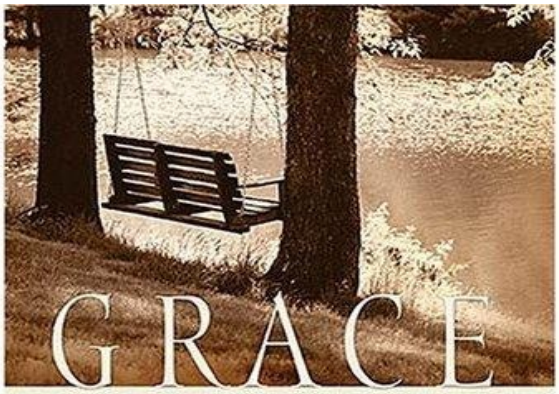

# GRACE

FOR THE MOMENT

# DAILY BIBLE

NCV

DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS BY

MAX LUCADO

# Grace for the Moment

Daily Bible
NCV

Devotional writings by Max Lucado

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# Introduction

Dear Friend,

May the words of this book, God's book, grant you eternal strength. May he steal your heart with heaven-glimpses and steel your character with strength-portions.

He will. God will meet your needs of today, today. This is his plan, help in the hour of need. Grace for the moment. The concerns of tomorrow will be met tomorrow. Provisions for next week will arrive next week. God meets the needs of the day, each day.

For that reason Jesus taught us to pray: "Give us the food we need for each day." (Luke 11:3)

Bread represents our basic need. We need only a couple of things every day: breath, bread, a cherry-topped chocolate ice cream sundae ... (ok, the cherry is optional). Christ explains God's schedule for meeting such needs. Day by day. We don't pray for an annual allotment or monthly shipment of bread. He gives not a bakery or a truckload. He gives daily portions.

When the wilderness wandering Israelites grew hungry, he responded with daily downpours of manna and coveys of quail. God told them to gather just enough food for the day, but some didn't listen. "But some of the people did not listen to Moses and kept part of it to eat the next morning. It became full of worms and began to stink ..." (Exodus 16:20).

Don't we do likewise? Try to solve tomorrow's problems with today's resources and today stinks. It gets wormy. Jesus could not have been more forthright: "Seek first God's kingdom and what God wants. Then all your other needs will be met as well. So don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:33–34).

Trust God, friend. "Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us *when we need it.*" (Hebrews 4:16, emphasis mine).

God gives grace for the moment. And in this moment, through these pages, may he amply provide for you.

Max Lucado

# Preface

God intended for everyone to be able to read and understand his Word. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew, the language of the people of Israel. Through the use of vivid stories based on real events and beautiful poetry, it appeals to the minds and hearts of the educated and the uneducated. The New Testament was first written in the simple Greek of everyday life, not in the Latin of Roman courts or the classical Greek of the academies. Even Jesus, the Master Teacher, taught spiritual principles by comparing them to such familiar terms as pearls, seeds, rocks, trees, and sheep. Likewise, the New Century Version translates the Scriptures in familiar, everyday words of our times.

The New Century Version is a translation of God's Word from the original Hebrew and Greek languages. A previous edition of the complete New Century Version, the International Children's Bible, was published in 1986.

## *A Trustworthy Translation*

Two basic premises guided the translation process of the New Century Version. The first concern was that the translation be faithful to the manuscripts in the original languages. A team composed of the World Bible Translation Center and fifty additional, highly qualified and experienced Bible scholars and translators was assembled. The team included people with translation experience on such accepted versions as the New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the New King James Version. The most recent scholarship and the best available Hebrew and Greek texts were used, principally the third edition of the United Bible Societies' Greek text and the latest edition of the *Biblia Hebraica, along with the Septuagint.*

## *A Clear Translation*

The second concern was to make the language clear enough for anyone to read the Bible and understand it. In maintaining clear language, several guidelines were followed. Vocabulary choice has been based upon *The Living Word Vocabulary* by Dr. Edgar Dale and Dr. Joseph O'Rourke (Worldbook-Childcraft International, 1981), which is the standard used by the editors

of *The World Book Encyclopedia* to determine appropriate vocabulary. For difficult words that have no simpler synonyms, footnotes and references are provided. Footnotes appear at the bottom of the page and are indicated in the text by an $^{n}$ (for "note").

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Gender language* has been rendered in keeping with the principles of meaning-based translation. In the interest of providing the best rendering of the original Hebrew and Greek texts in contemporary English, appropriate gender terms are used whenever it is possible to do so without hindering clarity or accuracy. Masculine terms are used when the meaning of the original has to do with males, including references to deity and to male cultural situations such as the military and the priesthood. Feminine terms are used when the meaning of the original has to do with females. When the meaning of the original has to do with both males and females, nongendered terms are used. (In such cases, the masculine resumptive pronoun has sometimes been preferred to changing person or number.)

*The divine name* YHWH, *the tetragrammaton,* has been indicated in the New Century Version by putting “LORD,” and sometimes “God,” in capital letters, following the tradition of other English versions. This is to distinguish it from *Adonai,* another Hebrew word that is translated “Lord.”

*Proper English style* has been maintained while clarifying concepts and communication. The beauty of the Hebrew parallelism in poetry and the wordplays have been retained, and the images of the ancient languages have been captured in equivalent English images wherever possible.

## *Study Aids*

Other features to enhance understanding of the text include subject headings throughout the text to identify speakers and topics and footnotes offering additional information on selected verses.

## *Our Prayer*

It is with great humility and prayerfulness that this Bible is presented. We acknowledge the infallibility of God’s Word, as well as our own human frailty. We pray that God has worked through us as his vessels so that we all might better learn his truth for ourselves and that it might richly grow in our lives. It is to his glory that this Bible is given.

The Publisher

# January 1

## Made in His Image

*Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image and likeness."*

Genesis 1:26

ımagine God's creativity. Of all we don't know about the creation, there is one thing we do know—he did it with a smile. He must've had a blast. Painting the stripes on the zebra, hanging the stars in the sky, putting the gold in the sunset. What creativity! Stretching the neck of the giraffe, putting the flutter in the mockingbird's wings, planting the giggle in the hyena.

What a time he had. Like a whistling carpenter in his workshop, he loved every bit of it. He poured himself into the work. So intent was his creativity that he took a day off at the end of the week just to rest.

And then, as a finale to a brilliant performance, he made man. With his typical creative flair, he began with a useless mound of dirt and ended up with an invaluable species called a human. A human who had the unique honor to bear the stamp, "In His Image."

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Genesis 1:1—2:25

### *The Beginning of the World*

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

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

day.
6Then God said, “Let there be something to divide the water
in two.” 7So God made the air and placed some of the water
above the air and some below it. 8God named the air “sky.”
Evening passed, and morning came. This was the second day.
9Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered
together so the dry land will appear.” And it happened. 10God
named the dry land “earth” and the water that was gathered
together “seas.” God saw that this was good.
11Then God said, “Let the earth produce plants—some to
make grain for seeds and others to make fruits with seeds in
them. Every seed will produce more of its own kind of plant.”
And it happened. 12The earth produced plants with grain for
seeds and trees that made fruits with seeds in them. Each seed
grew its own kind of plant. God saw that all this was good.
13Evening passed, and morning came. This was the third day.
14Then God said, “Let there be lights in the sky to separate
day from night. These lights will be used for signs, seasons,
days, and years. 15They will be in the sky to give light to the
earth.” And it happened.
16So God made the two large lights. He made the brighter
light to rule the day and made the smaller light to rule the
night. He also made the stars. 17God put all these in the sky to
shine on the earth, 18to rule over the day and over the night,
and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that all
these things were good. 19Evening passed, and morning came.
This was the fourth day.
20Then God said, “Let the water be filled with living things,
and let birds fly in the air above the earth.”
21So God created the large sea animals and every living
thing that moves in the sea. The sea is filled with these living
things, with each one producing more of its own kind. He also
made every bird that flies, and each bird produced more of its
own kind. God saw that this was good. 22God blessed them and
said, “Have many young ones so that you may grow in number.
Fill the water of the seas, and let the birds grow in number on
the earth.” 23Evening passed, and morning came. This was the
fifth day.
24Then God said, “Let the earth be filled with animals, each
producing more of its own kind. Let there be tame animals and
small crawling animals and wild animals, and let each produce
more of its kind.” And it happened.
25So God made the wild animals, the tame animals, and all
the small crawling animals to produce more of their own kind.
God saw that this was good.
26Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image
and likeness. And let them rule over the fish in the sea and the
birds in the sky, over the tame animals, over all the earth, and

over all the small crawling animals on the earth."

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

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

## *The Seventh Day—Rest*

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

## *The First People*

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

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

10A river flowed through Eden and watered the garden. From there the river branched out to become four rivers. 11The first river, named Pishon, flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12The gold of that land is excellent. Bdellium and onyx[n] are also found there. 13The second river, named Gihon, flows around the whole land of Cush. 14The third river, named Tigris, flows out of Assyria toward the east. The

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

### *The First Woman*

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

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

I will call her ‘woman,’
because she was taken out of man.”

24 So a man will leave his father and mother and be united
with his wife, and the two will become one body.
25 The man and his wife were naked, but they were not
ashamed.

## Psalm 1:1–6

## Book 1

### *Two Ways to Live*

1 Happy are those who don’t listen to the wicked, who don’t go where sinners go,
who don’t do what evil people do.

2They love the LORD’s teachings,
and they think about those teachings day and night.

3They are strong, like a tree planted by a river.
The tree produces fruit in season,
and its leaves don’t die.

Everything they do will succeed.

4But wicked people are not like that.
They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

5So the wicked will not escape God’s punishment.
Sinners will not worship with God’s people.

6This is because the LORD takes care of his people,
but the wicked will be destroyed.

## Proverbs 1:1–7

### *The Importance of Proverbs*

1 These are the wise words of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.

2They teach wisdom and self-control;
they will help you understand wise words.

3They will teach you how to be wise and self-controlled
and will teach you to do what is honest and fair and right.

4They make the uneducated wise
and give knowledge and sense to the young.

5Wise people can also listen and learn;
even they can find good advice in these words.

6Then anyone can understand wise words and stories,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

7Knowledge begins with respect for the LORD,
but fools hate wisdom and discipline.

## Matthew 1:1–25

### *The Family History of Jesus*

1 This is the family history of Jesus Christ. He came from the family of David, and David came from the family of Abraham.

2Abraham was the father[n] of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

3Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah.
(Their mother was Tamar.)

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Ram.

4Ram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

5 Salmon was the father of Boaz.
(Boaz's mother was Rahab.)

Boaz was the father of Obed.
(Obed's mother was Ruth.)

Obed was the father of Jesse.

6 Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon.
(Solomon's mother had been Uriah's wife.)

7 Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asa.[n]

8 Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.

Jehoram was the ancestor of Uzziah.

9 Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

10 Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh was the father of Amon.

Amon was the father of Josiah.

11 Josiah was the grandfather of Jehoiachin[n] and his brothers.
(This was at the time that the people were taken to Babylon.)

12 After they were taken to Babylon:

Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel was the grandfather of Zerubbabel.

13 Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.

Abiud was the father of Eliakim.

Eliakim was the father of Azor.

14 Azor was the father of Zadok.

Zadok was the father of Akim.

Akim was the father of Eliud.

15 Eliud was the father of Eleazar.

Eleazar was the father of Matthan.

Matthan was the father of Jacob.

16 Jacob was the father of Joseph.

Joseph was the husband of Mary,

and Mary was the mother of Jesus.

Jesus is called the Christ.

17 So there were fourteen generations from Abraham to
David. And there were fourteen generations from David until
the people were taken to Babylon. And there were fourteen
generations from the time when the people were taken to
Babylon until Christ was born.

## *The Birth of Jesus Christ*

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His
mother Mary was engaged[n] to marry Joseph, but before they
married, she learned she was pregnant by the power of the Holy
Spirit. 19 Because Mary's husband, Joseph, was a good man, he
did not want to disgrace her in public, so he planned to divorce
her secretly.
20 While Joseph thought about these things, an angel of the
Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph,
descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
because the baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give
birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus,[n] because he will
save his people from their sins."
22 All this happened to bring about what the Lord had said
through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be pregnant. She will
have a son, and they will name him Immanuel,"[n] which means
"God is with us."
24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord's angel had
told him to do. Joseph took Mary as his wife, 25 but he did not
have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to the son.
And Joseph named him Jesus.

# January 2

## Love Protects

*The LORD God made clothes from animal skins for the man and his wife and dressed them.*

Genesis 3:21

That simple sentence suggests three powerful scenes. Scene 1: God slays an animal. For the first time in the history of the earth, dirt is stained with blood. Innocent blood. The beast committed no sin. The creature did not deserve to die.

Adam and Eve did. The couple deserves to die, but they live …

Scene 2: Clothing is made. The shaper of the stars now becomes a tailor.

And in Scene 3: God dresses them. "The LORD … dressed them."

Adam and Eve are on their way out of the garden. They've been told to leave, but now God tells them to stop. "Those fig leaves," he says, shaking his head, "will never do." And he produces some clothing. But he doesn't throw the garments at their feet and tell them to get dressed. He dresses them himself. As a father would zip up the jacket of a preschooler. God covers them.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### Genesis 3:1—4:26

#### *The Beginning of Sin*

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

2The woman answered the snake, "We may eat fruit from the
trees in the garden. 3But God told us, 'You must not eat fruit

from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch it, or you will die.'"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13Then the LORD God said to the woman, "How could you have done such a thing?"

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

14The LORD God said to the snake,

"Because you did this,
a curse will be put on you.
You will be cursed as no other animal, tame or wild, will ever be.

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

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

Your descendants and her descendants
will be enemies.

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

16 Then God said to the woman,

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

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

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

17 Then God said to the man, "You listened to what your wife said, and you ate fruit from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat.

"So I will put a curse on the ground,
and you will have to work very hard for your food.

In pain you will eat its food
all the days of your life.

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

19 You will sweat and work hard for your food.

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

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

20 The man named his wife Eve,[n] because she was the mother of all the living.

21 The LORD God made clothes from animal skins for the man and his wife and dressed them. 22 Then the LORD God said, "Humans have become like one of us; they know good and evil. We must keep them from eating some of the fruit from the tree

of life, or they will live forever.” 23So the LORD God forced Adam
out of the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he
was taken. 24After God forced humans out of the garden, he
placed angels and a sword of fire that flashed around in every
direction on its eastern border. This kept people from getting to
the tree of life.

## *The First Family*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## *Cain’s Family*

16So Cain went away from the LORD and lived in the land of
Nod,[n] east of Eden. 17He had sexual relations with his wife, and

she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. At that time Cain was building a city, which he named after his son Enoch.
18 Enoch had a son named Irad, Irad had a son named Mehujael,
Mehujael had a son named Methushael, and Methushael had a
son named Lamech.
19 Lamech married two women, Adah and Zillah. 20 Adah gave
birth to Jabal, who became the first person to live in tents and
raise cattle. 21 Jabal's brother was Jubal, the first person to play
the harp and flute. 22 Zillah gave birth to Tubal-Cain, who made
tools out of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was
Naamah.
23 Lamech said to his wives:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice!
You wives of Lamech, listen to what I say.

I killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for hitting me.

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

### *Adam and Eve Have a New Son*

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

## Psalm 2:1–6

### *The Lord's Chosen King*

2 Why are the nations so angry? Why are the people making
useless plans?

2 The kings of the earth prepare to fight,
and their leaders make plans together

against the LORD
and his appointed one.

3 They say, “Let’s break the chains that hold us back
and throw off the ropes that tie us down.”

4 But the one who sits in heaven laughs;
the Lord makes fun of them.

5 Then the LORD warns them
and frightens them with his anger.

6 He says, “I have appointed my own king
to rule in Jerusalem on my holy mountain, Zion.”

## Proverbs 1:8–9

### *Warnings Against Evil*

8 My child, listen to your father’s teaching
and do not forget your mother’s advice.

9 Their teaching will be like flowers in your hair
or a necklace around your neck.

## Matthew 2:1–23

### *Wise Men Come to Visit Jesus*

2 Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea during the
time when Herod was king. When Jesus was born, some wise
men from the east came to Jerusalem. 2They asked, “Where is
the baby who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his
star in the east and have come to worship him.”
3When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, as were all
the people in Jerusalem. 4Herod called a meeting of all the
leading priests and teachers of the law and asked them where
the Christ would be born. 5They answered, “In the town of
Bethlehem in Judea. The prophet wrote about this in the
Scriptures:

6‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are not just an insignificant village in Judah.

A ruler will come from you
who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.’”

Micah 5:2

7Then Herod had a secret meeting with the wise men and
learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. 8He
sent the wise men to Bethlehem, saying, “Look carefully for the
child. When you find him, come tell me so I can worship him
too.”
9After the wise men heard the king, they left. The star that
they had seen in the east went before them until it stopped
above the place where the child was. 10When the wise men saw
the star, they were filled with joy. 11They came to the house
where the child was and saw him with his mother, Mary, and
they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their gifts
and gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12But
God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod,
so they returned to their own country by a different way.

## *Jesus’ Parents Take Him to Egypt*

13After they left, an angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a
dream and said, “Get up! Take the child and his mother and
escape to Egypt, because Herod is starting to look for the child
so he can kill him. Stay in Egypt until I tell you to return.”
14So Joseph got up and left for Egypt during the night with
the child and his mother. 15And Joseph stayed in Egypt until
Herod died. This happened to bring about what the Lord had
said through the prophet: “I called my son out of Egypt.”[n]

## *Herod Kills the Baby Boys*

16 When Herod saw that the wise men had tricked him, he
was furious. So he gave an order to kill all the baby boys in
Bethlehem and in the surrounding area who were two years old
or younger. This was in keeping with the time he learned from
the wise men. 17 So what God had said through the prophet
Jeremiah came true:

18 "A voice was heard in Ramah
of painful crying and deep sadness:

Rachel crying for her children.
She refused to be comforted,
because her children are dead."

Jeremiah 31:15

## *Joseph and Mary Return*

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a
dream while he was in Egypt. 20 The angel said, "Get up! Take
the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, because
the people who were trying to kill the child are now dead."
21 So Joseph took the child and his mother and went to Israel.
22 But he heard that Archelaus was now king in Judea since his
father Herod had died. So Joseph was afraid to go there. After
being warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee, 23 to a
town called Nazareth, and lived there. And so what God had
said through the prophets came true: "He will be called a
Nazarene."[n]

# January 3

## A Holy Task

*Obey the LORD with great fear.*

Psalm 2:11

Mary and Mary [Magdalene] knew a task had to be done—Jesus' body had to be prepared for burial. Peter didn't offer to do it. Andrew didn't volunteer … So the two Marys decide to do it …

I wonder if halfway to the tomb they had sat down and reconsidered. What if they'd looked at each other and shrugged, "What's the use?" What if they had given up? What if one had thrown up her arms in frustration and bemoaned, "I'm tired of being the only one who cares. Let Andrew do something for a change. Let Nathanael show some leadership."

Whether or not they were tempted to, I'm glad they didn't quit. That would have been tragic. You see, we know something they didn't. We know the Father was watching. Mary and Mary thought they were alone. They weren't. They thought their journey was unnoticed. They were wrong. God knew.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Genesis 5:1—6:22

#### *Adam's Family History*

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

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

6When Seth was 105 years old, he had a son named Enosh.

7 After Enosh was born, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons
and daughters. 8 So Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he
died.
9 When Enosh was 90 years old, he had a son named Kenan.
10 After Kenan was born, Enosh lived 815 years and had other
sons and daughters. 11 So Enosh lived a total of 905 years, and
then he died.
12 When Kenan was 70 years old, he had a son named
Mahalalel. 13 After Mahalalel was born, Kenan lived 840 years
and had other sons and daughters. 14 So Kenan lived a total of
910 years, and then he died.
15 When Mahalalel was 65 years old, he had a son named
Jared. 16 After Jared was born, Mahalalel lived 830 years and
had other sons and daughters. 17 So Mahalalel lived a total of
895 years, and then he died.
18 When Jared was 162 years old, he had a son named Enoch.
19 After Enoch was born, Jared lived 800 years and had other
sons and daughters. 20 So Jared lived a total of 962 years, and
then he died.
21 When Enoch was 65 years old, he had a son named
Methuselah. 22 After Methuselah was born, Enoch walked with
God 300 years more and had other sons and daughters. 23 So
Enoch lived a total of 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God; one
day Enoch could not be found, because God took him.
25 When Methuselah was 187 years old, he had a son named
Lamech. 26 After Lamech was born, Methuselah lived 782 years
and had other sons and daughters. 27 So Methuselah lived a
total of 969 years, and then he died.
28 When Lamech was 182, he had a son. 29 Lamech named his
son Noah[n] and said, “He will comfort us in our work, which
comes from the ground the LORD has cursed.” 30 After Noah was
born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and
daughters. 31 So Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he
died.
32 After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of
Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

## *The Human Race Becomes Evil*

6 The number of people on earth began to grow, and daughters
were born to them. 2 When the sons of God saw that these girls
were beautiful, they married any of them they chose. 3 The LORD
said, “My Spirit will not remain in human beings forever,
because they are flesh. They will live only 120 years.”
4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also later.
That was when the sons of God had sexual relations with the
daughters of human beings. These women gave birth to

children, who became famous and were the mighty warriors of long ago.

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

## *Noah and the Great Flood*

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

11 People on earth did what God said was evil, and violence
was everywhere. 12 When God saw that everyone on the earth
did only evil, 13 he said to Noah, "Because people have made the
earth full of violence, I will destroy all of them from the earth.
14 Build a boat of cypress wood for yourself. Make rooms in it
and cover it inside and outside with tar. 15 This is how big I want
you to build the boat: four hundred fifty feet long, seventy-five
feet wide, and forty-five feet high. 16 Make an opening around
the top of the boat that is eighteen inches high from the edge of
the roof down. Put a door in the side of the boat. Make an
upper, middle, and lower deck in it. 17 I will bring a flood of
water on the earth to destroy all living things that live under the
sky, including everything that has the breath of life. Everything
on the earth will die. 18 But I will make an agreement with you—
you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives will all go into
the boat. 19 Also, you must bring into the boat two of every living
thing, male and female. Keep them alive with you. 20 Two of
every kind of bird, animal, and crawling thing will come to you
to be kept alive. 21 Also gather some of every kind of food and
store it on the boat as food for you and the animals."

22 Noah did everything that God commanded him.

# Psalm 2:7–12

7 Now I will tell you what the LORD has declared:

He said to me, “You are my son.
Today I have become your father.

8 If you ask me, I will give you the nations;
all the people on earth will be yours.

9 You will rule over them with an iron rod.
You will break them into pieces like pottery.”

10 So, kings, be wise;
rulers, learn this lesson.

11 Obey the LORD with great fear.
Be happy, but tremble.

12 Show that you are loyal to his son,
or you will be destroyed by his anger,

because he can quickly become angry.
But happy are those who trust him for protection.

## Proverbs 1:10–19

10 My child, if sinners try to lead you into sin,
do not follow them.

11 They will say, “Come with us.
Let’s ambush and kill someone;
let’s attack some innocent people just for fun.

12 Let’s swallow them alive, as death does;
let’s swallow them whole, as the grave does.

13 We will take all kinds of valuable things

and fill our houses with stolen goods.

14 Come join us,
and we will share with you stolen goods.”

15 My child, do not go along with them;
do not do what they do.

16 They are eager to do evil
and are quick to kill.

17 It is useless to spread out a net
right where the birds can see it.

18 But sinners will fall into their own traps;
they will only catch themselves!

19 All greedy people end up this way;
greed kills selfish people.

## Matthew 3:1–17

### *The Work of John the Baptist*

3 About that time John the Baptist began preaching in the
desert area of Judea. 2 John said, “Change your hearts and lives
because the kingdom of heaven is near.” 3 John the Baptist is the
one Isaiah the prophet was talking about when he said:

“This is a voice of one
who calls out in the desert:

‘Prepare the way for the Lord.
Make the road straight for him.’”

Isaiah 40:3

4John's clothes were made from camel's hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food, he ate locusts and wild honey. 5Many people came from Jerusalem and Judea and all the area around the Jordan River to hear John. 6They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

7Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the place where John was baptizing people. When John saw them, he said, "You are snakes! Who warned you to run away from God's coming punishment? 8Do the things that show you really have changed your hearts and lives. 9And don't think you can say to yourselves, 'Abraham is our father.' I tell you that God could make children for Abraham from these rocks. 10The ax is now ready to cut down the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.[n]

11"I baptize you with water to show that your hearts and lives have changed. But there is one coming after me who is greater than I am, whose sandals I am not good enough to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12He will come ready to clean the grain, separating the good grain from the chaff. He will put the good part of the grain into his barn, but he will burn the chaff with a fire that cannot be put out."[n]

## *Jesus Is Baptized by John*

13At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River and wanted John to baptize him. 14But John tried to stop him, saying, "Why do you come to me to be baptized? I need to be baptized by you!"

15Jesus answered, "Let it be this way for now. We should do all things that are God's will." So John agreed to baptize Jesus.

16As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven opened, and he saw God's Spirit coming down on him like a dove. 17And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him."

# January 4

## A Leaf of Hope

*After seven days Noah again sent out the dove from the boat, and that evening it came back to him with a fresh olive leaf in its mouth.*

Genesis 8:10–11

An olive leaf. Noah would have been happy to have the bird but to have the leaf! This leaf was more than foliage; this was promise. The bird brought more than a piece of a tree; it brought hope. For isn't that what hope is? Hope is an olive leaf —evidence of dry land after a flood …

Don't we love the olive leaves of life? "It appears the cancer may be in remission." "I can help you with those finances." "We'll get through this together."

What's more, don't we love the doves that bring them? When the father walks his son through his first broken heart, he gives him an olive leaf. When the wife of many years consoles the wife of a few months, when she tells her that conflicts come and all husbands are moody and these storms pass, you know what she is doing? She is giving an olive leaf.

We love olive leaves. And we love those who give them.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### Genesis 7:1—8:22

### *The Flood Begins*

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, "I have seen that you are the best
person among the people of this time, so you and your family
can go into the boat. 2Take with you seven pairs, each male with
its female, of every kind of clean animal, and take one pair, each
male with its female, of every kind of unclean animal. 3Take
seven pairs of all the birds of the sky, each male with its female.
This will allow all these animals to continue living on the earth

after the flood. [4]Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth. It will rain forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe off from the earth every living thing that I have made."

[5]Noah did everything the LORD commanded him.

[6]Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came. [7]He and his wife and his sons and their wives went into the boat to escape the waters of the flood. [8]The clean animals, the unclean animals, the birds, and everything that crawls on the ground [9]came to Noah. They went into the boat in groups of two, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah. [10]Seven days later the flood started.

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

[13]On that same day Noah and his wife, his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives went into the boat. [14]They had every kind of wild and tame animal, every kind of animal that crawls on the earth, and every kind of bird. [15]Every creature that had the breath of life came to Noah in the boat in groups of two. [16]One male and one female of every living thing came, just as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD closed the door behind them.

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

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

## *The Flood Ends*

[8] But God remembered Noah and all the wild and tame animals with him in the boat. He made a wind blow over the earth, and the water went down. [2]The underground springs stopped flowing, and the clouds in the sky stopped pouring down rain. [3–4]The water that covered the earth began to go down. After

one hundred fifty days it had gone down so much that the boat touched land again. It came to rest on one of the mountains of Ararat[n] on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. 5The water continued to go down so that by the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains could be seen.

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

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

13When Noah was six hundred and one years old, in the first day of the first month of that year, the water was dried up from the land. Noah removed the covering of the boat and saw that the land was dry. 14By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the land was completely dry.

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

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

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

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

## Psalm 3:1–4

## *A Morning Prayer*

**David sang this when he ran away from his son Absalom.**

3 LORD, I have many enemies!
Many people have turned against me.

2Many are saying about me,
"God won't rescue him." *Selah*

3But, LORD, you are my shield,
my wonderful God who gives me courage.

4I will pray to the LORD,
and he will answer me from his holy mountain. *Selah*

## Proverbs 1:20–23

## *Wisdom Speaks*

20Wisdom is like a woman shouting in the street;
she raises her voice in the city squares.

21She cries out in the noisy street
and shouts at the city gates:

22"You fools, how long will you be foolish?
How long will you make fun of wisdom
and hate knowledge?

23 If only you had listened when I corrected you,
I would have told you what's in my heart;
I would have told you what I am thinking.

## Matthew 4:1–25

### *The Temptation of Jesus*

4 Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. After this, he was very hungry. 3 The devil came to Jesus to tempt him, saying, "If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written in the Scriptures, 'A person lives not on bread alone, but by everything God says.'"[n]

5 Then the devil led Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem and put him on a high place of the Temple. 6 The devil said, "If you are the Son of God, jump down, because it is written in the Scriptures:

'He has put his angels in charge of you.
They will catch you in their hands

so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.'"

Psalm 91:11–12

7 Jesus answered him, "It also says in the Scriptures, 'Do not test the LORD your God.'"[n]

8 Then the devil led Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and all their splendor. 9 The devil said, "If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things."

10 Jesus said to the devil, "Go away from me, Satan! It is written in the Scriptures, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'"[n]

11 So the devil left Jesus, and angels came and took care of him.

### *Jesus Begins Work in Galilee*

12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he went back to Galilee. 13 He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, a town near Lake Galilee, in the area near Zebulun

and Naphtali. 14Jesus did this to bring about what the prophet Isaiah had said:

15"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali
    along the sea,

beyond the Jordan River.
    This is Galilee where the non-Jewish people live.

16These people who live in darkness
    will see a great light.

They live in a place covered with the shadows of death,
    but a light will shine on them."

Isaiah 9:1–2

## *Jesus Chooses Some Followers*

17From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Change your hearts and lives, because the kingdom of heaven is near."

18As Jesus was walking by Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (called Peter) and his brother Andrew. They were throwing a net into the lake because they were fishermen. 19Jesus said, "Come follow me, and I will make you fish for people." 20So Simon and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed him.

21As Jesus continued walking by Lake Galilee, he saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus told them to come with him. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and they followed Jesus.

## *Jesus Teaches and Heals People*

23Jesus went everywhere in Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the Good News about the kingdom of heaven, and healing all the people's diseases and sicknesses. 24The news about Jesus spread all over Syria, and people brought all the sick to him. They were suffering from different kinds of diseases. Some were in great pain, some had demons, some were epileptics,[n] and some were paralyzed. Jesus healed all of them. 25Many people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,[n] Jerusalem, Judea, and the land across the Jordan River followed

him.

# January 5

## Live a Holy Life

*"You should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven."*

Matthew 5:16

You want to make a difference in your world? Live a holy life:

Be faithful to your spouse.
Be the one at the office who refuses to cheat.
Be the neighbor who acts neighborly.
Be the employee who does the work and doesn't complain.
Pay your bills.
Do your part and enjoy life.
Don't speak one message and live another.

People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

### Genesis 9:1—10:32

### *The New Beginning*

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

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

6 “Whoever kills a human being
will be killed by a human being,

because God made humans
in his own image.

7 “As for you, Noah, I want you and your family to have many children, to grow in number on the earth, and to become many.”
8 Then God said to Noah and his sons, 9 “Now I am making my agreement with you and your people who will live after you, 10 and with every living thing that is with you—the birds, the tame and the wild animals, and with everything that came out of the boat with you—with every living thing on earth. 11 I make this agreement with you: I will never again destroy all living things by a flood. A flood will never again destroy the earth.”
12 And God said, “This is the sign of the agreement between me and you and every living creature that is with you. 13 I am putting my rainbow in the clouds as the sign of the agreement between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and a rainbow appears in them, 15 I will remember my agreement between me and you and every living thing. Floods will never again destroy all life on the earth. 16 When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and I will remember the agreement that continues forever between me and every living thing on the earth.”
17 So God said to Noah, “The rainbow is a sign of the agreement that I made with all living things on earth.”

## *Noah and His Sons*

18 The sons of Noah who came out of the boat with him were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) 19 These three men were Noah’s sons, and all the people on earth came from these three sons.
20 Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard. 21 When he drank wine made from his grapes, he became drunk and lay naked in his tent. 22 Ham, the father of Canaan, looked at his naked father and told his brothers outside. 23 Then Shem and Japheth got a coat and, carrying it on both their shoulders, they walked backwards into the tent and covered their father. They turned their faces away so that they did not see their father’s nakedness.
24 Noah was sleeping because of the wine. When he woke up and learned what his youngest son, Ham, had done to him, 25 he said,

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

26 Noah also said,

“May the LORD, the God of Shem, be praised!
May Canaan be Shem’s slave.

27 May God give more land to Japheth.
May Japheth live in Shem’s tents,
and may Canaan be their slave.”

28 After the flood Noah lived 350 years. 29 He lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.

## *Nations Grow and Spread*

10 This is the family history of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah. After the flood these three men had sons.

## *Japheth’s Sons*

2 The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.
3 The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.
4 The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim,[n] and Rodanim. 5 Those who lived in the lands around the Mediterranean Sea came from these sons of Japheth. All the families grew and became different nations, each nation with its own land and its own language.

## *Ham’s Sons*

6 The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim,[n] Put, and Canaan.
7 The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca.
The sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.
8 Cush also had a descendant named Nimrod, who became a very powerful man on earth. 9 He was a great hunter before the LORD, which is why people say someone is “like Nimrod, a great hunter before the LORD.” 10 At first Nimrod’s kingdom covered Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh in the land of Babylonia. 11 From there he went to Assyria, where he built the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, and Calah. 12 He also built Resen, the great city between Nineveh and Calah.

13 Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites,
Lehabites, Naphtuhites, 14 Pathrusites, Casluhites, and the
people of Crete. (The Philistines came from the Casluhites.)
15 Canaan was the father of Sidon, his first son, and of Heth.
16 He was also the father of the Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites,
17 Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, 18 Arvadites, Zemarites, and
Hamathites. The families of the Canaanites scattered. 19 Their
land reached from Sidon to Gerar as far as Gaza, and then to
Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.
20 All these people were the sons of Ham, and all these
families had their own languages, their own lands, and their
own nations.

### *Shem's Sons*

21 Shem, Japheth's older brother, also had sons. One of his
descendants was the father of all the sons of Eber.
22 The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and
Aram.
23 The sons of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech.
24 Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, who was the father of
Eber. 25 Eber was the father of two sons—one named Peleg,[n]
because the earth was divided during his life, and the other was
named Joktan.
26 Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth,
Jerah, 27 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28 Obal, Abimael, Sheba,
29 Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these people were the sons of
Joktan. 30 They lived in the area between Mesha and Sephar in
the hill country in the East.
31 These are the people from the family of Shem, arranged by
families, languages, countries, and nations.
32 This is the list of the families from the sons of Noah,
arranged according to their nations. From these families came
all the nations who spread across the earth after the flood.

## Psalm 3:5–8

5 I can lie down and go to sleep,
and I will wake up again,
because the LORD gives me strength.

6 Thousands of troops may surround me,

but I am not afraid.

7 LORD, rise up!
My God, come save me!

You have struck my enemies on the cheek;
you have broken the teeth of the wicked.

8 The LORD can save his people.
LORD, bless your people. *Selah*

## Proverbs 1:24–27

24 I called, but you refused to listen;
I held out my hand, but you paid no attention.

25 You did not follow my advice
and did not listen when I corrected you.

26 So I will laugh when you are in trouble.
I will make fun when disaster strikes you,

27 when disaster comes over you like a storm,
when trouble strikes you like a whirlwind,
when pain and trouble overwhelm you.

## Matthew 5:1–26

### *Jesus Teaches the People*

5 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a hill and sat down. His followers came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

3 “They are blessed who realize their spiritual poverty,
for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

4 They are blessed who grieve,
for God will comfort them.

5 They are blessed who are humble,
for the whole earth will be theirs.

6 They are blessed who hunger and thirst after justice,
for they will be satisfied.

7 They are blessed who show mercy to others,
for God will show mercy to them.

8 They are blessed whose thoughts are pure,
for they will see God.

9 They are blessed who work for peace,
for they will be called God’s children.

10 They are blessed who are persecuted for doing good,
for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

11 “People will insult you and hurt you. They will lie and say all kinds of evil things about you because you follow me. But when they do, you will be blessed. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because you have a great reward waiting for you in heaven. People did the same evil things to the prophets who lived before you.

## *You Are Like Salt and Light*

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its salty taste, it cannot be made salty again. It is good for nothing, except to be thrown out and walked on.

14 “You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 And people don’t hide a light under a bowl. They put it on a lampstand so the light shines for all the people in the house. 16 In the same way, you

should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.

## *The Importance of the Law*

17 "Don't think that I have come to destroy the law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets. I have not come to destroy them but to bring about what they said. 18 I tell you the truth, nothing will disappear from the law until heaven and earth are gone. Not even the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will be lost until everything has happened. 19 Whoever refuses to obey any command and teaches other people not to obey that command will be the least important in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys the commands and teaches other people to obey them will be great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 I tell you that if you are no more obedient than the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

## *Jesus Teaches About Anger*

21 "You have heard that it was said to our people long ago, 'You must not murder anyone.[n] Anyone who murders another will be judged.' 22 But I tell you, if you are angry with a brother or sister,[n] you will be judged. If you say bad things to a brother or sister, you will be judged by the council. And if you call someone a fool, you will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 "So when you offer your gift to God at the altar, and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there at the altar. Go and make peace with that person, and then come and offer your gift.

25 "If your enemy is taking you to court, become friends quickly, before you go to court. Otherwise, your enemy might turn you over to the judge, and the judge might give you to a guard to put you in jail. 26 I tell you the truth, you will not leave there until you have paid everything you owe.

# January 6

## Love Isn't Easy

*"Love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you."*

Matthew 5:44

Love isn't easy. Not for you. Not for me. Not even for Jesus. Want proof? Listen to his frustration: "You people have no faith. How long must I stay with you? How long must I put up with you?" (Mark 9:19).

*How long must I put up with you?*

"Long enough to be called crazy by my brothers and a liar by my neighbors. Long enough to be run out of my town and my Temple …"

*How long?* "Until the rooster sings and the sweat stings and the mallet rings and a hillside of demons smirk at a dying God."

*How long?* "Long enough for every sin to so soak my sinless soul that heaven will turn in horror until my swollen lips pronounce the final transaction: 'It is finished.'"

*How long?* "Until it kills me."

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Genesis 11:1—12:20

### *The Languages Confused*

11 At this time the whole world spoke one language, and
everyone used the same words. 2As people moved from the east,
they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there.
3They said to each other, "Let's make bricks and bake them
to make them hard." So they used bricks instead of stones, and
tar instead of mortar. 4Then they said to each other, "Let's build
a city and a tower for ourselves, whose top will reach high into
the sky. We will become famous. Then we will not be scattered
over all the earth."
5The LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the

people had built. 6The LORD said, “Now, these people are united,
all speaking the same language. This is only the beginning of
what they will do. They will be able to do anything they want.
7Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will
not be able to understand each other.”

8So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth,
and they stopped building the city. 9The place is called Babel[n]
since that is where the LORD confused the language of the whole
world. So the LORD caused them to spread out from there over
the whole world.

## *The Story of Shem’s Family*

10This is the family history of Shem. Two years after the
flood, when Shem was 100 years old, his son Arphaxad was
born. 11After that, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and
daughters.

12When Arphaxad was 35 years old, his son Shelah was born.
13After that, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and
daughters.

14When Shelah was 30 years old, his son Eber was born.
15After that, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and
daughters.

16When Eber was 34 years old, his son Peleg was born.
17After that, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and
daughters.

18When Peleg was 30 years old, his son Reu was born.
19After that, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and
daughters.

20When Reu was 32 years old, his son Serug was born.
21After that, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and
daughters.

22When Serug was 30 years old, his son Nahor was born.
23After that, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and
daughters.

24When Nahor was 29 years old, his son Terah was born.
25After that, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and
daughters.

26After Terah was 70 years old, his sons Abram, Nahor, and
Haran were born.

## *The Story of Terah’s Family*

27This is the family history of Terah. Terah was the father of
Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran was the father of Lot. 28While
his father, Terah, was still alive, Haran died in Ur in Babylonia,
where he was born. 29Abram and Nahor both married. Abram’s

wife was named Sarai, and Nahor's wife was named Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran, who was the father of both Milcah and Iscah. 30Sarai was not able to have children.

31Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (Haran's son), and his daughter-in-law Sarai (Abram's wife) and moved out of Ur of Babylonia. They had planned to go to the land of Canaan, but when they reached the city of Haran, they settled there.

32Terah lived to be 205 years old, and then he died in Haran.

## *God Calls Abram*

12 The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land I will show you.

2I will make you a great nation,
and I will bless you.

I will make you famous,
and you will be a blessing to others.

3I will bless those who bless you,
and I will place a curse on those who harm you.

And all the people on earth
will be blessed through you."

4So Abram left Haran as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. At this time Abram was 75 years old. 5He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and everything they owned, as well as all the servants they had gotten in Haran. They set out from Haran, planning to go to the land of Canaan, and in time they arrived there.

6Abram traveled through that land as far as the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. The Canaanites were living in the land at that time. 7The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." So Abram built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8Then he traveled from Shechem to the mountain east of Bethel and set up his tent there. Bethel was to the west, and Ai was to the east. There Abram built another altar to the LORD and worshiped him. 9After this, he traveled on toward southern Canaan.

## *Abram Goes to Egypt*

10 At this time there was not much food in the land, so Abram
went down to Egypt to live because there was so little food.
11 Just before they arrived in Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I
know you are a very beautiful woman. 12 When the Egyptians
see you, they will say, ‘This woman is his wife.’ Then they will
kill me but let you live. 13 Tell them you are my sister so that
things will go well with me and I may be allowed to live because
of you.”
14 When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai
was very beautiful. 15 The Egyptian officers saw her and told the
king of Egypt how beautiful she was. They took her to the king’s
palace, and 16 the king was kind to Abram because he thought
Abram was her brother. He gave Abram sheep, cattle, male and
female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.
17 But the LORD sent terrible diseases on the king and all the
people in his house because of Abram’s wife Sarai. 18 So the
king sent for Abram and said, “What have you done to me? Why
didn’t you tell me Sarai was your wife? 19 Why did you say, ‘She
is my sister’ so that I made her my wife? Now, here is your wife.
Take her and leave!” 20 Then the king commanded his men to
make Abram leave Egypt; so Abram and his wife left with
everything they owned.

## Psalm 4:1–5

### *An Evening Prayer*

**For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of David.**

4 Answer me when I pray to you,
my God who does what is right.

Make things easier for me when I am in trouble.
Have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

2 People, how long will you turn my honor into shame?
How long will you love what is false and look for new
lies? *Selah*

3 You know that the LORD has chosen for himself those who
are loyal to him.
The LORD listens when I pray to him.

4 When you are angry, do not sin.
Think about these things quietly
as you go to bed. *Selah*

5 Do what is right as a sacrifice to the LORD
and trust the LORD.

## Proverbs 1:28–33

28 "Then you will call to me,
but I will not answer.

You will look for me,
but you will not find me.

29 It is because you rejected knowledge
and did not choose to respect the LORD.

30 You did not accept my advice,
and you rejected my correction.

31 So you will get what you deserve;
you will get what you planned for others.

32 Fools will die because they refuse to listen;
they will be destroyed because they do not care.

33 But those who listen to me will live in safety
and be at peace, without fear of injury."

# Matthew 5:27–48

## *Jesus Teaches About Sexual Sin*

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You must not be guilty of
adultery.'[n] 28 But I tell you that if anyone looks at a woman and
wants to sin sexually with her, in his mind he has already done
that sin with the woman. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin,
take it out and throw it away. It is better to lose one part of your
body than to have your whole body thrown into hell. 30 If your
right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is
better to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to
go into hell.

## *Jesus Teaches About Divorce*

31 "It was also said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give
her a written divorce paper.'[n] 32 But I tell you that anyone who
divorces his wife forces her to be guilty of adultery. The only
reason for a man to divorce his wife is if she has sexual
relations with another man. And anyone who marries that
divorced woman is guilty of adultery.

## *Make Promises Carefully*

33 "You have heard that it was said to our people long ago,
'Don't break your promises, but keep the promises you make to
the LORD.'[n] 34 But I tell you, never swear an oath. Don't swear an
oath using the name of heaven, because heaven is God's throne.
35 Don't swear an oath using the name of the earth, because the
earth belongs to God. Don't swear an oath using the name of
Jerusalem, because that is the city of the great King. 36 Don't
even swear by your own head, because you cannot make one
hair on your head become white or black. 37 Say only yes if you
mean yes, and no if you mean no. If you say more than yes or
no, it is from the Evil One.

## *Don't Fight Back*

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a
tooth for a tooth.'[n] 39 But I tell you, don't stand up against an
evil person. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him
the other cheek also. 40 If someone wants to sue you in court and
take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 If someone forces

you to go with him one mile, go with him two miles. 42If a person asks you for something, give it to him. Don't refuse to give to someone who wants to borrow from you.

## *Love All People*

43"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor[n] and hate your enemies.' 44But I say to you, love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you.[n] 45If you do this, you will be true children of your Father in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on good people and on evil people, and he sends rain to those who do right and to those who do wrong. 46If you love only the people who love you, you will get no reward. Even the tax collectors do that. 47And if you are nice only to your friends, you are no better than other people. Even those who don't know God are nice to their friends. 48So you must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

# January 7

## God's Will … Be Done

*"May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven."*

Matthew 6:10

To pray that God's will be done is to seek the heart of God. The word *will* means "strong desire." … [So] what is his heart? His passion? He wants you to know it. Shall God hide from us what he is going to do? Apparently not, for he has gone to great lengths to reveal his will to us. Could he have done more than send his Son to lead us? Could he have done more than give his Word to teach us? Could he have done more than orchestrate events to awaken us? Could he have done more than send his Holy Spirit to counsel us?

God is not the God of confusion, and wherever he sees sincere seekers with confused hearts, you can bet your sweet December that he will do whatever it takes to help them see his will.

from *The Great House of God*

### Genesis 13:1—14:24

#### *Abram and Lot Separate*

13 So Abram, his wife, and Lot left Egypt, taking everything they
owned, and traveled to southern Canaan. 2Abram was very rich
in cattle, silver, and gold.

3He left southern Canaan and went back to Bethel where he
had camped before, between Bethel and Ai, 4and where he had
built an altar. So he worshiped the LORD there.

5During this time Lot was traveling with Abram, and Lot also
had flocks, herds, and tents. 6Abram and Lot had so many
animals that the land could not support both of them together,
7so Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen began to argue. The

Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land at this time.

8 Abram said to Lot, “There should be no arguing between
you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, because we
are brothers. 9 We should separate. The whole land is there in
front of you. If you go to the left, I will go to the right. If you go
to the right, I will go to the left.”

10 Lot looked all around and saw the whole Jordan Valley and
that there was much water there. It was like the LORD’s garden,
like the land of Egypt in the direction of Zoar. (This was before
the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose to
move east and live in the Jordan Valley. In this way Abram and
Lot separated. 12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot
lived among the cities in the Jordan Valley, very near to Sodom.
13 Now the people of Sodom were very evil and were always
sinning against the LORD.

14 After Lot left, the LORD said to Abram, “Look all around you
—to the north and south and east and west. 15 All this land that
you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. 16 I will
make your descendants as many as the dust of the earth. If
anyone could count the dust on the earth, he could count your
people. 17 Get up! Walk through all this land because I am now
giving it to you.”

18 So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great
trees of Mamre at the city of Hebron. There he built an altar to
the LORD.

## *Lot Is Captured*

14 Now Amraphel was king of Babylonia, Arioch was king of
Ellasar, Kedorlaomer was king of Elam, and Tidal was king of
Goiim. 2 All these kings went to war against several other kings:
Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of
Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela. (Bela
is also called Zoar.)

3 These kings who were attacked united their armies in the
Valley of Siddim (now the Dead Sea). 4 They had served
Kedorlaomer for twelve years, but in the thirteenth year, they
all turned against him. 5 Then in the fourteenth year,
Kedorlaomer and the kings with him came and defeated the
Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, and the
Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim. 6 They also defeated the Horites in
the mountains of Edom to El Paran (near the desert). 7 Then
they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh).
They defeated all the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who
lived in Hazazon Tamar.

8 At that time the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah,
Zeboiim, and Bela went out to fight in the Valley of Siddim.

(Bela is called Zoar.) [9]They fought against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Babylonia, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings fighting against five. [10]There were many tar pits in the Valley of Siddim. When the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and their armies ran away, some of the soldiers fell into the tar pits, but the others ran away to the mountains.

[11]Now Kedorlaomer and his armies took everything the people of Sodom and Gomorrah owned, including their food. [12]They took Lot, Abram's nephew who was living in Sodom, and everything he owned. Then they left. [13]One of the men who was not captured went to Abram, the Hebrew, and told him what had happened. At that time Abram was camped near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite. Mamre was a brother of Eshcol and Aner, and they had all made an agreement to help Abram.

## *Abram Rescues Lot*

[14]When Abram learned that Lot had been captured, he called out his 318 trained men who had been born in his camp. He led the men and chased the enemy all the way to the town of Dan. [15]That night he divided his men into groups, and they made a surprise attack against the enemy. They chased them all the way to Hobah, north of Damascus. [16]Then Abram brought back everything the enemy had stolen, the women and the other people, and Lot, and everything Lot owned.

[17]After defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, Abram went home. As he was returning, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (now called King's Valley).

[18]Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was a priest for God Most High [19]and blessed Abram, saying,

"Abram, may you be blessed by God Most High,
the God who made heaven and earth.

[20]And we praise God Most High,
who has helped you to defeat your enemies."

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything he had brought back from the battle.

[21]The king of Sodom said to Abram, "You may keep all these things for yourself. Just give me my people who were captured."

[22]But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I make a promise to the LORD, the God Most High, who made heaven and earth. [23]I promise that I will not keep anything that is yours. I will not

keep even a thread or a sandal strap so that you cannot say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ 24I will keep nothing but the food my young men have eaten. But give Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre their share of what we won, because they went with me into battle.”

## Psalm 4:6–8

6Many people ask,
“Who will give us anything good?”
Lord
, be kind to us.

7But you have made me very happy,
happier than they are,
even with all their grain and new wine.

8I go to bed and sleep in peace,
because, LORD, only you keep me safe.

## Proverbs 2:1–5

### *Rewards of Wisdom*

2 My child, listen to what I say
and remember what I command you.

2Listen carefully to wisdom;
set your mind on understanding.

3Cry out for wisdom,
and beg for understanding.

4Search for it like silver,

and hunt for it like hidden treasure.

[5]Then you will understand respect for the LORD,
and you will find that you know God.

## Matthew 6:1–18

### *Jesus Teaches About Giving*

[6] “Be careful! When you do good things, don’t do them in front of people to be seen by them. If you do that, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

[2]“When you give to the poor, don’t be like the hypocrites. They blow trumpets in the synagogues and on the streets so that people will see them and honor them. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. [3]So when you give to the poor, don’t let anyone know what you are doing. [4]Your giving should be done in secret. Your Father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you.

### *Jesus Teaches About Prayer*

[5]“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites. They love to stand in the synagogues and on the street corners and pray so people will see them. I tell you the truth, they already have their full reward. [6]When you pray, you should go into your room and close the door and pray to your Father who cannot be seen. Your Father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you.

[7]“And when you pray, don’t be like those people who don’t know God. They continue saying things that mean nothing, thinking that God will hear them because of their many words. [8]Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him. [9]So when you pray, you should pray like this:

‘Our Father in heaven,
may your name always be kept holy.

[10]May your kingdom come

and what you want be done,
here on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us the food we need for each day.
12 Forgive us for our sins,
just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us.

13 And do not cause us to be tempted,

but save us from the Evil One.' [The kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen.][n]

14 Yes, if you forgive others for their sins, your Father in heaven will also forgive you for your sins. 15 But if you don't forgive others, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins.

## *Jesus Teaches About Worship*

16 "When you fast,[n] don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are fasting. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. 17 So when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. 18 Then people will not know that you are fasting, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you.

# January 8

## Fretting Is Futile

*"You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it."*

Matthew 6:27

NO one has to remind you of the high cost of anxiety. (But I will anyway.) Worry divides the mind. The biblical word for *worry (merimnao)* is a compound of two Greek words, *merizo* ("to divide") and *nous* ("the mind"). Anxiety splits our energy between today's priorities and tomorrow's problems. Part of our mind is on the now; the rest is on the not yet. The result is half-minded living.

That's not the only result. Worrying is not a disease, but it causes diseases. It has been connected to high blood pressure, heart trouble, blindness, migraine headaches, thyroid malfunctions, and a host of stomach disorders.

Anxiety is an expensive habit. Of course, it might be worth the cost if it worked. But it doesn't. Our frets are futile. Worry has never brightened a day, solved a problem, or cured a disease.

from *Traveling Light*

### Genesis 15:1—16:16

#### *God's Agreement with Abram*

15 After these things happened, the LORD spoke his word to
Abram in a vision: "Abram, don't be afraid. I will defend you,
and I will give you a great reward."
2But Abram said, "Lord God, what can you give me? I have no
son, so my slave Eliezer from Damascus will get everything I
own after I die." 3Abram said, "Look, you have given me no son,
so a slave born in my house will inherit everything I have."
4Then the LORD spoke his word to Abram: "He will not be the
one to inherit what you have. You will have a son of your own

who will inherit what you have."

5Then God led Abram outside and said, "Look at the sky. There are so many stars you cannot count them. Your descendants also will be too many to count."

6Abram believed the LORD. And the LORD accepted Abram's faith, and that faith made him right with God.

7God said to Abram, "I am the LORD who led you out of Ur of Babylonia so that I could give you this land to own."

8But Abram said, "Lord God, how can I be sure that I will own this land?"

9The LORD said to Abram, "Bring me a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old male sheep, a dove, and a young pigeon."

10Abram brought them all to God. Then Abram killed the animals and cut each of them into two pieces, laying each half opposite the other half. But he did not cut the birds in half. 11Later, large birds flew down to eat the animals, but Abram chased them away.

12As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep. While he was asleep, a very terrible darkness came. 13Then the LORD said to Abram, "You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers and travel in a land they don't own. The people there will make them slaves and be cruel to them for four hundred years. 14But I will punish the nation where they are slaves. Then your descendants will leave that land, taking great wealth with them. 15And you, Abram, will die in peace and will be buried at an old age. 16After your great-great-grandchildren are born, your people will come to this land again. It will take that long, because I am not yet going to punish the Amorites for their evil behavior."

17After the sun went down, it was very dark. Suddenly a smoking firepot and a blazing torch passed between the halves of the dead animals.[n] 18So on that day the LORD made an agreement with Abram and said, "I will give to your descendants the land between the river of Egypt and the great river Euphrates. 19This is the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites."

## *Ishmael Is Born*

16 Sarai, Abram's wife, had no children, but she had a slave girl from Egypt named Hagar. 2Sarai said to Abram, "Look, the LORD has not allowed me to have children, so have sexual relations with my slave girl. If she has a child, maybe I can have my own family through her."

Abram did what Sarai said. 3It was after he had lived ten years in Canaan that Sarai gave Hagar to her husband Abram.

(Hagar was her slave girl from Egypt.)
4 Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became
pregnant. When Hagar learned she was pregnant, she began to
treat her mistress Sarai badly. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "This
is your fault. I gave my slave girl to you, and when she became
pregnant, she began to treat me badly. Let the LORD decide who
is right—you or me."
6 But Abram said to Sarai, "You are Hagar's mistress. Do
anything you want to her." Then Sarai was hard on Hagar, and
Hagar ran away.
7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water
in the desert, by the road to Shur. 8 The angel said, "Hagar,
Sarai's slave girl, where have you come from? Where are you
going?"
Hagar answered, "I am running away from my mistress
Sarai."
9 The angel of the LORD said to her, "Go home to your mistress
and obey her." 10 The angel also said, "I will give you so many
descendants they cannot be counted."
11 The angel added,

"You are now pregnant,
and you will have a son.

You will name him Ishmael,[n]
because the LORD has heard your cries.

12 Ishmael will be like a wild donkey.
He will be against everyone,
and everyone will be against him.

He will attack all his brothers."

13 The slave girl gave a name to the LORD who spoke to her:
"You are 'God who sees me,'" because she said to herself, "Have
I really seen God who sees me?" 14 So the well there, between
Kadesh and Bered, was called Beer Lahai Roi.[n]
15 Hagar gave birth to a son for Abram, and Abram named
him Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar
gave birth to Ishmael.

## Psalm 5:1–6

## *A Morning Prayer for Protection*

**For the director of music. For flutes. A psalm of David.**

5 LORD, listen to my words.
Understand my sadness.

2 Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,
because I pray to you.

3 LORD, every morning you hear my voice.
Every morning, I tell you what I need,
and I wait for your answer.

4 You are not a God who is pleased with the wicked;
you do not live with those who do evil.

5 Those people who make fun of you cannot stand before you.
You hate all those who do evil.

6 You destroy liars;
the LORD hates those who kill and trick others.

## Proverbs 2:6–8

6 Only the LORD gives wisdom;
he gives knowledge and understanding.

7 He stores up wisdom for those who are honest.
Like a shield he protects the innocent.

8 He makes sure that justice is done,

and he protects those who are loyal to him.

## Matthew 6:19–34

### *God Is More Important than Money*

19 “Don’t store treasures for yourselves here on earth where
moths and rust will destroy them and thieves can break in and
steal them. 20 But store your treasures in heaven where they
cannot be destroyed by moths or rust and where thieves cannot
break in and steal them. 21 Your heart will be where your
treasure is.
22 “The eye is a light for the body. If your eyes are good, your
whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are evil, your
whole body will be full of darkness. And if the only light you
have is really darkness, then you have the worst darkness.
24 “No one can serve two masters. The person will hate one
master and love the other, or will follow one master and refuse
to follow the other. You cannot serve both God and worldly
riches.

### *Don’t Worry*

25 “So I tell you, don’t worry about the food or drink you need
to live, or about the clothes you need for your body. Life is more
than food, and the body is more than clothes. 26 Look at the
birds in the air. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in
barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them. And you know that
you are worth much more than the birds. 27 You cannot add any
time to your life by worrying about it.
28 “And why do you worry about clothes? Look at how the
lilies in the field grow. They don’t work or make clothes for
themselves. 29 But I tell you that even Solomon with his riches
was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. 30 God
clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow
is thrown into the fire. So you can be even more sure that God
will clothe you. Don’t have so little faith! 31 Don’t worry and say,
‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we
wear?’ 32 The people who don’t know God keep trying to get
these things, and your Father in heaven knows you need them.
33 Seek first God’s kingdom and what God wants. Then all your
other needs will be met as well. 34 So don’t worry about
tomorrow, because tomorrow will have its own worries. Each
day has enough trouble of its own.

# January 9

## A Heavenly Perspective

*"Ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you."*

Matthew 7:7

go back and report to John what you hear and see: "The blind can see, the crippled can walk … and the Good News is preached to the poor" (Luke 7:22). This was Jesus' answer to John's agonized query from the dungeon of doubt: "Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?" (Luke 7:19).

We don't know how John received Jesus' message, but we can imagine. I like to think of a slight smile coming over his lips as he heard what his Master said. For now he understood. It wasn't that Jesus was silent; it was that John had been listening for the wrong answer. John had been listening for an answer to his earthly problems, while Jesus was busy resolving his heavenly ones.

That's worth remembering the next time you hear the silence of God.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Genesis 17:1—18:33

### *Proof of the Agreement*

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to
him and said, "I am God Almighty. Obey me and do what is
right. 2I will make an agreement between us, and I will make
you the ancestor of many people."

3Then Abram bowed facedown on the ground. God said to
him, 4"I am making my agreement with you: I will make you the
father of many nations. 5I am changing your name from Abram[n]
to Abraham[n] because I am making you a father of many nations.

6 I will give you many descendants. New nations will be born
from you, and kings will come from you. 7 And I will make an
agreement between me and you and all your descendants from
now on: I will be your God and the God of all your descendants.
8 You live in the land of Canaan now as a stranger, but I will give
you and your descendants all this land forever. And I will be the
God of your descendants."

9 Then God said to Abraham, "You and your descendants must
keep this agreement from now on. 10 This is my agreement with
you and all your descendants, which you must obey: Every male
among you must be circumcised. 11 Cut away your foreskin to
show that you are prepared to follow the agreement between
me and you. 12 From now on when a baby boy is eight days old,
you will circumcise him. This includes any boy born among your
people or any who is your slave, who is not one of your
descendants. 13 Circumcise every baby boy whether he is born in
your family or bought as a slave. Your bodies will be marked to
show that you are part of my agreement that lasts forever.
14 Any male who is not circumcised will be cut off from his
people, because he has broken my agreement."

## *Isaac—the Promised Son*

15 God said to Abraham, "I will change the name of Sarai,[n]
your wife, to Sarah.[n] 16 I will bless her and give her a son, and
you will be the father. She will be the mother of many nations.
Kings of nations will come from her."

17 Abraham bowed facedown on the ground and laughed. He
said to himself, "Can a man have a child when he is a hundred
years old? Can Sarah give birth to a child when she is ninety?"
18 Then Abraham said to God, "Please let Ishmael be the son you
promised."

19 God said, "No, Sarah your wife will have a son, and you
will name him Isaac.[n] I will make my agreement with him to be
an agreement that continues forever with all his descendants.

20 "As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I will bless him and give
him many descendants. And I will cause their numbers to grow
greatly. He will be the father of twelve great leaders, and I will
make him into a great nation. 21 But I will make my agreement
with Isaac, the son whom Sarah will have at this same time next
year." 22 After God finished talking with Abraham, God rose and
left him.

23 Then Abraham gathered Ishmael, all the males born in his
camp, and the slaves he had bought. So that day Abraham
circumcised every man and boy in his camp as God had told him
to do. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was
circumcised. 25 And Ishmael, his son, was thirteen years old
when he was circumcised. 26 Abraham and his son were

circumcised on the same day. 27Also on that day all the men in Abraham's camp were circumcised, including all those born in his camp and all the slaves he had bought from other nations.

## *The Three Visitors*

18 Later, the LORD again appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre. Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day. 2He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When Abraham saw them, he ran from his tent to meet them. He bowed facedown on the ground before them 3and said, "Sir, if you think well of me, please stay awhile with me, your servant. 4I will bring some water so all of you can wash your feet. You may rest under the tree, 5and I will get some bread for you so you can regain your strength. Then you may continue your journey."

The three men said, "That is fine. Do as you said."

6Abraham hurried to the tent where Sarah was and said to her, "Hurry, prepare twenty quarts of fine flour, and make it into loaves of bread." 7Then Abraham ran to his herd and took one of his best calves. He gave it to a servant, who hurried to kill it and to prepare it for food. 8Abraham gave the three men the calf that had been cooked and milk curds and milk. While they ate, he stood under the tree near them.

9The men asked Abraham, "Where is your wife Sarah?"

"There, in the tent," said Abraham.

10Then the LORD said, "I will certainly return to you about this time a year from now. At that time your wife Sarah will have a son."

Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent which was behind him. 11Abraham and Sarah were very old. Since Sarah was past the age when women normally have children, 12she laughed to herself, "My husband and I are too old to have a baby."

13Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, 'I am too old to have a baby'? 14Is anything too hard for the LORD? No! I will return to you at the right time a year from now, and Sarah will have a son."

15Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I didn't laugh."

But the LORD said, "No. You did laugh."

16Then the men got up to leave and started out toward Sodom. Abraham walked along with them a short time to send them on their way.

## *Abraham's Bargain with God*

17The LORD said, "Should I tell Abraham what I am going to

do now? 18Abraham's children will certainly become a great and
powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed
through him. 19I have chosen him so he would command his
children and his descendants to live the way the LORD wants
them to, to live right and be fair. Then I, the LORD, will give
Abraham what I promised him."
20Then the LORD said, "I have heard many complaints against
the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are very evil. 21I will
go down and see if they are as bad as I have heard. If not, I will
know."
22So the men turned and went toward Sodom, but Abraham
stood there before the LORD. 23Then Abraham approached him
and asked, "Do you plan to destroy the good people along with
the evil ones? 24What if there are fifty good people in that city?
Will you still destroy it? Surely you will save the city for the fifty
good people living there. 25Surely you will not destroy the good
people along with the evil ones; then they would be treated the
same. You are the judge of all the earth. Won't you do what is
right?"
26The LORD said, "If I find fifty good people in the city of
Sodom, I will save the whole city because of them."
27Then Abraham said, "Though I am only dust and ashes, I
have been brave to speak to the Lord. 28What if there are only
forty-five good people in the city? Will you destroy the whole
city for the lack of five good people?"
The LORD said, "If I find forty-five there, I will not destroy the
city."
29Again Abraham said to him, "If you find only forty good
people there, will you destroy the city?"
The LORD said, "If I find forty, I will not destroy it."
30Then Abraham said, "Lord, please don't be angry with me,
but let me ask you this. If you find only thirty good people in the
city, will you destroy it?"
He said, "If I find thirty good people there, I will not destroy
the city."
31Then Abraham said, "I have been brave to speak to the
Lord. But what if there are twenty good people in the city?"
He answered, "If I find twenty there, I will not destroy the
city."
32Then Abraham said, "Lord, please don't be angry with me,
but let me bother you this one last time. What if you find ten
there?"
He said, "If I find ten there, I will not destroy it."
33When the LORD finished speaking to Abraham, he left, and
Abraham returned home.

## Psalm 5:7–12

7 Because of your great love,
I can come into your Temple.

Because I fear and respect you,
I can worship in your holy Temple.

8 LORD, since I have many enemies,
show me the right thing to do.
Show me clearly how you want me to live.

9 My enemies' mouths do not tell the truth;
in their hearts they want to destroy others.

Their throats are like open graves;
they use their tongues for telling lies.

10 God, declare them guilty!
Let them fall into their own traps.

Send them away because their sins are many;
they have turned against you.

11 But let everyone who trusts you be happy;
let them sing glad songs forever.

Protect those who love you
and who are happy because of you.

12 LORD, you bless those who do what is right;
you protect them like a soldier's shield.

## Proverbs 2:9–22

9 Then you will understand what is honest and fair
and what is the good and right thing to do.

10 Wisdom will come into your mind,
and knowledge will be pleasing to you.

11 Good sense will protect you;
understanding will guard you.

12 It will keep you from the wicked,
from those whose words are bad,

13 who don’t do what is right
but what is evil.

14 They enjoy doing wrong
and are happy to do what is crooked and evil.

15 What they do is wrong,
and their ways are dishonest.

16 It will save you from the unfaithful wife
who tries to lead you into adultery with pleasing words.

17 She leaves the husband she married when she was young.
She ignores the promise she made before God.

18 Her house is on the way to death;
those who took that path are now all dead.

19 No one who goes to her comes back
or walks the path of life again.

20 But wisdom will help you be good
and do what is right.

21 Those who are honest will live in the land,
and those who are innocent will remain in it.

22 But the wicked will be removed from the land,
and the unfaithful will be thrown out of it.

## Matthew 7:1–29

### *Be Careful About Judging Others*

7 “Don’t judge others, or you will be judged. 2 You will be judged
in the same way that you judge others, and the amount you give
to others will be given to you.
3 “Why do you notice the little piece of dust in your friend’s
eye, but you don’t notice the big piece of wood in your own eye?
4 How can you say to your friend, ‘Let me take that little piece of
dust out of your eye’? Look at yourself! You still have that big
piece of wood in your own eye. 5 You hypocrite! First, take the
wood out of your own eye. Then you will see clearly to take the
dust out of your friend’s eye.
6 “Don’t give holy things to dogs, and don’t throw your pearls
before pigs. Pigs will only trample on them, and dogs will turn
to attack you.

### *Ask God for What You Need*

7 “Ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find.
Knock, and the door will open for you. 8 Yes, everyone who asks
will receive. Everyone who searches will find. And everyone
who knocks will have the door opened.
9 “If your children ask for bread, which of you would give
them a stone? 10 Or if your children ask for a fish, would you
give them a snake? 11 Even though you are bad, you know how
to give good gifts to your children. How much more your
heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him!

### *The Most Important Rule*

12 “Do to others what you want them to do to you. This is the
meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets.

### *The Way to Heaven Is Hard*

13“Enter through the narrow gate. The gate is wide and the
road is wide that leads to hell, and many people enter through
that gate. 14But the gate is small and the road is narrow that
leads to true life. Only a few people find that road.

## *People Know You by Your Actions*

15“Be careful of false prophets. They come to you looking
gentle like sheep, but they are really dangerous like wolves.
16You will know these people by what they do. Grapes don’t
come from thornbushes, and figs don’t come from thorny
weeds. 17In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit,
but a bad tree produces bad fruit. 18A good tree cannot produce
bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. 19Every
tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown
into the fire. 20In the same way, you will know these false
prophets by what they do.
21“Not all those who say ‘You are our Lord’ will enter the
kingdom of heaven. The only people who will enter the kingdom
of heaven are those who do what my Father in heaven wants.
22On the last day many people will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, we
spoke for you, and through you we forced out demons and did
many miracles.’ 23Then I will tell them clearly, ‘Get away from
me, you who do evil. I never knew you.’

## *Two Kinds of People*

24“Everyone who hears my words and obeys them is like a
wise man who built his house on rock. 25It rained hard, the
floods came, and the winds blew and hit that house. But it did
not fall, because it was built on rock. 26Everyone who hears my
words and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his
house on sand. 27It rained hard, the floods came, and the winds
blew and hit that house, and it fell with a big crash.”
28When Jesus finished saying these things, the people were
amazed at his teaching, 29because he did not teach like their
teachers of the law. He taught like a person who had authority.

# January 10

## A Godly Touch

*Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, "I will. Be healed!"*

Matthew 8:3

oh, the power of a godly touch. Haven't you known it? The doctor who treated you, or the teacher who dried your tears? Was there a hand holding yours at a funeral? Another on your shoulder during a trial? A handshake of welcome at a new job? …

Can't we offer the same?

Many of you already do. Some of you have the master touch of the Physician himself. You use your hands to pray over the sick and minister to the weak. If you aren't touching them personally, your hands are writing letters, dialing phones, baking pies. You have learned the power of a touch.

But others of us tend to forget. Our hearts are good; it's just that our memories are bad. We forget how significant one touch can be …

Aren't we glad Jesus didn't make the same mistake?

from *Just Like Jesus*

### Genesis 19:1—20:18

### *Lot Leaves Sodom*

19 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was
sitting near the city gate. When he saw them, he got up and
went to them and bowed facedown on the ground. 2Lot said,
"Sirs, please come to my house and spend the night. There you
can wash your feet, and then tomorrow you may continue your
journey."

The angels answered, "No, we will spend the night in the city's public square."

[3]But Lot begged them to come, so they agreed and went to
his house. Then Lot prepared a meal for them. He baked bread
without yeast, and they ate it.
[4]Before bedtime, men both young and old and from every
part of Sodom surrounded Lot's house. [5]They called to Lot,
"Where are the two men who came to you tonight? Bring them
out to us so we can have sexual relations with them."
[6]Lot went outside to them, closing the door behind him. [7]He
said, "No, my brothers! Do not do this evil thing. [8]Look! I have
two daughters who have never slept with a man. I will give
them to you, and you may do anything you want with them. But
please don't do anything to these men. They have come to my
house, and I must protect them."
[9]The men around the house answered, "Move out of the
way!" Then they said to each other, "This man Lot came to our
city as a stranger, and now he wants to tell us what to do!" They
said to Lot, "We will do worse things to you than to them." They
started pushing him back and were ready to break down the
door.
[10]But the two men staying with Lot opened the door, pulled
him back inside the house, and then closed the door. [11]They
struck those outside the door with blindness, so the men, both
young and old, could not find the door.
[12]The two men said to Lot, "Do you have any other relatives
in this city? Do you have any sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or
any other relatives? If you do, tell them to leave now, [13]because
we are about to destroy this city. The LORD has heard of all the
evil that is here, so he has sent us to destroy it."
[14]So Lot went out and said to his future sons-in-law who
were pledged to marry his daughters, "Hurry and leave this
city! The LORD is about to destroy it!" But they thought Lot was
joking.
[15]At dawn the next morning, the angels begged Lot to hurry.
They said, "Go! Take your wife and your two daughters with you
so you will not be destroyed when the city is punished."
[16]But Lot delayed. So the two men took the hands of Lot, his
wife, and his two daughters and led them safely out of the city.
So the LORD was merciful to Lot and his family. [17]After they
brought them out of the city, one of the men said, "Run for your
lives! Don't look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Run to the
mountains, or you will be destroyed."
[18]But Lot said to one of them, "Sir, please don't force me to
go so far! [19]You have been merciful and kind to me and have
saved my life. But I can't run to the mountains. The disaster will
catch me, and I will die. [20]Look, that little town over there is not
too far away. Let me run there. It's really just a little town, and
I'll be safe there."
[21]The angel said to Lot, "Very well, I will allow you to do this

also. I will not destroy that town. 22But run there fast, because I
cannot destroy Sodom until you are safely in that town." (That
town is named Zoar,[n] because it is little.)

## *Sodom and Gomorrah Are Destroyed*

23The sun had already come up when Lot entered Zoar. 24The
LORD sent a rain of burning sulfur down from the sky on Sodom
and Gomorrah 25and destroyed those cities. He also destroyed
the whole Jordan Valley, everyone living in the cities, and even
all the plants.

26At that point Lot's wife looked back. When she did, she
became a pillar of salt.

27Early the next morning, Abraham got up and went to the
place where he had stood before the LORD. 28He looked down
toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the Jordan Valley and saw
smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

29God destroyed the cities in the valley, but he remembered
what Abraham had asked. So God saved Lot's life, but he
destroyed the city where Lot had lived.

## *Lot and His Daughters*

30Lot was afraid to continue living in Zoar, so he and his two
daughters went to live in the mountains in a cave. 31One day the
older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old.
Everywhere on the earth women and men marry, but there are
no men around here for us to marry. 32Let's get our father
drunk and have sexual relations with him. We can use him to
have children and continue our family."

33That night the two girls got their father drunk, and the
older daughter went and had sexual relations with him. But Lot
did not know when she lay down or when she got up.

34The next day the older daughter said to the younger, "Last
night I had sexual relations with my father. Let's get him drunk
again tonight so you can go and have sexual relations with him,
too. In this way we can use our father to have children to
continue our family." 35So that night they got their father drunk
again, and the younger daughter went and had sexual relations
with him. Again, Lot did not know when she lay down or when
she got up.

36So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their
father. 37The older daughter gave birth to a son and named him
Moab. He is the ancestor of all the Moabite people who are still
living today. 38The younger daughter also gave birth to a son
and named him Ben-Ammi. He is the father of all the Ammonite
people who are still living today.

## *Abraham Tricks Abimelech*

20 Abraham left Hebron and traveled to southern Canaan where
he stayed awhile between Kadesh and Shur. When he moved to
Gerar, 2he told people that his wife Sarah was his sister.
Abimelech king of Gerar heard this, so he sent some servants to
take her. 3But one night God spoke to Abimelech in a dream and
said, “You will die. The woman you took is married.”

4But Abimelech had not gone near Sarah, so he said, “Lord,
would you destroy an innocent nation? 5Abraham himself told
me, ‘This woman is my sister,’ and she also said, ‘He is my
brother.’ I am innocent. I did not know I was doing anything
wrong.”

6Then God said to Abimelech in the dream, “Yes, I know you
did not realize what you were doing. So I did not allow you to
sin against me and touch her. 7Give Abraham his wife back. He
is a prophet. He will pray for you, and you will not die. But if
you do not give Sarah back, you and all your family will surely
die.”

8So early the next morning, Abimelech called all his officers
and told them everything that had happened in the dream. They
were very afraid. 9Then Abimelech called Abraham to him and
said, “What have you done to us? What wrong did I do against
you? Why did you bring this trouble to my kingdom? You should
not have done these things to me. 10What were you thinking
that caused you to do this?”

11Then Abraham answered, “I thought no one in this place
respected God and that someone would kill me to get Sarah.
12And it is true that she is my sister. She is the daughter of my
father, but she is not the daughter of my mother. 13When God
told me to leave my father’s house and wander in many
different places, I told Sarah, ‘You must do a special favor for
me. Everywhere we go tell people I am your brother.’”

14Then Abimelech gave Abraham some sheep, cattle, and
male and female slaves. He also gave Sarah, Abraham’s wife,
back to him 15and said, “Look around you at my land. You may
live anywhere you want.”

16Abimelech said to Sarah, “I gave your brother Abraham
twenty-five pounds of silver to make up for any wrong that
people may think about you. I want everyone to know that you
are innocent.”

17Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech,
his wife, and his servant girls so they could have children. 18The
LORD had kept all the women in Abimelech’s house from having
children as a punishment on Abimelech for taking Abraham’s
wife Sarah.

## Psalm 6:1–5

### *A Prayer for Mercy in Troubled Times*

**For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Upon the sheminith. A psalm of David.**

6 LORD, don't correct me when you are angry;
don't punish me when you are very angry.

2LORD, have mercy on me because I am weak.
Heal me, LORD, because my bones ache.

3I am very upset.
LORD, how long will it be?

4LORD, return and save me;
save me because of your kindness.

5Dead people don't remember you;
those in the grave don't praise you.

## Proverbs 3:1–4

### *Advice to Children*

3 My child, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in mind.

2Then you will live a long time,
and your life will be successful.

3 Don’t ever forget kindness and truth.
Wear them like a necklace.
Write them on your heart as if on a tablet.

4 Then you will be respected
and will please both God and people.

## Matthew 8:1–17

### *Jesus Heals a Sick Man*

8 When Jesus came down from the hill, great crowds followed
him. 2 Then a man with a skin disease came to Jesus. The man
bowed down before him and said, “Lord, you can heal me if you
will.”
3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said,
“I will. Be healed!” And immediately the man was healed from
his disease. 4 Then Jesus said to him, “Don’t tell anyone about
this. But go and show yourself to the priest[n] and offer the gift
Moses commanded[n] for people who are made well. This will
show the people what I have done.”

### *Jesus Heals a Soldier’s Servant*

5 When Jesus entered the city of Capernaum, an army officer
came to him, begging for help. 6 The officer said, “Lord, my
servant is at home in bed. He can’t move his body and is in
much pain.”
7 Jesus said to the officer, “I will go and heal him.”
8 The officer answered, “Lord, I am not worthy for you to
come into my house. You only need to command it, and my
servant will be healed. 9 I, too, am a man under the authority of
others, and I have soldiers under my command. I tell one
soldier, ‘Go,’ and he goes. I tell another soldier, ‘Come,’ and he
comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and my servant does it.
10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. He said to those
who were following him, “I tell you the truth, this is the greatest
faith I have found, even in Israel. 11 Many people will come from
the east and from the west and will sit and eat with Abraham,
Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But those people
who should be in the kingdom will be thrown outside into the
darkness, where people will cry and grind their teeth with
pain.”

[13]Then Jesus said to the officer, “Go home. Your servant will be healed just as you believed he would.” And his servant was healed that same hour.

## *Jesus Heals Many People*

[14]When Jesus went to Peter’s house, he saw that Peter’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever. [15]Jesus touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she stood up and began to serve Jesus.

[16]That evening people brought to Jesus many who had demons. Jesus spoke and the demons left them, and he healed all the sick. [17]He did these things to bring about what Isaiah the prophet had said:

“He took our suffering on him
and carried our diseases.”

Isaiah 53:4

# January 11

## The True Son of God

*His followers went to him and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We will drown!" Jesus answered, "Why are you afraid?"*

Matthew 8:25–26

Read this verse: "Then those who were in the boat worshiped Jesus and said, 'Truly you are the Son of God!'" (Matthew 14:33). After the storm, [the disciples] worshiped him. They had never, as a group, done that before. Never. Check it out. Open your Bible. Search for a time when the disciples corporately praised him.

You won't find it.

You won't find them worshiping when he heals the leper. Forgives the adulteress. Preaches to the masses. They were willing to follow. Willing to leave family. Willing to cast out demons. Willing to be in the army.

But only after the incident on the sea did they worship him. Why?

Simple. This time they were the ones who were saved.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

### Genesis 21:1—22:24

### *A Baby for Sarah*

21 The LORD cared for Sarah as he had said and did for her what
he had promised. 2Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to a
son for Abraham in his old age. Everything happened at the
time God had said it would. 3Abraham named his son Isaac, the
son Sarah gave birth to. 4He circumcised Isaac when he was
eight days old as God had commanded.
5Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was
born. 6And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh.[n] Everyone
who hears about this will laugh with me. 7No one thought that I

would be able to have Abraham's child, but even though Abraham is old I have given him a son."

## *Hagar and Ishmael Leave*

[8]Isaac grew, and when he became old enough to eat food, Abraham gave a great feast. [9]But Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of Isaac. (Ishmael was the son of Abraham by Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave.) [10]So Sarah said to Abraham, "Throw out this slave woman and her son. Her son should not inherit anything; my son Isaac should receive it all."

[11]This troubled Abraham very much because Ishmael was also his son. [12]But God said to Abraham, "Don't be troubled about the boy and the slave woman. Do whatever Sarah tells you. The descendants I promised you will be from Isaac. [13]I will also make the descendants of Ishmael into a great nation because he is your son, too."

[14]Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a leather bag full of water. He gave them to Hagar and sent her away. Carrying these things and her son, Hagar went and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

[15]Later, when all the water was gone from the bag, Hagar put her son under a bush. [16]Then she went away a short distance and sat down. She thought, "My son will die, and I cannot watch this happen." She sat there and began to cry.

[17]God heard the boy crying, and God's angel called to Hagar from heaven. He said, "What is wrong, Hagar? Don't be afraid! God has heard the boy crying there. [18]Help him up and take him by the hand. I will make his descendants into a great nation."

[19]Then God showed Hagar a well of water. So she went to the well and filled her bag with water and gave the boy a drink.

[20]God was with the boy as he grew up. Ishmael lived in the desert and became an archer. [21]He lived in the Desert of Paran, and his mother found a wife for him in Egypt.

## *Abraham's Bargain with Abimelech*

[22]Then Abimelech came with Phicol, the commander of his army, and said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. [23]So make a promise to me here before God that you will be fair with me and my children and my descendants. Be kind to me and to this land where you have lived as a stranger—as kind as I have been to you."

[24]And Abraham said, "I promise." [25]Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about Abimelech's servants who had seized a well of water.

[26]But Abimelech said, "I don't know who did this. You never told me about this before today."

27 Then Abraham gave Abimelech some sheep and cattle, and
they made an agreement. 28 Abraham also put seven female
lambs in front of Abimelech.
29 Abimelech asked Abraham, “Why did you put these seven
female lambs by themselves?”
30 Abraham answered, “Accept these lambs from me to prove
that you believe I dug this well.”
31 So that place was called Beersheba[n] because they made a
promise to each other there.
32 After Abraham and Abimelech made the agreement at
Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army,
went back to the land of the Philistines.
33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba and prayed
to the LORD, the God who lives forever. 34 And Abraham lived as a
stranger in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

## *God Tests Abraham*

22 After these things God tested Abraham’s faith. God said to
him, “Abraham!”
And he answered, “Here I am.”
2 Then God said, “Take your only son, Isaac, the son you love,
and go to the land of Moriah. Kill him there and offer him as a
whole burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you
about.”
3 Abraham got up early in the morning and saddled his
donkey. He took Isaac and two servants with him. After he cut
the wood for the sacrifice, they went to the place God had told
them to go. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the
place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, “Stay here with
the donkey. My son and I will go over there and worship, and
then we will come back to you.”
6 Abraham took the wood for the sacrifice and gave it to his
son to carry, but he himself took the knife and the fire. So he
and his son went on together.
7 Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!”
Abraham answered, “Yes, my son.”
Isaac said, “We have the fire and the wood, but where is the
lamb we will burn as a sacrifice?”
8 Abraham answered, “God will give us the lamb for the
sacrifice, my son.”
So Abraham and his son went on together 9 and came to the
place God had told him about. Abraham built an altar there. He
laid the wood on it and then tied up his son Isaac and laid him
on the wood on the altar. 10 Then Abraham took his knife and
was about to kill his son.
11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and
said, “Abraham! Abraham!”

Abraham answered, “Yes.”
12The angel said, “Don’t kill your son or hurt him in any way.
Now I can see that you trust God and that you have not kept
your son, your only son, from me.”
13Then Abraham looked up and saw a male sheep caught in a
bush by its horns. So Abraham went and took the sheep and
killed it. He offered it as a whole burnt offering to God, and his
son was saved. 14So Abraham named that place The LORD
Provides. Even today people say, “On the mountain of the LORD it
will be provided.”
15The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a
second time 16and said, “The LORD says, ‘Because you did not
keep back your son, your only son, from me, I make you this
promise by my own name: 17I will surely bless you and give you
many descendants. They will be as many as the stars in the sky
and the sand on the seashore, and they will capture the cities of
their enemies. 18Through your descendants all the nations on
the earth will be blessed, because you obeyed me.’”
19Then Abraham returned to his servants. They all traveled
back to Beersheba, and Abraham stayed there.
20After these things happened, someone told Abraham: “Your
brother Nahor and his wife Milcah have children now. 21The
first son is Uz, and the second is Buz. The third son is Kemuel
(the father of Aram). 22Then there are Kesed, Hazo, Pildash,
Jidlaph, and Bethuel.” 23Bethuel became the father of Rebekah.
Milcah was the mother of these eight sons, and Nahor,
Abraham’s brother, was the father. 24Also Nahor had four other
sons by his slave woman Reumah. Their names were Tebah,
Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

## Psalm 6:6–10

6I am tired of crying to you.
Every night my bed is wet with tears;
my bed is soaked from my crying.

7My eyes are weak from so much crying;
they are weak from crying about my enemies.

8Get away from me, all you who do evil,
because the LORD has heard my crying.

9 The LORD has heard my cry for help;
the LORD will answer my prayer.

10 All my enemies will be ashamed and troubled.
They will turn and suddenly leave in shame.

## Proverbs 3:5–6

5 Trust the LORD with all your heart,
and don't depend on your own understanding.

6 Remember the LORD in all you do,
and he will give you success.

## Matthew 8:18–34

### *People Want to Follow Jesus*

18 When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he told his followers to go to the other side of the lake. 19 Then a teacher of the law came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, I will follow you any place you go."

20 Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes to live in, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest his head."

21 Another man, one of Jesus' followers, said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

22 But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the people who are dead bury their own dead."

### *Jesus Calms a Storm*

23 Jesus got into a boat, and his followers went with him. 24 A great storm arose on the lake so that waves covered the boat, but Jesus was sleeping. 25 His followers went to him and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We will drown!"

26 Jesus answered, "Why are you afraid? You don't have enough faith." Then Jesus got up and gave a command to the

wind and the waves, and it became completely calm.
27The men were amazed and said, “What kind of man is this?
Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

## *Jesus Heals Two Men with Demons*

28When Jesus arrived at the other side of the lake in the area
of the Gadarene[n] people, two men who had demons in them met
him. These men lived in the burial caves and were so dangerous
that people could not use the road by those caves. 29They
shouted, “What do you want with us, Son of God? Did you come
here to torture us before the right time?”
30Near that place there was a large herd of pigs feeding.
31The demons begged Jesus, “If you make us leave these men,
please send us into that herd of pigs.”
32Jesus said to them, “Go!” So the demons left the men and
went into the pigs. Then the whole herd rushed down the hill
into the lake and were drowned. 33The herdsmen ran away and
went into town, where they told about all of this and what had
happened to the men who had demons. 34Then the whole town
went out to see Jesus. When they saw him, they begged him to
leave their area.

# January 12

## Found, Called, and Adopted

*"It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick … I did not come to invite good people but to invite sinners."*

Matthew 9:12–13

God didn't look at our frazzled lives and say, "I'll die for you when you deserve it." No, despite our sin, in the face of our rebellion, he chose to adopt us. And for God, there's no going back. His grace is a come-as-you-are promise from a one-of-a-kind King. You've been found, called, and adopted; so trust your Father and claim this verse as your own: "But God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). And you never again have to wonder who your father is—you've been adopted by God and are therefore an heir of God through Christ (Galatians 4:7).

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### Genesis 23:1—24:67

#### *Sarah Dies*

23 Sarah lived to be one hundred twenty-seven years old. 2She
died in Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.
Abraham was very sad and cried because of her. 3After a while
he got up from the side of his wife's body and went to talk to
the Hittites. He said, 4"I am only a stranger and a foreigner
here. Sell me some of your land so that I can bury my dead
wife."
5The Hittites answered Abraham, 6"Sir, you are a great
leader among us. You may have the best place we have to bury
your dead. You may have any of our burying places that you
want, and none of us will stop you from burying your dead
wife."
7Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the

Hittites. [8]He said to them, “If you truly want to help me bury my
dead wife here, speak to Ephron, the son of Zohar for me. [9]Ask
him to sell me the cave of Machpelah at the edge of his field. I
will pay him the full price. You can be the witnesses that I am
buying it as a burial place.”

[10]Ephron was sitting among the Hittites at the city gate. He
answered Abraham, [11]“No, sir. I will give you the land and the
cave that is in it, with these people as witnesses. Bury your
dead wife.”

[12]Then Abraham bowed down before the Hittites. [13]He said
to Ephron before all the people, “Please let me pay you the full
price for the field. Accept my money, and I will bury my dead
there.”

[14]Ephron answered Abraham, [15]“Sir, the land is worth ten
pounds of silver, but I won’t argue with you over the price. Take
the land, and bury your dead wife.”

[16]Abraham agreed and paid Ephron in front of the Hittite
witnesses. He weighed out the full price, ten pounds of silver,
and they counted the weight as the traders normally did.

[17–18]So Ephron’s field in Machpelah, east of Mamre, was
sold. Abraham became the owner of the field, the cave in it, and
all the trees that were in the field. The sale was made at the city
gate, with the Hittites as witnesses. [19]After this, Abraham
buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near
Mamre. (Mamre was later called Hebron in the land of Canaan.)
[20]So Abraham bought the field and the cave in it from the
Hittites to use as a burying place.

## *A Wife for Isaac*

[24] Abraham was now very old, and the LORD had blessed him in
every way. [2]Abraham said to his oldest servant, who was in
charge of everything he owned, “Put your hand under my leg.[n]
[3]Make a promise to me before the LORD, the God of heaven and
earth. Don’t get a wife for my son from the Canaanite girls who
live around here. [4]Instead, go back to my country, to the land of
my relatives, and get a wife for my son Isaac.”

[5]The servant said to him, “What if this woman does not want
to return with me to this land? Then, should I take your son
with me back to your homeland?”

[6]Abraham said to him, “No! Don’t take my son back there.
[7]The LORD, the God of heaven, brought me from the home of my
father and the land of my relatives. And he promised me, ‘I will
give this land to your descendants.’ The LORD will send his angel
before you to help you get a wife for my son there. [8]If the girl
won’t come back with you, you will be free from this promise.
But you must not take my son back there.” [9]So the servant put
his hand under his master’s leg and made a promise to

Abraham about this.

10The servant took ten of Abraham's camels and left,
carrying with him many different kinds of beautiful gifts. He
went to Northwest Mesopotamia to Nahor's city. 11In the
evening, when the women come out to get water, he made the
camels kneel down at the well outside the city.

12The servant said, "LORD, God of my master Abraham, allow
me to find a wife for his son today. Please show this kindness to
my master Abraham. 13Here I am, standing by the spring, and
the girls from the city are coming out to get water. 14I will say
to one of them, 'Please put your jar down so I can drink.' Then
let her say, 'Drink, and I will also give water to your camels.' If
that happens, I will know she is the right one for your servant
Isaac and that you have shown kindness to my master."

15Before the servant had finished praying, Rebekah, the
daughter of Bethuel, came out of the city. (Bethuel was the son
of Milcah and Nahor, Abraham's brother.) Rebekah was
carrying her water jar on her shoulder. 16She was very pretty, a
virgin; she had never had sexual relations with a man. She went
down to the spring and filled her jar, then came back up. 17The
servant ran to her and said, "Please give me a little water from
your jar."

18Rebekah said, "Drink, sir." She quickly lowered the jar
from her shoulder and gave him a drink. 19After he finished
drinking, Rebekah said, "I will also pour some water for your
camels." 20So she quickly poured all the water from her jar into
the drinking trough for the camels. Then she kept running to
the well until she had given all the camels enough to drink.

21The servant quietly watched her. He wanted to be sure the
LORD had made his trip successful. 22After the camels had
finished drinking, he gave Rebekah a gold ring weighing one-
fifth of an ounce and two gold arm bracelets weighing about
four ounces each. 23He asked, "Who is your father? Is there a
place in his house for me and my men to spend the night?"

24Rebekah answered, "My father is Bethuel, the son of
Milcah and Nahor." 25Then she said, "And, yes, we have straw
for your camels and a place for you to spend the night."

26The servant bowed and worshiped the LORD 27and said,
"Blessed is the LORD, the God of my master Abraham. The LORD
has been kind and truthful to him and has led me to my
master's relatives."

28Then Rebekah ran and told her mother's family about all
these things. 29She had a brother named Laban, who ran out to
Abraham's servant, who was still at the spring. 30Laban had
heard what she had said and had seen the ring and the
bracelets on his sister's arms. So he ran out to the well, and
there was the man standing by the camels at the spring.
31Laban said, "Sir, you are welcome to come in; you don't have

to stand outside. I have prepared the house for you and also a place for your camels."

32So Abraham's servant went into the house. After Laban unloaded the camels and gave them straw and food, he gave water to Abraham's servant so he and the men with him could wash their feet. 33Then Laban gave the servant food, but the servant said, "I will not eat until I have told you why I came."

So Laban said, "Then tell us."

34He said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35The LORD has greatly blessed my master in everything, and he has become a rich man. The LORD has given him many flocks of sheep, herds of cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, camels, and horses. 36Sarah, my master's wife, gave birth to a son when she was old, and my master has given everything he owns to that son. 37My master had me make a promise to him and said, 'Don't get a wife for my son from the Canaanite girls who live around here. 38Instead, you must go to my father's people and to my family. There you must get a wife for my son.' 39I said to my master, 'What if the woman will not come back with me?' 40But he said, 'I serve the LORD, who will send his angel with you and will help you. You will get a wife for my son from my family and my father's people. 41Then you will be free from the promise. But if they will not give you a wife for my son, you will be free from this promise.'

42"Today I came to this spring. I said, 'LORD, God of my master Abraham, please make my trip successful. 43I am standing by this spring. I will wait for a young woman to come out to get water, and I will say, "Please give me water from your jar to drink." 44Then let her say, "Drink this water, and I will also get water for your camels." By this I will know the LORD has chosen her for my master's son.'

45"Before I finished my silent prayer, Rebekah came out of the city with her water jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and got water. I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' 46She quickly lowered the jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink this. I will also get water for your camels.' So I drank, and she gave water to my camels too. 47When I asked her, 'Who is your father?' she answered, 'My father is Bethuel son of Milcah and Nahor.' Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, 48and I bowed my head and thanked the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, because he led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. 49Now, tell me, will you be kind and truthful to my master? And if not, tell me so. Then I will know what I should do."

50Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is clearly from the LORD, and we cannot change what must happen. 51Rebekah is yours. Take her and go. Let her marry your master's son as the

LORD has commanded.”

52When Abraham’s servant heard these words, he bowed facedown on the ground before the LORD. 53Then he gave Rebekah gold and silver jewelry and clothes. He also gave expensive gifts to her brother and mother. 54The servant and the men with him ate and drank and spent the night there. When they got up the next morning, the servant said, “Now let me go back to my master.”

55Rebekah’s mother and her brother said, “Let Rebekah stay with us at least ten days. After that she may go.”

56But the servant said to them, “Do not make me wait, because the LORD has made my trip successful. Now let me go back to my master.”

57Rebekah’s brother and mother said, “We will call Rebekah and ask her what she wants to do.” 58They called her and asked her, “Do you want to go with this man now?”

She said, “Yes, I do.”

59So they allowed Rebekah and her nurse to go with Abraham’s servant and his men. 60They blessed Rebekah and said,

“Our sister, may you be the mother of thousands of people,
and may your descendants capture the cities of their enemies.”

61Then Rebekah and her servant girls got on the camels and followed the servant and his men. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

62At this time Isaac had left Beer Lahai Roi and was living in southern Canaan. 63One evening when he went out to the field to think, he looked up and saw camels coming. 64Rebekah also looked and saw Isaac. Then she jumped down from the camel 65and asked the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?”

The servant answered, “That is my master.” So Rebekah covered her face with her veil.

66The servant told Isaac everything that had happened. 67Then Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of Sarah, his mother, and she became his wife. Isaac loved her very much, and so he was comforted after his mother’s death.

## Psalm 7:1–5

### *A Prayer for Fairness*

**A shiggaion of David which he sang to the LORD about Cush, from the tribe of Benjamin.**

7 LORD my God, I trust in you for protection.
Save me and rescue me
from those who are chasing me.

2Otherwise, like a lion they will tear me apart.
They will rip me to pieces, and no one can save me.

3LORD my God, what have I done?
Have my hands done something wrong?

4Have I done wrong to my friend
or stolen without reason from my enemy?

5If I have, let my enemy chase me and capture me.
Let him trample me into the dust
and bury me in the ground. *Selah*

## Proverbs 3:7–8

7Don't depend on your own wisdom.
Respect the LORD and refuse to do wrong.

8Then your body will be healthy,
and your bones will be strong.

## Matthew 9:1–17

### *Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man*

9 Jesus got into a boat and went back across the lake to his own
town. 2Some people brought to Jesus a man who was paralyzed
and lying on a mat. When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he
said to the paralyzed man, “Be encouraged, young man. Your
sins are forgiven.”
3Some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This
man speaks as if he were God. That is blasphemy!”[n]
4Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why are you thinking
evil thoughts? 5Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’
or to tell him, ‘Stand up and walk’? 6But I will prove to you that
the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Then
Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Stand up, take your mat, and
go home.” 7And the man stood up and went home. 8When the
people saw this, they were amazed and praised God for giving
power like this to human beings.

## *Jesus Chooses Matthew*

9When Jesus was leaving, he saw a man named Matthew
sitting in the tax collector’s booth. Jesus said to him, “Follow
me,” and he stood up and followed Jesus.
10As Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax
collectors and “sinners” came and ate with Jesus and his
followers. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they asked Jesus’
followers, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and
sinners?”
12When Jesus heard them, he said, “It is not the healthy
people who need a doctor, but the sick. 13Go and learn what this
means: ‘I want kindness more than I want animal sacrifices.’[n] I
did not come to invite good people but to invite sinners.”

## *Jesus’ Followers Are Criticized*

14Then the followers of John[n] came to Jesus and said, “Why
do we and the Pharisees often fast[n] for a certain time, but your
followers don’t?”
15Jesus answered, “The friends of the bridegroom are not sad
while he is with them. But the time will come when the
bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast.
16“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth over a hole in an
old coat. If he does, the patch will shrink and pull away from the
coat, making the hole worse. 17Also, people never pour new
wine into old leather bags. Otherwise, the bags will break, the
wine will spill, and the wine bags will be ruined. But people
always pour new wine into new wine bags. Then both will
continue to be good.”

# January 13

## His Broken Heart

*When he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were hurting and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

Matthew 9:36

I can't understand it. I honestly cannot. Why did Jesus [die on the cross]? Oh, I know, I know. I have heard the official answers. "To gratify the old law." "To fulfill prophecy." And these answers are right. They are. But there is something more here. Something very compassionate. Something yearning. Something personal.

What is it?

Could it be that his heart was broken for all the people who cast despairing eyes toward the dark heavens and cry the same "Why?" Could it be that his heart was broken for the hurting? …

I imagine him, bending close to those who hurt. I imagine him listening. I picture his eyes misting and a pierced hand brushing away a tear … He who also was once alone, understands.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Genesis 25:1—26:35

#### *Abraham's Family*

25 Abraham married again, and his new wife was Keturah. 2She gave birth to Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 3Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. Dedan's descendants were the people of Assyria, Letush, and Leum. 4The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. 5Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. 6But before Abraham died, he did give gifts to the sons of his other wives, then sent them to the East to be away from Isaac.

[7]Abraham lived to be one hundred seventy-five years old.
[8]He breathed his last breath and died at an old age, after a long
and satisfying life. [9]His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in
the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron east of Mamre.
(Ephron was the son of Zohar the Hittite.) [10]So Abraham was
buried with his wife Sarah in the same field that he had bought
from the Hittites. [11]After Abraham died, God blessed his son
Isaac. Isaac was now living at Beer Lahai Roi.

[12]This is the family history of Ishmael, Abraham's son.
(Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant, was Ishmael's mother.)
[13]These are the names of Ishmael's sons in the order they were
born: Nebaioth, the first son, then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,
[14]Mishma, Dumah, Massa, [15]Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and
Kedemah. [16]These were Ishmael's sons, and these are the
names of the tribal leaders listed according to their settlements
and camps. [17]Ishmael lived one hundred thirty-seven years and
then breathed his last breath and died. [18]His descendants lived
from Havilah to Shur, which is east of Egypt stretching toward
Assyria. They often attacked the descendants of his brothers.

## *Isaac's Family*

[19]This is the family history of Isaac. Abraham had a son
named Isaac. [20]When Isaac was forty years old, he married
Rebekah, who came from Northwest Mesopotamia. She was
Bethuel's daughter and the sister of Laban the Aramean.
[21]Isaac's wife could not have children, so Isaac prayed to the
LORD for her. The LORD heard Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah
became pregnant.

[22]While she was pregnant, the babies struggled inside her.
She asked, "Why is this happening to me?" Then she went to
get an answer from the LORD.

[23]The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your body,
and two groups of people will be taken from you.

One group will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."

[24]When the time came, Rebekah gave birth to twins. [25]The
first baby was born red. Since his skin was like a hairy robe, he
was named Esau.[n] [26]When the second baby was born, he was
holding on to Esau's heel, so that baby was named Jacob.[n] Isaac
was sixty years old when they were born.

27When the boys grew up, Esau became a skilled hunter. He
loved to be out in the fields. But Jacob was a quiet man and
stayed among the tents. 28Isaac loved Esau because he hunted
the wild animals that Isaac enjoyed eating. But Rebekah loved
Jacob.
29One day Jacob was boiling a pot of vegetable soup. Esau
came in from hunting in the fields, weak from hunger. 30So Esau
said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red soup, because I am
weak with hunger.” (That is why people call him Edom.[n])
31But Jacob said, “You must sell me your rights as the
firstborn son.”[n]
32Esau said, “I am almost dead from hunger. If I die, all of my
father’s wealth will not help me.”
33But Jacob said, “First, promise me that you will give it to
me.” So Esau made a promise to Jacob and sold his part of their
father’s wealth to Jacob. 34Then Jacob gave Esau bread and
vegetable soup, and he ate and drank, and then left. So Esau
showed how little he cared about his rights as the firstborn son.

## *Isaac Lies to Abimelech*

26 Now there was a time of hunger in the land, besides the time
of hunger that happened during Abraham’s life. So Isaac went
to the town of Gerar to see Abimelech king of the Philistines.
2The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, “Don’t go down to Egypt,
but live in the land where I tell you to live. 3Stay in this land,
and I will be with you and bless you. I will give you and your
descendants all these lands, and I will keep the oath I made to
Abraham your father. 4I will give you many descendants, as
hard to count as the stars in the sky, and I will give them all
these lands. Through your descendants all the nations on the
earth will be blessed. 5I will do this because your father
Abraham obeyed me. He did what I said and obeyed my
commands, my teachings, and my rules.”
6So Isaac stayed in Gerar. 7His wife Rebekah was very
beautiful, and the men of that place asked Isaac about her.
Isaac said, “She is my sister,” because he was afraid to tell them
she was his wife. He thought they might kill him so they could
have her.
8Isaac lived there a long time. One day as Abimelech king of
the Philistines looked out his window, he saw Isaac holding his
wife Rebekah tenderly. 9Abimelech called for Isaac and said,
“This woman is your wife. Why did you say she was your
sister?”
Isaac said to him, “I was afraid you would kill me so you
could have her.”
10Abimelech said, “What have you done to us? One of our
men might have had sexual relations with your wife. Then we

would have been guilty of a great sin."
[11]So Abimelech warned everyone, "Anyone who touches this man or his wife will be put to death."

## *Isaac Becomes Rich*

[12]Isaac planted seed in that land, and that year he gathered a great harvest. The LORD blessed him very much, [13]and he became rich. He gathered more wealth until he became a very rich man. [14]He had so many slaves and flocks and herds that the Philistines envied him. [15]So they stopped up all the wells the servants of Isaac's father Abraham had dug. (They had dug them when Abraham was alive.) The Philistines filled those wells with dirt. [16]And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Leave our country because you have become much more powerful than we are."
[17]So Isaac left that place and camped in the Valley of Gerar and lived there. [18]Long before this time Abraham had dug many wells, but after he died, the Philistines filled them with dirt. So Isaac dug those wells again and gave them the same names his father had given them. [19]Isaac's servants dug a well in the valley, from which a spring of water flowed. [20]But the herdsmen of Gerar argued with them and said, "This water is ours." So Isaac named that well Argue because they argued with him. [21]Then his servants dug another well. When the people also argued about it, Isaac named that well Fight. [22]He moved from there and dug another well. No one argued about this one, so he named it Room Enough. Isaac said, "Now the LORD has made room for us, and we will be successful in this land."
[23]From there Isaac went to Beersheba. [24]The LORD appeared to him that night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Don't be afraid, because I am with you. I will bless you and give you many descendants because of my servant Abraham." [25]So Isaac built an altar and worshiped the LORD there. He also made a camp there, and his servants dug a well.
[26]Abimelech came from Gerar to see Isaac. He brought with him Ahuzzath, who advised him, and Phicol, the commander of his army. [27]Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to see me? You were my enemy and forced me to leave your country."
[28]They answered, "Now we know that the LORD is with you. Let us swear an oath to each other. Let us make an agreement with you [29]that since we did not hurt you, you will not hurt us. We were good to you and sent you away in peace. Now the LORD has blessed you."
[30]So Isaac prepared food for them, and they all ate and drank. [31]Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them away, and they left in peace.
[32]That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well

they had dug, saying, “We found water in that well.” 33So Isaac named it Shibah[n] and that city is called Beersheba even now.

34When Esau was forty years old, he married two Hittite women—Judith daughter of Beeri and Basemath daughter of Elon. 35These women brought much sorrow to Isaac and Rebekah.

## Psalm 7:6–9

6LORD, rise up in your anger;
stand up against my enemies’ anger.
Get up and demand fairness.

7Gather the nations around you
and rule them from above.

8LORD, judge the people.
LORD, defend me because I am right,
because I have done no wrong, God Most High.

9God, you do what is right.
You know our thoughts and feelings.

Stop those wicked actions done by evil people,
and help those who do what is right.

## Proverbs 3:9–10

9Honor the LORD with your wealth
and the firstfruits from all your crops.

10Then your barns will be full,
and your wine barrels will overflow with new wine.

# Matthew 9:18–38

## *Jesus Gives Life to a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman*

18While Jesus was saying these things, a leader of the
synagogue came to him. He bowed down before Jesus and said,
“My daughter has just died. But if you come and lay your hand
on her, she will live again.” 19So Jesus and his followers stood
up and went with the leader.
20Then a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years
came behind Jesus and touched the edge of his coat. 21She was
thinking, “If I can just touch his clothes, I will be healed.”
22Jesus turned and saw the woman and said, “Be
encouraged, dear woman. You are made well because you
believed.” And the woman was healed from that moment on.
23Jesus continued along with the leader and went into his
house. There he saw the funeral musicians and many people
crying. 24Jesus said, “Go away. The girl is not dead, only
asleep.” But the people laughed at him. 25After the crowd had
been thrown out of the house, Jesus went into the girl’s room
and took hold of her hand, and she stood up. 26The news about
this spread all around the area.

## *Jesus Heals More People*

27When Jesus was leaving there, two blind men followed him.
They cried out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”
28After Jesus went inside, the blind men went with him. He
asked the men, “Do you believe that I can make you see again?”
They answered, “Yes, Lord.”
29Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “Because you
believe I can make you see again, it will happen.” 30Then the
men were able to see. But Jesus warned them strongly, saying,
“Don’t tell anyone about this.” 31But the blind men left and
spread the news about Jesus all around that area.
32When the two men were leaving, some people brought
another man to Jesus. This man could not talk because he had a
demon in him. 33After Jesus forced the demon to leave the man,
he was able to speak. The crowd was amazed and said, “We
have never seen anything like this in Israel.”
34But the Pharisees said, “The prince of demons is the one
that gives him power to force demons out.”
35Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages, teaching

in their synagogues, preaching the Good News about the kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases and sicknesses.
36When he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were hurting and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
37Jesus said to his followers, “There are many people to harvest but only a few workers to help harvest them.
38Pray to the Lord, who owns the harvest, that he will send more workers to gather his harvest.”[n]

# January 14

## Hear His Music

*The LORD corrects those he loves, just as parents correct the child they delight in.*

Proverbs 3:12

Oh, how God wants you to hear his music. He has a rhythm that will race your heart and lyrics that will stir your tears. You want to journey to the stars? He can take you there. You want to lie down in peace? His music can soothe your soul.

But first, he's got to get rid of that country-western stuff. (Forgive me, Nashville. Only an example.)

And so he begins tossing the CDs. A friend turns away. The job goes bad. Your spouse doesn't understand. The church is dull. One by one he removes the options until all you have left is God.

He would do that? Absolutely. If he must silence every voice, he will. He wants you to hear his music.

from *Traveling Light*

### Genesis 27:1—28:22

### *Jacob Tricks Isaac*

27 When Isaac was old, his eyesight was poor, so he could not
see clearly. One day he called his older son Esau to him and
said, "Son."

Esau answered, "Here I am."

2 Isaac said, "I am old and don't know when I might die. 3 So
take your bow and arrows and go hunting in the field for an
animal for me to eat. 4 When you prepare the tasty food that I
love, bring it to me, and I will eat. Then I will bless you before I
die." 5 So Esau went out in the field to hunt.

Rebekah was listening as Isaac said this to his son Esau.
6 She said to her son Jacob, "Listen, I heard your father saying

to your brother Esau, 7‘Kill an animal and prepare some tasty
food for me to eat. Then I will bless you in the presence of the
LORD before I die.’ 8So obey me, my son, and do what I tell you.
9Go out to our goats and bring me two of the best young ones. I
will prepare them just the way your father likes them. 10Then
you will take the food to your father, and he will bless you
before he dies.”

11But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, “My brother Esau is
a hairy man, and I am smooth! 12If my father touches me, he
will know I am not Esau. Then he will not bless me but will
place a curse on me because I tried to trick him.”

13So Rebekah said to him, “If your father puts a curse on
you, I will accept the blame. Just do what I said. Go get the
goats for me.”

14So Jacob went out and got two goats and brought them to
his mother, and she cooked them in the special way Isaac
enjoyed. 15She took the best clothes of her older son Esau that
were in the house and put them on the younger son Jacob.
16She also took the skins of the goats and put them on Jacob’s
hands and neck. 17Then she gave Jacob the tasty food and the
bread she had made.

18Jacob went in to his father and said, “Father.”

And his father said, “Yes, my son. Who are you?”

19Jacob said to him, “I am Esau, your first son. I have done
what you told me. Now sit up and eat some meat of the animal I
hunted for you. Then bless me.”

20But Isaac asked his son, “How did you find and kill the
animal so quickly?”

Jacob answered, “Because the LORD your God helped me to
find it.”

21Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you,
my son. Then I will know if you are really my son Esau.”

22So Jacob came near to Isaac his father. Isaac touched him
and said, “Your voice sounds like Jacob’s voice, but your hands
are hairy like the hands of Esau.” 23Isaac did not know it was
Jacob, because his hands were hairy like Esau’s hands, so Isaac
blessed him. 24Isaac asked, “Are you really my son Esau?”

Jacob answered, “Yes, I am.”

25Then Isaac said, “Bring me the food, and I will eat it and
bless you.” So Jacob gave him the food, and he ate. Jacob gave
him wine, and he drank. 26Then Isaac said to him, “My son,
come near and kiss me.” 27So Jacob went to his father and
kissed him. When Isaac smelled Esau’s clothes, he blessed him
and said,

“The smell of my son
is like the smell of the field

that the LORD has blessed.

28 May God give you plenty of rain
and good soil
so that you will have plenty of grain and new wine.

29 May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.

May you be master over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.

May everyone who curses you be cursed,
and may everyone who blesses you be blessed."

30 Isaac finished blessing Jacob. Then, just as Jacob left his father Isaac, Esau came in from hunting. 31 He also prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. He said, "Father, rise and eat the food that your son killed for you and then bless me."

32 Isaac asked, "Who are you?"

He answered, "I am your son—your firstborn son—Esau."

33 Then Isaac trembled greatly and said, "Then who was it that hunted the animals and brought me food before you came? I ate it, and I blessed him, and it is too late now to take back my blessing."

34 When Esau heard the words of his father, he let out a loud and bitter cry. He said to his father, "Bless me—me, too, my father!"

35 But Isaac said, "Your brother came and tricked me. He has taken your blessing."

36 Esau said, "Jacob[n] is the right name for him. He has tricked me these two times. He took away my share of everything you own, and now he has taken away my blessing." Then Esau asked, "Haven't you saved a blessing for me?"

37 Isaac answered, "I gave Jacob the power to be master over you, and all his brothers will be his servants. And I kept him strong with grain and new wine. There is nothing left to give you, my son."

38 But Esau continued, "Do you have only one blessing, Father? Bless me, too, Father!" Then Esau began to cry out loud.

39 Isaac said to him,

"You will live far away from the best land,
far from the rain.

40 You will live by using your sword,
and you will be a slave to your brother.

But when you struggle,
you will break free from him."

41 After that Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing from Isaac. He thought to himself, "My father will soon die, and I will be sad for him. Then I will kill Jacob."

42 Rebekah heard about Esau's plan to kill Jacob. So she sent for Jacob and said to him, "Listen, your brother Esau is comforting himself by planning to kill you. 43 So, my son, do what I say. My brother Laban is living in Haran. Go to him at once! 44 Stay with him for a while, until your brother is not so angry. 45 In time, your brother will not be angry, and he will forget what you did to him. Then I will send a servant to bring you back. I don't want to lose both of my sons on the same day."

46 Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am tired of Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of these Hittite women here in this land, I want to die."

## *Jacob Searches for a Wife*

28 Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and commanded him, "You must not marry a Canaanite woman. 2 Go to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, in Northwest Mesopotamia. Laban, your mother's brother, lives there. Marry one of his daughters. 3 May God Almighty bless you and give you many children, and may you become a group of many peoples. 4 May he give you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham so that you may own the land where you are now living as a stranger, the land God gave to Abraham." 5 So Isaac sent Jacob to Northwest Mesopotamia, to Laban the brother of Rebekah. Bethuel the Aramean was the father of Laban and Rebekah, and Rebekah was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

6 Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to Northwest Mesopotamia to find a wife there. He also learned that Isaac had commanded Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Northwest Mesopotamia. 8 So Esau saw that his father Isaac did not want his sons to marry Canaanite women. 9 Now Esau already had wives, but he went to Ishmael son of Abraham, and he married Mahalath, Ishmael's daughter.

Mahalath was the sister of Nebaioth.

## *Jacob's Dream at Bethel*

10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. 11 When he
came to a place, he spent the night there because the sun had
set. He found a stone and laid his head on it to go to sleep.
12 Jacob dreamed that there was a ladder resting on the earth
and reaching up into heaven, and he saw angels of God going
up and coming down the ladder. 13 Then Jacob saw the LORD
standing above the ladder, and he said, "I am the LORD, the God
of Abraham your grandfather, and the God of Isaac. I will give
you and your descendants the land on which you are now
sleeping. 14 Your descendants will be as many as the dust of the
earth. They will spread west and east, north and south, and all
the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your
descendants. 15 I am with you and will protect you everywhere
you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you
until I have done what I have promised you."

16 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD
is in this place, but I did not know it." 17 He was afraid and said,
"This place frightens me! It is surely the house of God and the
gate of heaven."

18 Jacob rose early in the morning and took the stone he had
slept on and set it up on its end. Then he poured olive oil on the
top of it. 19 At first, the name of that city was Luz, but Jacob
named it Bethel.[n]

20 Then Jacob made a promise. He said, "I want God to be
with me and to protect me on this journey. I want him to give
me food to eat and clothes to wear 21 so I will be able to return
in peace to my father's house. If the LORD does these things, he
will be my God. 22 This stone which I have set up on its end will
be the house of God. And I will give God one-tenth of all he
gives me."

## Psalm 7:10–17

10 God protects me like a shield;
he saves those whose hearts are right.

11 God judges by what is right,
and God is always ready to punish the wicked.

12 If they do not change their lives,
God will sharpen his sword;
he will string his bow and take aim.

13 He has prepared his deadly weapons;
he has made his flaming arrows.

14 There are people who think up evil
and plan trouble and tell lies.

15 They dig a hole to trap others,
but they will fall into it themselves.

16 They will get themselves into trouble;
the violence they cause will hurt only themselves.

17 I praise the LORD because he does what is right.
I sing praises to the LORD Most High.

## Proverbs 3:11–12

11 My child, do not reject the LORD's discipline,
and don't get angry when he corrects you.

12 The LORD corrects those he loves,
just as parents correct the child they delight in.

## Matthew 10:1–15

### *Jesus Sends Out His Apostles*

10 Jesus called his twelve followers together and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every kind of

disease and sickness. 2These are the names of the twelve apostles: Simon (also called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who turned against Jesus.

5Jesus sent out these twelve men with the following order: "Don't go to the non-Jewish people or to any town where the Samaritans live. 6But go to the people of Israel, who are like lost sheep. 7When you go, preach this: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8Heal the sick, raise the dead to life again, heal those who have skin diseases, and force demons out of people. I give you these powers freely, so help other people freely. 9Don't carry any money with you—gold or silver or copper. 10Don't carry a bag or extra clothes or sandals or a walking stick. Workers should be given what they need.

11"When you enter a city or town, find some worthy person there and stay in that home until you leave. 12When you enter that home, say, 'Peace be with you.' 13If the people there welcome you, let your peace stay there. But if they don't welcome you, take back the peace you wished for them. 14And if a home or town refuses to welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake its dust off your feet.[n] 15I tell you the truth, on the Judgment Day it will be better for the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah[n] than for the people of that town.

# January 15

## A High-Stakes Mission

*“Don’t be afraid of people, who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. The only one you should fear is the one who can destroy the soul and the body in hell.”*

Matthew 10:28

Hell’s misery is deep, but not as deep as God’s love. So how do we apply this [truth]? If you are saved, it should cause you to rejoice. You’ve been rescued. A glance into hell leads the believer to rejoice. But it also leads the believer to redouble his efforts to reach the lost. To understand hell is to pray more earnestly and to serve more diligently. Ours is a high-stakes mission.

And the lost? What is the meaning of this message for the unprepared? Heed the warnings and get ready. “We all must die, and everyone living should think about this” (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

from *When Christ Comes*

## Genesis 29:1—30:43

### *Jacob Arrives in Northwest Mesopotamia*

29 Then Jacob continued his journey and came to the land of the
people of the East. 2He looked and saw a well in the field and
three flocks of sheep lying nearby, because they drank water
from this well. A large stone covered the mouth of the well.
3When all the flocks would gather there, the shepherds would
roll the stone away from the well and water the sheep. Then
they would put the stone back in its place.

4Jacob said to the shepherds there, “My brothers, where are
you from?”

They answered, “We are from Haran.”

5Then Jacob asked, “Do you know Laban, grandson of

Nahor?”

They answered, “We know him.”

6Then Jacob asked, “How is he?”

They answered, “He is well. Look, his daughter Rachel is coming now with his sheep.”

7Jacob said, “But look, it is still the middle of the day. It is not time for the sheep to be gathered for the night, so give them water and let them go back into the pasture.”

8But they said, “We cannot do that until all the flocks are gathered. Then we will roll away the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep.”

9While Jacob was talking with the shepherds, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, because it was her job to care for the sheep. 10When Jacob saw Laban’s daughter Rachel and Laban’s sheep, he went to the well and rolled the stone from its mouth and watered Laban’s sheep. Now Laban was the brother of Rebekah, Jacob’s mother. 11Then Jacob kissed Rachel and cried. 12He told her that he was from her father’s family and that he was the son of Rebekah. So Rachel ran home and told her father.

13When Laban heard the news about his sister’s son Jacob, he ran to meet him. Laban hugged him and kissed him and brought him to his house, where Jacob told Laban everything that had happened.

14Then Laban said, “You are my own flesh and blood.”

## *Jacob Is Tricked*

Jacob stayed there a month. 15Then Laban said to Jacob, “You are my relative, but it is not right for you to work for me without pay. What would you like me to pay you?”

16Now Laban had two daughters. The older was Leah, and the younger was Rachel. 17Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was very beautiful. 18Jacob loved Rachel, so he said to Laban, “Let me marry your younger daughter Rachel. If you will, I will work seven years for you.”

19Laban said, “It would be better for her to marry you than someone else, so stay here with me.” 20So Jacob worked for Laban seven years so he could marry Rachel. But they seemed like just a few days to him because he loved Rachel very much.

21After seven years Jacob said to Laban, “Give me Rachel so that I may marry her. The time I promised to work for you is over.”

22So Laban gave a feast for all the people there. 23That evening he brought his daughter Leah to Jacob, and they had sexual relations. 24(Laban gave his slave girl Zilpah to his daughter to be her servant.) 25In the morning when Jacob saw that he had had sexual relations with Leah, he said to Laban,

“What have you done to me? I worked hard for you so that I could marry Rachel! Why did you trick me?”

26Laban said, “In our country we do not allow the younger daughter to marry before the older daughter. 27But complete the full week of the marriage ceremony with Leah, and I will give you Rachel to marry also. But you must serve me another seven years.”

28So Jacob did this, and when he had completed the week with Leah, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. 29(Laban gave his slave girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) 30So Jacob had sexual relations with Rachel also, and Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Jacob worked for Laban for another seven years.

## *Jacob’s Family Grows*

31When the LORD saw that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, he made it possible for Leah to have children, but not Rachel. 32Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben,[n] because she said, “The LORD has seen my troubles. Surely now my husband will love me.”

33Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. She named him Simeon[n] and said, “The LORD has heard that I am not loved, so he has given me this son.”

34Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. She named him Levi[n] and said, “Now, surely my husband will be close to me, because I have given him three sons.”

35Then Leah gave birth to another son. She named him Judah,[n] because she said, “Now I will praise the LORD.” Then Leah stopped having children.

30 When Rachel saw that she was not having children for Jacob, she envied her sister Leah. She said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!” 2Jacob became angry with her and said, “Can I do what only God can do? He is the one who has kept you from having children.”

3Then Rachel said, “Here is my slave girl Bilhah. Have sexual relations with her so she can give birth to a child for me. Then I can have my own family through her.”

4So Rachel gave Bilhah, her slave girl, to Jacob as a wife, and he had sexual relations with her. 5She became pregnant and gave Jacob a son. 6Rachel said, “God has judged me innocent. He has listened to my prayer and has given me a son,” so she named him Dan.[n]

7Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son. 8Rachel said, “I have struggled hard with my sister, and I have won.” So she named that son Naphtali.[n]

9Leah saw that she had stopped having children, so she gave

her slave girl Zilpah to Jacob as a wife. [10]When Zilpah had a
son, [11]Leah said, “I am lucky,” so she named him Gad.[n] [12]Zilpah
gave birth to another son, [13]and Leah said, “I am very happy!
Now women will call me happy,” so she named him Asher.[n]

[14]During the wheat harvest Reuben went into the field and
found some mandrake[n] plants and brought them to his mother
Leah. But Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your
son’s mandrakes.”

[15]Leah answered, “You have already taken away my
husband, and now you are trying to take away my son’s
mandrakes.”

But Rachel answered, “If you will give me your son’s
mandrakes, you may sleep with Jacob tonight.”

[16]When Jacob came in from the field that night, Leah went
out to meet him. She said, “You will have sexual relations with
me tonight because I have paid for you with my son’s
mandrakes.” So Jacob slept with her that night.

[17]Then God answered Leah’s prayer, and she became
pregnant again. She gave birth to a fifth son [18]and said, “God
has given me what I paid for, because I gave my slave girl to my
husband.” So Leah named her son Issachar.[n]

[19]Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a sixth son.
[20]She said, “God has given me a fine gift. Now surely Jacob will
honor me, because I have given him six sons,” so she named
him Zebulun.[n] [21]Later Leah gave birth to a daughter and named
her Dinah.

[22]Then God remembered Rachel and answered her prayer,
making it possible for her to have children. [23]When she became
pregnant and gave birth to a son, she said, “God has taken away
my shame,” [24]and she named him Joseph.[n] Rachel said, “I wish
the LORD would give me another son.”

## *Jacob Tricks Laban*

[25]After the birth of Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Now let me
go to my own home and country. [26]Give me my wives and my
children and let me go. I have earned them by working for you,
and you know that I have served you well.”

[27]Laban said to him, “If I have pleased you, please stay. I
know the LORD has blessed me because of you. [28]Tell me what I
should pay you, and I will give it to you.”

[29]Jacob answered, “You know that I have worked hard for
you, and your flocks have grown while I cared for them. [30]When
I came, you had little, but now you have much. Every time I did
something for you, the LORD blessed you. But when will I be able
to do something for my own family?”

[31]Laban asked, “Then what should I give you?”

Jacob answered, “I don’t want you to give me anything. Just
do this one thing, and I will come back and take care of your
flocks. 32Today let me go through all your flocks. I will take
every speckled or spotted sheep, every black lamb, and every
spotted or speckled goat. That will be my pay. 33In the future
you can easily see if I am honest. When you come to look at my
flocks, if I have any goat that isn’t speckled or spotted or any
lamb that isn’t black, you will know I stole it.”

34Laban answered, “Agreed! We will do what you ask.” 35But
that day Laban took away all the male goats that had streaks or
spots, all the speckled and spotted female goats (all those that
had white on them), and all the black sheep. He told his sons to
watch over them. 36Then he took these animals to a place that
was three days’ journey away from Jacob. Jacob took care of all
the flocks that were left.

37So Jacob cut green branches from poplar, almond, and
plane trees and peeled off some of the bark so that the
branches had white stripes on them. 38He put the branches in
front of the flocks at the watering places. When the animals
came to drink, they also mated there, 39so the flocks mated in
front of the branches. Then the young that were born were
streaked, speckled, or spotted. 40Jacob separated the young
animals from the others, and he made them face the streaked
and dark animals in Laban’s flock. Jacob kept his animals
separate from Laban’s. 41When the stronger animals in the flock
were mating, Jacob put the branches before their eyes so they
would mate near the branches. 42But when the weaker animals
mated, Jacob did not put the branches there. So the animals
born from the weaker animals were Laban’s, and those born
from the stronger animals were Jacob’s. 43In this way Jacob
became very rich. He had large flocks, many male and female
servants, camels, and donkeys.

## Psalm 8:1–2

### *The Lord’s Greatness*

**For the director of music. On the gittith. A psalm of
David.**

8 LORD our Lord,
your name is the most wonderful name
in all the earth!

It brings you praise in heaven above.

2 You have taught children and babies
to sing praises to you
because of your enemies.

And so you silence your enemies
and destroy those who try to get even.

## Proverbs 3:13–18

13 Happy is the person who finds wisdom,
the one who gets understanding.

14 Wisdom is worth more than silver;
it brings more profit than gold.

15 Wisdom is more precious than rubies;
nothing you could want is equal to it.

16 With her right hand wisdom offers you a long life,
and with her left hand she gives you riches and honor.

17 Wisdom will make your life pleasant
and will bring you peace.

18 As a tree produces fruit, wisdom gives life to those who use it,
and everyone who uses it will be happy.

## Matthew 10:16–42

## *Jesus Warns His Apostles*

16 “Listen, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. So
be as clever as snakes and as innocent as doves. 17 Be careful of
people, because they will arrest you and take you to court and
whip you in their synagogues. 18 Because of me you will be
taken to stand before governors and kings, and you will tell
them and the non-Jewish people about me. 19 When you are
arrested, don’t worry about what to say or how to say it. At that
time you will be given the things to say. 20 It will not really be
you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through
you.
21 “Brothers will give their own brothers to be killed, and
fathers will give their own children to be killed. Children will
fight against their own parents and have them put to death.
22 All people will hate you because you follow me, but those
people who keep their faith until the end will be saved. 23 When
you are treated badly in one city, run to another city. I tell you
the truth, you will not finish going through all the cities of Israel
before the Son of Man comes.
24 “A student is not better than his teacher, and a servant is
not better than his master. 25 A student should be satisfied to
become like his teacher; a servant should be satisfied to become
like his master. If the head of the family is called Beelzebul,
then the other members of the family will be called worse
names!

## *Fear God, Not People*

26 “So don’t be afraid of those people, because everything
that is hidden will be shown. Everything that is secret will be
made known. 27 I tell you these things in the dark, but I want
you to tell them in the light. What you hear whispered in your
ear you should shout from the housetops. 28 Don’t be afraid of
people, who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. The only
one you should fear is the one who can destroy the soul and the
body in hell. 29 Two sparrows cost only a penny, but not even one
of them can die without your Father’s knowing it. 30 God even
knows how many hairs are on your head. 31 So don’t be afraid.
You are worth much more than many sparrows.

## *Tell People About Your Faith*

32 “All those who stand before others and say they believe in
me, I will say before my Father in heaven that they belong to
me. 33 But all who stand before others and say they do not
believe in me, I will say before my Father in heaven that they do

not belong to me.
34 “Don’t think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did
not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 I have come so that

‘a son will be against his father,
a daughter will be against her mother,

a daughter-in-law will be against her mother-in-law.

36 A person’s enemies will be members of his own family.’

Micah 7:6

37 “Those who love their father or mother more than they love
me are not worthy to be my followers. Those who love their son
or daughter more than they love me are not worthy to be my
followers. 38 Whoever is not willing to carry the cross and follow
me is not worthy of me. 39 Those who try to hold on to their lives
will give up true life. Those who give up their lives for me will
hold on to true life. 40 Whoever accepts you also accepts me, and
whoever accepts me also accepts the One who sent me.
41 Whoever meets a prophet and accepts him will receive the
reward of a prophet. And whoever accepts a good person
because that person is good will receive the reward of a good
person. 42 Those who give one of these little ones a cup of cold
water because they are my followers will truly get their
reward.”

# January 16

## Sole Provider, Sole Comforter

*“Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest.”*

Matthew 11:28

As long as Jesus is one of many options, he is no option. As long as you can carry your burdens alone, you don’t need a burden bearer. As long as your situation brings you no grief, you will receive no comfort. And as long as you can take him or leave him, you might as well leave him, because he won’t be taken half-heartedly.

But when you mourn, when you get to the point of sorrow for your sins, when you admit that you have no other option but to cast all your cares on him, and when there is truly no other name that you can call, then cast all your cares on him, for he is waiting in the midst of the storm.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Genesis 31:1—32:32

### *Jacob Runs Away*

31 One day Jacob heard Laban’s sons talking. They said, “Jacob
has taken everything our father owned, and in this way he has
become rich.” 2Then Jacob noticed that Laban was not as
friendly as he had been before. 3The LORD said to Jacob, “Go
back to the land where your ancestors lived, and I will be with
you.”

4So Jacob told Rachel and Leah to meet him in the field
where he kept his flocks. 5He said to them, “I have seen that
your father is not as friendly with me as he used to be, but the
God of my father has been with me. 6You both know that I have
worked as hard as I could for your father, 7but he cheated me
and changed my pay ten times. But God has not allowed your

father to harm me. [8]When Laban said, ‘You can have all the speckled animals as your pay,’ all the animals gave birth to speckled young ones. But when he said, ‘You can have all the streaked animals as your pay,’ all the flocks gave birth to streaked babies. [9]So God has taken the animals away from your father and has given them to me.

[10]“I had a dream during the season when the flocks were mating. I saw that the only male goats who were mating were streaked, speckled, or spotted. [11]The angel of God spoke to me in that dream and said, ‘Jacob!’ I answered, ‘Yes!’ [12]The angel said, ‘Look! Only the streaked, speckled, or spotted male goats are mating. I have seen all the wrong things Laban has been doing to you. [13]I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel, where you poured olive oil on the stone you set up on end and where you made a promise to me. Now I want you to leave here and go back to the land where you were born.’”

[14]Rachel and Leah answered Jacob, “Our father has nothing to give us when he dies. [15]He has treated us like strangers. He sold us to you, and then he spent all of the money you paid for us. [16]God took all this wealth from our father, and now it belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you to do.”

[17]So Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, [18]and they began their journey back to Isaac, his father, in the land of Canaan. All the flocks of animals that Jacob owned walked ahead of them. He carried everything with him that he had gotten while he lived in Northwest Mesopotamia.

[19]While Laban was gone to cut the wool from his sheep, Rachel stole the idols that belonged to him. [20]And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was leaving. [21]Jacob and his family left quickly, crossed the Euphrates River, and traveled toward the mountains of Gilead.

[22]Three days later Laban learned that Jacob had run away, [23]so he gathered his relatives and began to chase him. After seven days Laban found him in the mountains of Gilead. [24]That night God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream and said, “Be careful! Do not say anything to Jacob, good or bad.”

## *The Search for the Stolen Idols*

[25]So Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had made his camp in the mountains, so Laban and his relatives set up their camp in the mountains of Gilead. [26]Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done? You cheated me and took my daughters as if you had captured them in a war. [27]Why did you run away secretly and trick me? Why didn’t you tell me? Then I could have sent you away with joy and singing and with the music of tambourines and harps. [28]You did not even let me kiss my

grandchildren and my daughters good-bye. You were very foolish to do this! [29]I have the power to harm you, but last night the God of your father spoke to me and warned me not to say anything to you, good or bad. [30]I know you want to go back to your home, but why did you steal my idols?”

[31]Jacob answered Laban, “I left without telling you, because I was afraid you would take your daughters away from me. [32]If you find anyone here who has taken your idols, that person will be killed! Your relatives will be my witnesses. You may look for anything that belongs to you and take anything that is yours.” (Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen Laban’s idols.)

[33]So Laban looked in Jacob’s tent, in Leah’s tent, and in the tent where the two slave women stayed, but he did not find his idols. When he left Leah’s tent, he went into Rachel’s tent. [34]Rachel had hidden the idols inside her camel’s saddle and was sitting on them. Although Laban looked through the whole tent, he did not find them.

[35]Rachel said to her father, “Father, don’t be angry with me. I am not able to stand up before you because I am having my monthly period.” So Laban looked through the camp, but he did not find his idols.

[36]Then Jacob became very angry and said, “What wrong have I done? What law have I broken to cause you to chase me? [37]You have looked through everything I own, but you have found nothing that belongs to you. If you have found anything, show it to everyone. Put it in front of your relatives and my relatives, and let them decide which one of us is right. [38]I have worked for you now for twenty years. During all that time none of the lambs and kids died during birth, and I have not eaten any of the male sheep from your flocks. [39]Any time an animal was killed by wild beasts, I did not bring it to you, but made up for the loss myself. You made me pay for any animal that was stolen during the day or night. [40]In the daytime the sun took away my strength, and at night I was cold and could not sleep. [41]I worked like a slave for you for twenty years—the first fourteen to get your two daughters and the last six to earn your flocks. During that time you changed my pay ten times. [42]But the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, was with me. Otherwise, you would have sent me away with nothing. But he saw the trouble I had and the hard work I did, and last night he corrected you.”

## *Jacob and Laban’s Agreement*

[43]Laban said to Jacob, “These girls are my daughters. Their children belong to me, and these flocks are mine. Everything you see here belongs to me, but I can do nothing to keep my daughters and their children. [44]Let us make an agreement, and

let us set up a pile of stones to remind us of it.”

45So Jacob took a large rock and set it up on its end. 46He told his relatives to gather rocks, so they took the rocks and piled them up; then they ate beside the pile. 47Laban named that place in his language A Pile to Remind Us, and Jacob gave the place the same name in Hebrew.

48Laban said to Jacob, “This pile of rocks will remind us of the agreement between us.” That is why the place was called A Pile to Remind Us. 49It was also called Mizpah,[n] because Laban said, “Let the LORD watch over us while we are separated from each other. 50Remember that God is our witness even if no one else is around us. He will know if you harm my daughters or marry other women. 51Here is the pile of rocks that I have put between us and here is the rock I set up on end. 52This pile of rocks and this rock set on end will remind us of our agreement. I will never go past this pile to hurt you, and you must never come to my side of them to hurt me. 53Let the God of Abraham, who is the God of Nahor and the God of their ancestors, punish either of us if we break this agreement.”

So Jacob made a promise in the name of the God whom his father Isaac worshiped. 54Then Jacob killed an animal and offered it as a sacrifice on the mountain, and he invited his relatives to share in the meal. After they finished eating, they spent the night on the mountain. 55Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them, and then he left to return home.

## *Jacob Meets Esau*

32 When Jacob also went his way, the angels of God met him. 2When he saw them, he said, “This is the camp of God!” So he named that place Mahanaim.[n]

3Jacob’s brother Esau was living in the area called Seir in the country of Edom. Jacob sent messengers to Esau, 4telling them, “Give this message to my master Esau: ‘This is what Jacob, your servant, says: I have lived with Laban and have remained there until now. 5I have cattle, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants. I send this message to you and ask you to accept us.’”

6The messengers returned to Jacob and said, “We went to your brother Esau. He is coming to meet you and has four hundred men with him.”

7Then Jacob was very afraid and worried. He divided the people who were with him and all the flocks, herds, and camels into two camps. 8Jacob thought, “Esau might come and destroy one camp, but the other camp can run away and be saved.”

9Then Jacob said, “God of my father Abraham! God of my father Isaac! LORD, you told me to return to my country and my family. You said that you would treat me well. 10I am not worthy

of the kindness and continual goodness you have shown me. The first time I traveled across the Jordan River, I had only my walking stick, but now I own enough to have two camps. 11Please save me from my brother Esau. I am afraid he will come and kill all of us, even the mothers with the children. 12You said to me, 'I will treat you well and will make your children as many as the sand of the seashore. There will be too many to count.'"

13Jacob stayed there for the night and prepared a gift for Esau from what he had with him: 14two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred female sheep and twenty male sheep, 15thirty female camels and their young, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys, and ten male donkeys. 16Jacob gave each separate flock of animals to one of his servants and said to them, "Go ahead of me and keep some space between each herd." 17Jacob gave them their orders. To the servant with the first group of animals he said, "My brother Esau will come to you and ask, 'Whose servant are you? Where are you going and whose animals are these?' 18Then you will answer, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. He sent them as a gift to you, my master Esau, and he also is coming behind us.'"

19Jacob ordered the second servant, the third servant, and all the other servants to do the same thing. He said, "Say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. 20Say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" Jacob thought, "If I send these gifts ahead of me, maybe Esau will forgive me. Then when I see him, perhaps he will accept me." 21So Jacob sent the gifts to Esau, but he himself stayed that night in the camp.

## *Jacob Wrestles with God*

22During the night Jacob rose and crossed the Jabbok River at the crossing, taking with him his two wives, his two slave girls, and his eleven sons. 23He sent his family and everything he had across the river. 24So Jacob was alone, and a man came and wrestled with him until the sun came up. 25When the man saw he could not defeat Jacob, he struck Jacob's hip and put it out of joint. 26Then he said to Jacob, "Let me go. The sun is coming up."

But Jacob said, "I will let you go if you will bless me."

27The man said to him, "What is your name?"

And he answered, "Jacob."

28Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob. Your name will now be Israel,[n] because you have wrestled with God and with people, and you have won."

29Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name."

But the man said, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed Jacob there.

30So Jacob named that place Peniel,[n] saying, “I have seen
God face to face, but my life was saved.” 31Then the sun rose as
he was leaving that place, and Jacob was limping because of his
leg. 32So even today the people of Israel do not eat the muscle
that is on the hip joint of animals, because Jacob was touched
there.

## Psalm 8:3–9

3I look at your heavens,
which you made with your fingers.

I see the moon and stars,
which you created.

4But why are people even important to you?
Why do you take care of human beings?

5You made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.

6You put them in charge of everything you made.
You put all things under their control:

7all the sheep, the cattle,
and the wild animals,

8the birds in the sky,
the fish in the sea,
and everything that lives under water.

9LORD our Lord,
your name is the most wonderful name in all the earth!

## Proverbs 3:19–20

19 The LORD made the earth, using his wisdom.
He set the sky in place, using his understanding.

20 With his knowledge, he made springs flow into rivers
and the clouds drop rain on the earth.

## Matthew 11:1–30

### *Jesus and John the Baptist*

11 After Jesus finished telling these things to his twelve
followers, he left there and went to the towns in Galilee to teach
and preach.
2 John the Baptist was in prison, but he heard about what the
Christ was doing. So John sent some of his followers to Jesus.
3 They asked him, “Are you the One who is to come, or should we
wait for someone else?”
4 Jesus answered them, “Go tell John what you hear and see:
5 The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin
diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to
life, and the Good News is preached to the poor. 6 Those who do
not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed.”
7 As John’s followers were leaving, Jesus began talking to the
people about John. Jesus said, “What did you go out into the
desert to see? A reed[n] blown by the wind? 8 What did you go out
to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine
clothes live in kings’ palaces. 9 So why did you go out? To see a
prophet? Yes, and I tell you, John is more than a prophet. 10 This
was written about him:

‘I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare the way for you.’

Malachi 3:1

11 I tell you the truth, John the Baptist is greater than any other
person ever born, but even the least important person in the
kingdom of heaven is greater than John. 12 Since the time John
the Baptist came until now, the kingdom of heaven has been

going forward in strength, and people have been trying to take it by force. 13All the prophets and the law of Moses told about what would happen until the time John came. 14And if you will believe what they said, you will believe that John is Elijah, whom they said would come. 15Let those with ears use them and listen!

16"What can I say about the people of this time? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace, who call out to each other,

17'We played music for you, but you did not dance;
we sang a sad song, but you did not cry.'

18John came and did not eat or drink like other people. So people say, 'He has a demon.' 19The Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and people say, 'Look at him! He eats too much and drinks too much wine, and he is a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved to be right by what she does."

## *Jesus Warns Unbelievers*

20Then Jesus criticized the cities where he did most of his miracles, because the people did not change their lives and stop sinning. 21He said, "How terrible for you, Korazin! How terrible for you, Bethsaida! If the same miracles I did in you had happened in Tyre and Sidon,[n] those people would have changed their lives a long time ago. They would have worn rough cloth and put ashes on themselves to show they had changed. 22But I tell you, on the Judgment Day it will be better for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 23And you, Capernaum,[n] will you be lifted up to heaven? No, you will be thrown down to the depths. If the miracles I did in you had happened in Sodom,[n] its people would have stopped sinning, and it would still be a city today. 24But I tell you, on the Judgment Day it will be better for Sodom than for you."

## *Jesus Offers Rest to People*

25At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the people who are wise and smart. But you have shown them to those who are like little children. 26Yes, Father, this is what you really wanted.

27"My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son, except the Father. And no one knows the Father, except the Son and those whom the Son chooses to tell.

[28]“Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy
loads, and I will give you rest. [29]Accept my teachings and learn
from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will
find rest for your lives. [30]The burden that I ask you to accept is
easy; the load I give you to carry is light.”

# January 17

## It Defies Logic

*"Here is my servant whom I have chosen. I love him, and I am pleased with him."*

Matthew 12:18

Those who saw Jesus—really saw him—knew there was something different. At his touch blind beggars saw. At his command crippled legs walked. At his embrace empty lives filled with vision.

He fed thousands with one basket. He stilled a storm with one command. He raised the dead with one proclamation. He changed lives with one request. He rerouted the history of the world with one life, lived in one country, was born in one manger, and died on one hill …

God did what we wouldn't dare dream. He did what we couldn't imagine. He became a man so we could trust him. He became a sacrifice so we could know him. And he defeated death so we could follow him.

It defies logic. It is a divine insanity. A holy incredibility.

Only a Creator beyond the fence of logic could offer such a gift of love.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Genesis 33:1—34:31

### *Jacob Shows His Bravery*

33 Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and with him were four hundred men. So Jacob divided his children among Leah, Rachel, and the two slave girls. 2Jacob put the slave girls with their children first, then Leah and her children behind them, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3Jacob himself went out in front of them and bowed down flat on the ground seven times as he was walking toward his brother.

4But Esau ran to meet Jacob and put his arms around him
and hugged him. Then Esau kissed him, and they both cried.
5When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he
asked, “Who are these people with you?”

Jacob answered, “These are the children God has given me.
God has been good to me, your servant.”

6Then the two slave girls and their children came up to Esau
and bowed down flat on the earth before him. 7Leah and her
children also came up to Esau and also bowed down flat on the
earth. Last of all, Joseph and Rachel came up to Esau, and they,
too, bowed down flat before him.

8Esau said, “I saw many herds as I was coming here. Why did
you bring them?”

Jacob answered, “They were to please you, my master.”

9But Esau said, “I already have enough, my brother. Keep
what you have.”

10Jacob said, “No! Please! If I have pleased you, then accept
the gift I give you. I am very happy to see your face again. It is
like seeing the face of God, because you have accepted me. 11So
I beg you to accept the gift I give you. God has been very good
to me, and I have more than I need.” And because Jacob
begged, Esau accepted the gift.

12Then Esau said, “Let us be going. I will travel with you.”

13But Jacob said to him, “My master, you know that the
children are weak. And I must be careful with my flocks and
their young ones. If I force them to go too far in one day, all the
animals will die. 14So, my master, you go on ahead of me, your
servant. I will follow you slowly and let the animals and the
children set the speed at which we travel. I will meet you, my
master, in Edom.”

15So Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my people with
you.”

“No, thank you,” said Jacob. “I only want to please you, my
master.” 16So that day Esau started back to Edom. 17But Jacob
went to Succoth, where he built a house for himself and shelters
for his animals. That is why the place was named Succoth.[n]

18Jacob left Northwest Mesopotamia and arrived safely at
the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan. There he camped
east of the city. 19He bought a part of the field where he had
camped from the sons of Hamor father of Shechem for one
hundred pieces of silver. 20He built an altar there and named it
after God, the God of Israel.

## *Dinah Is Attacked*

34 At this time Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob, went out
to visit the women of the land. 2When Shechem son of Hamor
the Hivite, the ruler of the land, saw her, he took her and forced

her to have sexual relations with him. [3]Shechem fell in love with Dinah, and he spoke kindly to her. [4]He told his father, Hamor, "Please get this girl for me so I can marry her."

[5]Jacob learned how Shechem had disgraced his daughter, but since his sons were out in the field with the cattle, Jacob said nothing until they came home. [6]While he waited, Hamor father of Shechem went to talk with Jacob.

[7]When Jacob's sons heard what had happened, they came in from the field. They were very angry that Shechem had done such a wicked thing to Israel. It was wrong for him to have sexual relations with Jacob's daughter; a thing like this should not be done.

[8]But Hamor talked to Dinah's brothers and said, "My son Shechem is deeply in love with Dinah. Please let him marry her. [9]Marry our people. Give your women to our men as wives and take our women for your men as wives. [10]You can live in the same land with us. You will be free to own land and to trade here."

[11]Shechem also talked to Jacob and to Dinah's brothers and said, "Please accept my offer. I will give anything you ask. [12]Ask as much as you want for the payment for the bride, and I will give it to you. Just let me marry Dinah."

[13]Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father with lies, because Shechem had disgraced their sister Dinah. [14]The brothers said to them, "We cannot allow you to marry our sister, because you are not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. [15]But we will allow you to marry her if you do this one thing: Every man in your town must be circumcised like us. [16]Then your men can marry our women, and our men can marry your women, and we will live in your land and become one people. [17]If you refuse to be circumcised, we will take Dinah and leave."

[18]What they asked seemed fair to Hamor and Shechem. [19]So Shechem quickly went to be circumcised because he loved Jacob's daughter.

Now Shechem was the most respected man in his family. [20]So Hamor and Shechem went to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, [21]"These people want to be friends with us. So let them live in our land and trade here. There is enough land for all of us. Let us marry their women, and we can let them marry our women. [22]But we must agree to one thing: All our men must be circumcised as they are. Then they will agree to live in our land, and we will be one people. [23]If we do this, their cattle and their animals will belong to us. Let us do what they say, and they will stay in our land." [24]All the people who had come to the city gate heard this. They agreed with Hamor and Shechem, and every man was circumcised.

[25]Three days later the men who were circumcised were still in pain. Two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi (Dinah's

brothers), took their swords and made a surprise attack on the city, killing all the men there. [26]They killed Hamor and his son Shechem and then took Dinah out of Shechem's house and left. [27]Jacob's sons came upon the dead bodies and stole everything that was in the city, to pay them back for what Shechem had done to their sister. [28]So the brothers took the flocks, herds, and donkeys, and everything in the city and in the fields. [29]They took every valuable thing the people owned, even their wives and children and everything in the houses.

[30]Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have caused me a lot of trouble. Now the Canaanites and the Perizzites who live in the land will hate me. Since there are only a few of us, if they join together to attack us, my people and I will be destroyed."

[31]But the brothers said, "We will not allow our sister to be treated like a prostitute."

## Psalm 9:1–6

### *Thanksgiving for Victory*

**For the director of music. To the tune of "The Death of the Son." A psalm of David.**

[9] I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart.
I will tell all the miracles you have done.

[2]I will be happy because of you;
God Most High, I will sing praises to your name.

[3]My enemies turn back;
they are overwhelmed and die because of you.

[4]You have heard my complaint;
you sat on your throne and judged by what was right.

[5]You spoke strongly against the foreign nations and destroyed the wicked;
you wiped out their names forever and ever.

6 The enemy is gone forever.
You destroyed their cities;
no one even remembers them.

## Proverbs 3:21–26

21 My child, hold on to wisdom and good sense.
Don’t let them out of your sight.

22 They will give you life
and beauty like a necklace around your neck.

23 Then you will go your way in safety,
and you will not get hurt.

24 When you lie down, you won’t be afraid;
when you lie down, you will sleep in peace.

25 You won’t be afraid of sudden trouble;
you won’t fear the ruin that comes to the wicked,

26 because the LORD will keep you safe.
He will keep you from being trapped.

## Matthew 12:1–21

### *Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath*

12 At that time Jesus was walking through some fields of grain on a Sabbath day. His followers were hungry, so they began to pick the grain and eat it. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to Jesus, “Look! Your followers are doing what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath day.”

3 Jesus answered, “Have you not read what David did when

he and the people with him were hungry? [4]He went into God's house, and he and those with him ate the holy bread, which was lawful only for priests to eat. [5]And have you not read in the law of Moses that on every Sabbath day the priests in the Temple break this law about the Sabbath day? But the priests are not wrong for doing that. [6]I tell you that there is something here that is greater than the Temple. [7]The Scripture says, 'I want kindness more than I want animal sacrifices.'[n] You don't really know what those words mean. If you understood them, you would not judge those who have done nothing wrong.

[8]"So the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day."

## *Jesus Heals a Man's Hand*

[9]Jesus left there and went into their synagogue, [10]where there was a man with a crippled hand. They were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they asked him, "Is it right to heal on the Sabbath day?"[n]

[11]Jesus answered, "If any of you has a sheep, and it falls into a ditch on the Sabbath day, you will help it out of the ditch. [12]Surely a human being is more important than a sheep. So it is lawful to do good things on the Sabbath day."

[13]Then Jesus said to the man with the crippled hand, "Hold out your hand." The man held out his hand, and it became well again, like the other hand. [14]But the Pharisees left and made plans to kill Jesus.

## *Jesus Is God's Chosen Servant*

[15]Jesus knew what the Pharisees were doing, so he left that place. Many people followed him, and he healed all who were sick. [16]But Jesus warned the people not to tell who he was. [17]He did these things to bring about what Isaiah the prophet had said:

[18]"Here is my servant whom I have chosen.
I love him, and I am pleased with him.

I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will tell of my justice to all people.

[19]He will not argue or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.

[20]He will not break a crushed blade of grass
or put out even a weak flame

until he makes justice win the victory.

[21] In him will the non-Jewish people find hope.”

Isaiah 42:1–4

# January 18

## People Who Make a Difference

*"Good people have good things in their hearts."*

Matthew 12:35

Name the ten wealthiest men in the world. Name eight people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize. How did you do? I didn't do well either. With the exception of you trivia hounds, none of us remember the headliners of yesterday too well. Surprising how quickly we forget, isn't it? And what I've mentioned above are no second-rate achievements. These are the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one.

Name ten people who have taught you something worthwhile.

Name five friends who have helped you in a difficult time.

Easier? It was for me, too. The lesson? The people who make a difference are not the ones with the credentials, but the ones with the concern.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Genesis 35:1—36:43

### *Jacob in Bethel*

35 God said to Jacob, "Go to the city of Bethel and live there.
Make an altar to the God who appeared to you there when you
were running away from your brother Esau."

2So Jacob said to his family and to all who were with him,
"Put away the foreign gods you have, and make yourselves
clean, and change your clothes. 3We will leave here and go to
Bethel. There I will build an altar to God, who has helped me
during my time of trouble. He has been with me everywhere I
have gone." 4So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had,

and the earrings they were wearing, and he hid them under the great tree near the town of Shechem. 5Then Jacob and his sons left there. But God caused the people in the nearby cities to be afraid, so they did not follow them. 6And Jacob and all the people who were with him went to Luz, which is now called Bethel, in the land of Canaan. 7There Jacob built an altar and named the place Bethel, after God, because God had appeared to him there when he was running from his brother.

8Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak tree at Bethel, so they named that place Oak of Crying.

## *Jacob's New Name*

9When Jacob came back from Northwest Mesopotamia, God appeared to him again and blessed him. 10God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. Your new name will be Israel." So he called him Israel. 11God said to him, "I am God Almighty. Have many children and grow in number as a nation. You will be the ancestor of many nations and kings. 12The same land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you and your descendants." 13Then God left him. 14Jacob set up a stone on edge in that place where God had talked to him, and he poured a drink offering and olive oil on it to make it special for God. 15And Jacob named the place Bethel.

## *Rachel Dies Giving Birth*

16Jacob and his group left Bethel. Before they came to Ephrath, Rachel began giving birth to her baby, 17but she was having much trouble. When Rachel's nurse saw this, she said, "Don't be afraid, Rachel. You are giving birth to another son." 18Rachel gave birth to the son, but she herself died. As she lay dying, she named the boy Son of My Suffering, but Jacob called him Benjamin.[n]

19Rachel was buried on the road to Ephrath, a district of Bethlehem, 20and Jacob set up a rock on her grave to honor her. That rock is still there. 21Then Israel[n] continued his journey and camped just south of Migdal Eder.

22While Israel was there, Reuben had sexual relations with Israel's slave woman Bilhah, and Israel heard about it.

## *The Family of Israel*

Jacob had twelve sons. 23He had six sons by his wife Leah: Reuben, his first son, then Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

24He had two sons by his wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

25 He had two sons by Rachel's slave girl Bilhah: Dan and
Naphtali.
26 And he had two sons by Leah's slave girl Zilpah: Gad and
Asher.
These are Jacob's sons who were born in Northwest
Mesopotamia.
27 Jacob went to his father Isaac at Mamre near Hebron,
where Abraham and Isaac had lived. 28 Isaac lived one hundred
eighty years. 29 So Isaac breathed his last breath and died when
he was very old, and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

## *Esau's Family*

36 This is the family history of Esau (also called Edom). 2 Esau
married women from the land of Canaan: Adah daughter of Elon
the Hittite; and Oholibamah daughter of Anah, the son of
Zibeon the Hivite; 3 and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the
sister of Nebaioth.
4 Adah gave birth to Eliphaz for Esau. Basemath gave him
Reuel, 5 and Oholibamah gave him Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.
These were Esau's sons who were born in the land of Canaan.
6 Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the
people who lived with him, his herds and other animals, and all
the belongings he had gotten in Canaan, and he went to a land
away from his brother Jacob. 7 Esau and Jacob's belongings
were becoming too many for them to live in the same land. The
land where they had lived could not support both of them,
because they had too many herds. 8 So Esau lived in the
mountains of Edom. (Esau is also named Edom.)
9 This is the family history of Esau. He is the ancestor of the
Edomites, who live in the mountains of Edom.
10 Esau's sons were Eliphaz, son of Adah and Esau, and
Reuel, son of Basemath and Esau.
11 Eliphaz had five sons: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and
Kenaz. 12 Eliphaz also had a slave woman named Timna, and
Timna and Eliphaz gave birth to Amalek. These were Esau's
grandsons by his wife Adah.
13 Reuel had four sons: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and
Mizzah. These were Esau's grandsons by his wife Basemath.
14 Esau's third wife was Oholibamah the daughter of Anah.
(Anah was the son of Zibeon.) Esau and Oholibamah gave birth
to Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.
15 These were the leaders that came from Esau: Esau's first
son was Eliphaz. From him came these leaders: Teman, Omar,
Zepho, Kenaz, 16 Korah, Gatam, and Amalek. These were the
leaders that came from Eliphaz in the land of Edom. They were
the grandsons of Adah.
17 Esau's son Reuel was the father of these leaders: Nahath,

Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the leaders that
came from Reuel in the land of Edom. They were the grandsons
of Esau's wife Basemath.
18Esau's wife Oholibamah gave birth to these leaders: Jeush,
Jalam, and Korah. These are the leaders that came from Esau's
wife Oholibamah the daughter of Anah. 19These were the sons
of Esau (also called Edom), and these were their leaders.
20These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were living in
the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, 21Dishon, Ezer, and
Dishan. These sons of Seir were the leaders of the Horites in
Edom.
22The sons of Lotan were Hori and Homam. (Timna was
Lotan's sister.)
23The sons of Shobal were Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho,
and Onam.
24The sons of Zibeon were Aiah and Anah. Anah is the man
who found the hot springs in the desert while he was caring for
his father's donkeys.
25The children of Anah were Dishon and Oholibamah
daughter of Anah.
26The sons of Dishon were Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and
Keran.
27The sons of Ezer were Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.
28The sons of Dishan were Uz and Aran.
29These were the names of the Horite leaders: Lotan, Shobal,
Zibeon, Anah, 30Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan.
These men were the leaders of the Horite families who lived
in the land of Edom.
31These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before
the Israelites ever had a king:
32Bela son of Beor was the king of Edom. He came from the
city of Dinhabah.
33When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah became king. Jobab
was from Bozrah.
34When Jobab died, Husham became king. He was from the
land of the Temanites.
35When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who had
defeated Midian in the country of Moab, became king. Hadad
was from the city of Avith.
36When Hadad died, Samlah became king. He was from
Masrekah.
37When Samlah died, Shaul became king. He was from
Rehoboth on the Euphrates River.
38When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Acbor became king.
39When Baal-Hanan son of Acbor died, Hadad became king.
He was from the city of Pau. His wife's name was Mehetabel
daughter of Matred, who was the daughter of Me-Zahab.
40These Edomite leaders, listed by their families and regions,

came from Esau. Their names were Timna, Alvah, Jetheth,
41 Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, 42 Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, 43 Magdiel,
and Iram. They were the leaders of Edom. (Esau was the father
of the Edomites.) The area where each of these families lived
was named after that family.

## Psalm 9:7–10

7 But the LORD rules forever.
He sits on his throne to judge,

8 and he will judge the world in fairness;
he will decide what is fair for the nations.

9 The LORD defends those who suffer;
he defends them in times of trouble.

10 Those who know the LORD trust him,
because he will not leave those who come to him.

## Proverbs 3:27–30

27 Whenever you are able,
do good to people who need help.

28 If you have what your neighbor asks for,
don't say, "Come back later.
I will give it to you tomorrow."

29 Don't make plans to hurt your neighbor
who lives nearby and trusts you.

30 Don't accuse a person for no good reason;

don’t accuse someone who has not harmed you.

## Matthew 12:22–50

### *Jesus’ Power Is from God*

22Then some people brought to Jesus a man who was blind
and could not talk, because he had a demon. Jesus healed the
man so that he could talk and see. 23All the people were amazed
and said, “Perhaps this man is the Son of David!”
24When the Pharisees heard this, they said, “Jesus uses the
power of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons, to force demons out of
people.”
25Jesus knew what the Pharisees were thinking, so he said to
them, “Every kingdom that is divided against itself will be
destroyed. And any city or family that is divided against itself
will not continue. 26And if Satan forces out himself, then Satan
is divided against himself, and his kingdom will not continue.
27You say that I use the power of Beelzebul to force out demons.
If that is true, then what power do your people use to force out
demons? So they will be your judges. 28But if I use the power of
God’s Spirit to force out demons, then the kingdom of God has
come to you.
29“If anyone wants to enter a strong person’s house and steal
his things, he must first tie up the strong person. Then he can
steal the things from the house.
30“Whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever does not
work with me is working against me. 31So I tell you, people can
be forgiven for every sin and everything they say against God.
But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.
32Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven,
but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be
forgiven, now or in the future.

### *People Know You by Your Words*

33“If you want good fruit, you must make the tree good. If
your tree is not good, it will have bad fruit. A tree is known by
the kind of fruit it produces. 34You snakes! You are evil people,
so how can you say anything good? The mouth speaks the
things that are in the heart. 35Good people have good things in
their hearts, and so they say good things. But evil people have
evil in their hearts, so they say evil things. 36And I tell you that
on the Judgment Day people will be responsible for every

careless thing they have said. 37The words you have said will be
used to judge you. Some of your words will prove you right, but
some of your words will prove you guilty."

## *The People Ask for a Miracle*

38Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law
answered Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want to see you work a
miracle as a sign."
39Jesus answered, "Evil and sinful people are the ones who
want to see a miracle for a sign. But no sign will be given to
them, except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40Jonah was in the
stomach of the big fish for three days and three nights. In the
same way, the Son of Man will be in the grave three days and
three nights. 41On the Judgment Day the people from Nineveh[n]
will stand up with you people who live now, and they will show
that you are guilty. When Jonah preached to them, they were
sorry and changed their lives. And I tell you that someone
greater than Jonah is here. 42On the Judgment Day, the Queen
of the South[n] will stand up with you people who live today. She
will show that you are guilty, because she came from far away
to listen to Solomon's wise teaching. And I tell you that
someone greater than Solomon is here.

## *People Today Are Full of Evil*

43"When an evil spirit comes out of a person, it travels
through dry places, looking for a place to rest, but it doesn't
find it. 44So the spirit says, 'I will go back to the house I left.'
When the spirit comes back, it finds the house still empty, swept
clean, and made neat. 45Then the evil spirit goes out and brings
seven other spirits even more evil than it is, and they go in and
live there. So the person has even more trouble than before. It
is the same way with the evil people who live today."

## *Jesus' True Family*

46While Jesus was talking to the people, his mother and
brothers stood outside, trying to find a way to talk to him.
47Someone told Jesus, "Your mother and brothers are standing
outside, and they want to talk to you."[n]
48He answered, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?"
49Then he pointed to his followers and said, "Here are my
mother and my brothers. 50My true brother and sister and
mother are those who do what my Father in heaven wants."

# January 19

## Christmas Every Day

*Sing praises to the* LORD *... Tell the nations what he has done.*

Psalm 9:11

You have Christmas every day. Your gift bears, not toys and books, but God himself! His work: on the cross and in the resurrection. As a result, your sin brings no guilt, and the grave brings no fear.

His energy: it's not up to you. You can do all things through Christ, who gives you strength.

His lordship: he is in charge of you and looks out for you.

His love: what can separate you from it?

Who could imagine such gifts? Who could imagine not opening them?

from *Come Thirsty*

### Genesis 37:1—38:30

### *Joseph the Dreamer*

37 Jacob lived in the land of Canaan, where his father had lived.
2 This is the family history of Jacob:

Joseph was a young man, seventeen years old. He and his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, cared for the flocks. Joseph gave his father bad reports about his brothers. 3 Since Joseph was born when his father Israel[n] was old, Israel loved him more than his other sons. He made Joseph a special robe with long sleeves. 4 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him more than he loved them, they hated their brother and could not speak to him politely.

5 One time Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him even more. 6 Joseph said, "Listen to the dream I had. 7 We were in the field tying bundles of wheat together. My bundle stood up, and your bundles of

wheat gathered around it and bowed down to it."

[8]His brothers said, "Do you really think you will be king over us? Do you truly think you will rule over us?" His brothers hated him even more because of his dreams and what he had said.

[9]Then Joseph had another dream, and he told his brothers about it also. He said, "Listen, I had another dream. I saw the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to me."

[10]Joseph also told his father about this dream, but his father scolded him, saying, "What kind of dream is this? Do you really believe that your mother, your brothers, and I will bow down to you?" [11]Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, but his father thought about what all these things could mean.

[12]One day Joseph's brothers went to Shechem to graze their father's flocks. [13]Israel said to Joseph, "Go to Shechem where your brothers are grazing the flocks."

Joseph answered, "I will go."

[14]His father said, "Go and see if your brothers and the flocks are all right. Then come back and tell me." So Joseph's father sent him from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph came to Shechem, [15]a man found him wandering in the field and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

[16]Joseph answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing the flocks?"

[17]The man said, "They have already gone. I heard them say they were going to Dothan." So Joseph went to look for his brothers and found them in Dothan.

## *Joseph Sold into Slavery*

[18]Joseph's brothers saw him coming from far away. Before he reached them, they made a plan to kill him. [19]They said to each other, "Here comes that dreamer. [20]Let's kill him and throw his body into one of the wells. We can tell our father that a wild animal killed him. Then we will see what will become of his dreams."

[21]But Reuben heard their plan and saved Joseph, saying, "Let's not kill him. [22]Don't spill any blood. Throw him into this well here in the desert, but don't hurt him!" Reuben planned to save Joseph later and send him back to his father. [23]So when Joseph came to his brothers, they pulled off his robe with long sleeves [24]and threw him into the well. It was empty, and there was no water in it.

[25]While Joseph was in the well, the brothers sat down to eat. When they looked up, they saw a group of Ishmaelites traveling from Gilead to Egypt. Their camels were carrying spices, balm, and myrrh.

[26]Then Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we

kill our brother and hide his death? 27Let's sell him to these Ishmaelites. Then we will not be guilty of killing our own brother. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." And the other brothers agreed. 28So when the Midianite traders came by, the brothers took Joseph out of the well and sold him to the Ishmaelites for eight ounces of silver. And the Ishmaelites took him to Egypt.

29When Reuben came back to the well and Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes to show he was upset. 30Then he went back to his brothers and said, "The boy is not there! What shall I do?" 31The brothers killed a goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. 32Then they brought the long-sleeved robe to their father and said, "We found this robe. Look it over carefully and see if it is your son's robe."

33Jacob looked it over and said, "It is my son's robe! Some savage animal has eaten him. My son Joseph has been torn to pieces!" 34Then Jacob tore his clothes and put on rough cloth to show that he was upset, and he continued to be sad about his son for a long time. 35All of his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he could not be comforted. He said, "I will be sad about my son until the day I die." So Jacob cried for his son Joseph.

36Meanwhile the Midianites who had bought Joseph had taken him to Egypt. There they sold him to Potiphar, an officer to the king of Egypt and captain of the palace guard.

## *Judah and Tamar*

38 About that time, Judah left his brothers and went to stay with a man named Hirah in the town of Adullam. 2There Judah met a Canaanite girl, the daughter of a man named Shua, and married her. Judah had sexual relations with her, 3and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, whom Judah named Er. 4Later she gave birth to another son and named him Onan. 5Still later she had another son and named him Shelah. She was at Kezib when this third son was born.

6Judah chose a girl named Tamar to be the wife of his first son Er. 7But Er, Judah's oldest son, did what the LORD said was evil, so the LORD killed him. 8Then Judah said to Er's brother Onan, "Go and have sexual relations with your dead brother's wife.[n] It is your duty to provide children for your brother in this way."

9But Onan knew that the children would not belong to him, so when he was supposed to have sexual relations with Tamar he did not complete the sex act. This made it impossible for Tamar to become pregnant and for Er to have descendants. 10The LORD was displeased by this wicked thing Onan had done, so the LORD killed Onan also. 11Then Judah said to his daughter-

in-law Tamar, “Go back to live in your father’s house, and don’t marry until my young son Shelah grows up.” Judah was afraid that Shelah also would die like his brothers. So Tamar returned to her father’s home.

12After a long time Judah’s wife, the daughter of Shua, died. After Judah had gotten over his sorrow, he went to Timnah to his men who were cutting the wool from his sheep. His friend Hirah from Adullam went with him. 13Tamar learned that Judah, her father-in-law, was going to Timnah to cut the wool from his sheep. 14So she took off the clothes that showed she was a widow and covered her face with a veil to hide who she was. Then she sat down by the gate of Enaim on the road to Timnah. She did this because Judah’s younger son Shelah had grown up, but Judah had not made plans for her to marry him.

15When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, because she had covered her face with a veil. 16So Judah went to her and said, “Let me have sexual relations with you.” He did not know that she was Tamar, his daughter-in-law.

She asked, “What will you give me if I let you have sexual relations with me?”

17Judah answered, “I will send you a young goat from my flock.”

She answered, “First give me something to keep as a deposit until you send the goat.”

18Judah asked, “What do you want me to give you as a deposit?”

Tamar answered, “Give me your seal and its cord,[n] and give me your walking stick.” So Judah gave these things to her. Then Judah and Tamar had sexual relations, and Tamar became pregnant. 19When Tamar went home, she took off the veil that covered her face and put on the clothes that showed she was a widow.

20Judah sent his friend Hirah with the young goat to find the woman and get back his seal and the walking stick he had given her, but Hirah could not find her. 21He asked some of the people at the town of Enaim, “Where is the prostitute who was here by the road?”

They answered, “There has never been a prostitute here.”

22So he went back to Judah and said, “I could not find the woman, and the people who lived there said, ‘There has never been a prostitute here.’”

23Judah said, “Let her keep the things. I don’t want people to laugh at us. I sent her the goat as I promised, but you could not find her.”

24About three months later someone told Judah, “Tamar, your daughter-in-law, is guilty of acting like a prostitute, and now she is pregnant.”

Then Judah said, “Bring her out and let her be burned to death.”

25When the people went to bring Tamar out, she sent a
message to her father-in-law that said, “The man who owns
these things has made me pregnant. Look at this seal and its
cord and this walking stick, and tell me whose they are.”
26Judah recognized them and said, “She is more in the right
than I. She did this because I did not give her to my son Shelah
as I promised.” And Judah did not have sexual relations with her
again.
27When the time came for Tamar to give birth, there were
twins in her body. 28While she was giving birth, one baby put his
hand out. The nurse tied a red string on his hand and said,
“This baby came out first.” 29But he pulled his hand back in, so
the other baby was born first. The nurse said, “So you are able
to break out first,” and they named him Perez.[n] 30After this, the
baby with the red string on his hand was born, and they named
him Zerah.

## Psalm 9:11–20

11Sing praises to the LORD who is king on Mount Zion.
Tell the nations what he has done.

12He remembers who the murderers are;
he will not forget the cries of those who suffer.

13LORD, have mercy on me.
See how my enemies hurt me.
Do not let me go through the gates of death.

14Then, at the gates of Jerusalem, I will praise you;
I will rejoice because you saved me.

15The nations have fallen into the pit they dug.
Their feet are caught in the nets they laid.

16The LORD has made himself known by his fair decisions;
the wicked get trapped by what they do. *Higgaion. Selah*

17 Wicked people will go to the grave,
and so will all those who forget God.

18 But those who have troubles will not be forgotten.
The hopes of the poor will never die.

19 LORD, rise up and judge the nations.
Don't let people think they are strong.

20 Teach them to fear you, LORD.
The nations must learn that they are only human. *Selah*

## Proverbs 3:31–35

31 Don't be jealous of those who use violence,
and don't choose to be like them.

32 The LORD hates those who do wrong,
but he is a friend to those who are honest.

33 The LORD will curse the evil person's house,
but he will bless the home of those who do right.

34 The LORD laughs at those who laugh at him,
but he gives grace to those who are not proud.

35 Wise people will receive honor,
but fools will be disgraced.

## Matthew 13:1–30

### *A Story About Planting Seed*

[13]That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the
lake. [2]Large crowds gathered around him, so he got into a boat
and sat down, while the people stood on the shore. [3]Then Jesus
used stories to teach them many things. He said: "A farmer
went out to plant his seed. [4]While he was planting, some seed
fell by the road, and the birds came and ate it all up. [5]Some
seed fell on rocky ground, where there wasn't much dirt. That
seed grew very fast, because the ground was not deep. [6]But
when the sun rose, the plants dried up, because they did not
have deep roots. [7]Some other seed fell among thorny weeds,
which grew and choked the good plants. [8]Some other seed fell
on good ground where it grew and produced a crop. Some
plants made a hundred times more, some made sixty times
more, and some made thirty times more. [9]Let those with ears
use them and listen."

## *Why Jesus Used Stories to Teach*

[10]The followers came to Jesus and asked, "Why do you use
stories to teach the people?"
[11]Jesus answered, "You have been chosen to know the
secrets about the kingdom of heaven, but others cannot know
these secrets. [12]Those who have understanding will be given
more, and they will have all they need. But those who do not
have understanding, even what they have will be taken away
from them. [13]This is why I use stories to teach the people: They
see, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really
hear or understand. [14]So they show that the things Isaiah said
about them are true:

'You will listen and listen, but you will not understand.
You will look and look, but you will not learn.

[15]For the minds of these people have become stubborn.
They do not hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might really understand
what they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears.

They might really understand in their minds

and come back to me and be healed.’

Isaiah 6:9–10

16But you are blessed, because you see with your eyes and hear
with your ears. 17I tell you the truth, many prophets and good
people wanted to see the things that you now see, but they did
not see them. And they wanted to hear the things that you now
hear, but they did not hear them.

## *Jesus Explains the Seed Story*

18“So listen to the meaning of that story about the farmer.
19What is the seed that fell by the road? That seed is like the
person who hears the message about the kingdom but does not
understand it. The Evil One comes and takes away what was
planted in that person’s heart. 20And what is the seed that fell
on rocky ground? That seed is like the person who hears the
teaching and quickly accepts it with joy. 21But he does not let
the teaching go deep into his life, so he keeps it only a short
time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the
teaching he accepted, he quickly gives up. 22And what is the
seed that fell among the thorny weeds? That seed is like the
person who hears the teaching but lets worries about this life
and the temptation of wealth stop that teaching from growing.
So the teaching does not produce fruit[n] in that person’s life.
23But what is the seed that fell on the good ground? That seed
is like the person who hears the teaching and understands it.
That person grows and produces fruit, sometimes a hundred
times more, sometimes sixty times more, and sometimes thirty
times more.”

## *A Story About Wheat and Weeds*

24Then Jesus told them another story: “The kingdom of
heaven is like a man who planted good seed in his field. 25That
night, when everyone was asleep, his enemy came and planted
weeds among the wheat and then left. 26Later, the wheat
sprouted and the heads of grain grew, but the weeds also grew.
27Then the man’s servants came to him and said, ‘You planted
good seed in your field. Where did the weeds come from?’ 28The
man answered, ‘An enemy planted weeds.’ The servants asked,
‘Do you want us to pull up the weeds?’ 29The man answered,
‘No, because when you pull up the weeds, you might also pull
up the wheat. 30Let the weeds and the wheat grow together
until the harvest time. At harvest time I will tell the workers,
“First gather the weeds and tie them together to be burned.
Then gather the wheat and bring it to my barn.”’”

# January 20

## He Was Reachable

*"Where did this man get this wisdom and this power to do miracles? He is just the son of a carpenter."*

Matthew 13:54–55

"The Word became a human and lived among us," John said (John 1:14). In other words … he was touchable, approachable, reachable. And, what's more, he was ordinary. If he were here today you probably wouldn't notice him as he walked through a shopping mall. He wouldn't turn heads by the clothes he wore or the jewelry he flashed.

"Just call me Jesus," you can almost hear him say.

He was the kind of fellow you'd invite to watch the Rams-Giants game at your house.

He'd wrestle on the floor with your kids, doze on your couch, and cook steaks on your grill. He'd laugh at your jokes and tell a few of his own. And when you spoke, he'd listen to you as if he had all the time in eternity.

And one thing's for sure, you'd invite him back.

from *God Came Near*

### Genesis 39:1—40:23

### *Joseph Is Sold to Potiphar*

39 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. An Egyptian named Potiphar was an officer to the king of Egypt and the captain of the palace guard. He bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man. He lived in the house of his master, Potiphar the Egyptian.

3Potiphar saw that the LORD was with Joseph and that the LORD made Joseph successful in everything he did. 4So Potiphar was very happy with Joseph and allowed him to be his personal

servant. He put Joseph in charge of the house, trusting him with everything he owned. [5]When Joseph was put in charge of the house and everything Potiphar owned, the LORD blessed the people in Potiphar's house because of Joseph. And the LORD blessed everything that belonged to Potiphar, both in the house and in the field. [6]So Potiphar left Joseph in charge of everything he owned and was not concerned about anything except the food he ate.

## *Joseph Is Put into Prison*

Now Joseph was well built and handsome. [7]After some time the wife of Joseph's master began to desire Joseph, and one day she said to him, "Have sexual relations with me."

[8]But Joseph refused and said to her, "My master trusts me with everything in his house. He has put me in charge of everything he owns. [9]There is no one in his house greater than I. He has not kept anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How can I do such an evil thing? It is a sin against God."

[10]The woman talked to Joseph every day, but he refused to have sexual relations with her or even spend time with her.

[11]One day Joseph went into the house to do his work as usual and was the only man in the house at that time. [12]His master's wife grabbed his coat and said to him, "Come and have sexual relations with me." But Joseph left his coat in her hand and ran out of the house.

[13]When she saw that Joseph had left his coat in her hands and had run outside, [14]she called to the servants in her house and said, "Look! This Hebrew slave was brought here to shame us. He came in and tried to have sexual relations with me, but I screamed. [15]My scream scared him and he ran away, but he left his coat with me." [16]She kept his coat until her husband came home, [17]and she told him the same story. She said, "This Hebrew slave you brought here came in to shame me! [18]When he came near me, I screamed. He ran away, but he left his coat."

[19]When Joseph's master heard what his wife said Joseph had done, he became very angry. [20]So Potiphar arrested Joseph and put him into the prison where the king's prisoners were put. And Joseph stayed there in the prison.

[21]But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him kindness and caused the prison warden to like Joseph. [22]The prison warden chose Joseph to take care of all the prisoners, and he was responsible for whatever was done in the prison. [23]The warden paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's care because the LORD was with Joseph and made him successful in everything he did.

## *Joseph Interprets Two Dreams*

40 After these things happened, two of the king's officers
displeased the king—the man who served wine to the king and
the king's baker. 2The king became angry with his officer who
served him wine and his baker, 3so he put them in the prison of
the captain of the guard, the same prison where Joseph was
kept. 4The captain of the guard put the two prisoners in
Joseph's care, and they stayed in prison for some time.

5One night both the king's officer who served him wine and
the baker had a dream. Each had his own dream with its own
meaning. 6When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw
they were worried. 7He asked the king's officers who were with
him, "Why do you look so unhappy today?"

8The two men answered, "We both had dreams last night,
but no one can explain their meaning to us."

Joseph said to them, "God is the only One who can explain
the meaning of dreams. Tell me your dreams."

9So the man who served wine to the king told Joseph his
dream. He said, "I dreamed I saw a vine, and 10on the vine were
three branches. I watched the branches bud and blossom, and
then the grapes ripened. 11I was holding the king's cup, so I
took the grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup. Then I
gave it to the king."

12Then Joseph said, "I will explain the dream to you. The
three branches stand for three days. 13Before the end of three
days the king will free you, and he will allow you to return to
your work. You will serve the king his wine just as you did
before. 14But when you are free, remember me. Be kind to me,
and tell the king about me so I can get out of this prison. 15I
was taken by force from the land of the Hebrews, and I have
done nothing here to deserve being put in prison."

16The baker saw that Joseph's explanation of the dream was
good, so he said to him, "I also had a dream. I dreamed there
were three bread baskets on my head. 17In the top basket were
all kinds of baked food for the king, but the birds were eating
this food out of the basket on my head."

18Joseph answered, "I will tell you what the dream means.
The three baskets stand for three days. 19Before the end of
three days, the king will cut off your head! He will hang your
body on a pole, and the birds will eat your flesh."

20Three days later, on his birthday, the king gave a feast for
all his officers. In front of his officers, he released from prison
the chief officer who served his wine and the chief baker. 21The
king gave his chief officer who served wine his old position, and
once again he put the king's cup of wine into the king's hand.
22But the king hanged the baker on a pole. Everything
happened just as Joseph had said it would, 23but the officer who

served wine did not remember Joseph. He forgot all about him.

## Psalm 10:1–11

### *A Complaint About Evil People*

10 LORD, why are you so far away?
Why do you hide when there is trouble?

2 Proudly the wicked chase down those who suffer.
Let them be caught in their own traps.

3 They brag about the things they want.
They bless the greedy but hate the LORD.

4 The wicked people are too proud.
They do not look for God;
there is no room for God in their thoughts.

5 They always succeed.
They are far from keeping your laws;
they make fun of their enemies.

6 They say to themselves, “Nothing bad will ever happen to me;
I will never be ruined.”

7 Their mouths are full of curses, lies, and threats;
they use their tongues for sin and evil.

8 They hide near the villages.
They look for innocent people to kill;
they watch in secret for the helpless.

9 They wait in hiding like a lion.
They wait to catch poor people;
they catch the poor in nets.

10 The poor are thrown down and crushed;
they are defeated because the others are stronger.

11 The wicked think, “God has forgotten us.
He doesn’t see what is happening.”

## Proverbs 4:1–6

### *Wisdom Is Important*

4 My children, listen to your father’s teaching;
pay attention so you will understand.

2 What I am telling you is good,
so do not forget what I teach you.

3 When I was a young boy in my father’s house
and like an only child to my mother,

4 my father taught me and said,
“Hold on to my words with all your heart.
Keep my commands and you will live.

5 Get wisdom and understanding.
Don’t forget or ignore my words.

6 Hold on to wisdom, and it will take care of you.
Love it, and it will keep you safe.

## Matthew 13:31–58

## *Stories of Mustard Seed and Yeast*

31 Then Jesus told another story: “The kingdom of heaven is
like a mustard seed that a man planted in his field. 32 That seed
is the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows, it is one of the
largest garden plants. It becomes big enough for the wild birds
to come and build nests in its branches.”
33 Then Jesus told another story: “The kingdom of heaven is
like yeast that a woman took and hid in a large tub of flour until
it made all the dough rise.”
34 Jesus used stories to tell all these things to the people; he
always used stories to teach them. 35 This is as the prophet said:

“I will speak using stories;
I will tell things that have been secret since the world
was made.”

Psalm 78:2

## *Jesus Explains About the Weeds*

36 Then Jesus left the crowd and went into the house. His
followers came to him and said, “Explain to us the meaning of
the story about the weeds in the field.”
37 Jesus answered, “The man who planted the good seed in
the field is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the
good seed are all of God’s children who belong to the kingdom.
The weeds are those people who belong to the Evil One. 39 And
the enemy who planted the bad seed is the devil. The harvest
time is the end of the age, and the workers who gather are
God’s angels.
40 “Just as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so
it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out
his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all who
cause sin and all who do evil. 42 The angels will throw them into
the blazing furnace, where the people will cry and grind their
teeth with pain. 43 Then the good people will shine like the sun
in the kingdom of their Father. Let those with ears use them and
listen.

## *Stories of a Treasure and a Pearl*

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field.

One day a man found the treasure, and then he hid it in the field again. He was so happy that he went and sold everything he owned to buy that field.

45 “Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a man looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found a very valuable pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

## *A Story of a Fishing Net*

47 “Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was put into the lake and caught many different kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled the net to the shore. They sat down and put all the good fish in baskets and threw away the bad fish. 49 It will be this way at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the evil people from the good people. 50 The angels will throw the evil people into the blazing furnace, where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.”

51 Jesus asked his followers, “Do you understand all these things?”

They answered, “Yes, we understand.”

52 Then Jesus said to them, “So every teacher of the law who has been taught about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house. He brings out both new things and old things he has saved.”

## *Jesus Goes to His Hometown*

53 When Jesus finished teaching with these stories, he left there. 54 He went to his hometown and taught the people in the synagogue, and they were amazed. They said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and this power to do miracles? 55 He is just the son of a carpenter. His mother is Mary, and his brothers are James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. 56 And all his sisters are here with us. Where then does this man get all these things?” 57 So the people were upset with Jesus.

But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is honored everywhere except in his hometown and in his own home.”

58 So he did not do many miracles there because they had no faith.

# January 21

## Beyond Our Faults

*He felt sorry for them and healed those who were sick.*

Matthew 14:14

Matthew writes that Jesus healed their sick. Not *some* of their sick. Not the *righteous* among the sick. Not the *deserving* among the sick. But *the sick*. Surely, among the many thousands, there were a few people unworthy of good health. The same divinity that gave Jesus the power to heal also gave him the power to perceive ... I wonder if Jesus was tempted to say to the bigot, "Get out of here, buddy, and take your arrogance with you."

And he could see not only their past, he could see their future.

Undoubtedly, there were those in the multitude who would use their newfound health to hurt others. Jesus released tongues that would someday curse. He gave sight to eyes that would lust. He healed hands that would kill ...

Each time Jesus healed, he had to overlook the future and the past.

Something, by the way, that he still does.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

### Genesis 41:1—42:38

### *The King's Dreams*

41 Two years later the king dreamed he was standing on the
bank of the Nile River. 2He saw seven fat and beautiful cows
come up out of the river, and they stood there, eating the grass.
3Then seven more cows came up out of the river, but they were
thin and ugly. They stood beside the seven beautiful cows on the
bank of the Nile. 4The seven thin and ugly cows ate the seven
beautiful fat cows. Then the king woke up. 5The king slept again

and dreamed a second time. In his dream he saw seven full and good heads of grain growing on one stalk. [6]After that, seven more heads of grain sprang up, but they were thin and burned by the hot east wind. [7]The thin heads of grain ate the seven full and good heads. Then the king woke up again, and he realized it was only a dream. [8]The next morning the king was troubled about these dreams, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. The king told them his dreams, but no one could explain their meaning to him.

[9]Then the chief officer who served wine to the king said to him, “Now I remember something I promised to do, but I forgot about it. [10]There was a time when you were angry with the baker and me, and you put us in prison in the house of the captain of the guard. [11]In prison we each had a dream on the same night, and each dream had a different meaning. [12]A young Hebrew man, a servant of the captain of the guard, was in the prison with us. When we told him our dreams, he explained their meanings to us. He told each man the meaning of his dream, and [13]things happened exactly as he said they would: I was given back my old position, and the baker was hanged.”

[14]So the king called for Joseph. The guards quickly brought him out of the prison, and he shaved, put on clean clothes, and went before the king.

[15]The king said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, but no one can explain its meaning to me. I have heard that you can explain a dream when someone tells it to you.”

[16]Joseph answered the king, “I am not able to explain the meaning of dreams, but God will do this for the king.”

[17]Then the king said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile River. [18]I saw seven fat and beautiful cows that came up out of the river and ate the grass. [19]Then I saw seven more cows come out of the river that were thin and lean and ugly—the worst looking cows I have seen in all the land of Egypt. [20]And these thin and ugly cows ate the first seven fat cows, [21]but after they had eaten the seven cows, no one could tell they had eaten them. They looked just as thin and ugly as they did in the beginning. Then I woke up.

[22]“I had another dream. I saw seven full and good heads of grain growing on one stalk. [23]Then seven more heads of grain sprang up after them, but these heads were thin and ugly and were burned by the hot east wind. [24]Then the thin heads ate the seven good heads. I told this dream to the magicians, but no one could explain its meaning to me.”

## *Joseph Tells the Dreams’ Meaning*

[25]Then Joseph said to the king, “Both of these dreams mean the same thing. God is telling you what he is about to do. [26]The

seven good cows stand for seven years, and the seven good heads of grain stand for seven years. Both dreams mean the same thing. [27]The seven thin and ugly cows stand for seven years, and the seven thin heads of grain burned by the hot east wind stand for seven years of hunger. [28]This will happen as I told you. God is showing the king what he is about to do. [29]You will have seven years of good crops and plenty to eat in all the land of Egypt. [30]But after those seven years, there will come seven years of hunger, and all the food that grew in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The time of hunger will eat up the land. [31]People will forget what it was like to have plenty of food, because the hunger that follows will be so great. [32]You had two dreams which mean the same thing. This shows that God has firmly decided that this will happen, and he will make it happen soon.

[33]"So let the king choose a man who is very wise and understanding and set him over the land of Egypt. [34]And let the king also appoint officers over the land, who should take one-fifth of all the food that is grown during the seven good years. [35]They should gather all the food that is produced during the good years that are coming, and under the king's authority they should store the grain in the cities and guard it. [36]That food should be saved to use during the seven years of hunger that will come on the land of Egypt. Then the people in Egypt will not die during the seven years of hunger."

## *Joseph Is Made Ruler over Egypt*

[37]This seemed like a very good idea to the king, and all his officers agreed. [38]And the king asked them, "Can we find a better man than Joseph to take this job? God's spirit is truly in him!"

[39]So the king said to Joseph, "God has shown you all this. There is no one as wise and understanding as you are, so [40]I will put you in charge of my palace. All the people will obey your orders, and only I will be greater than you."

[41]Then the king said to Joseph, "Look! I have put you in charge of all the land of Egypt." [42]Then the king took off from his own finger his ring with the royal seal on it, and he put it on Joseph's finger. He gave Joseph fine linen clothes to wear, and he put a gold chain around Joseph's neck. [43]The king had Joseph ride in the second royal chariot, and people walked ahead of his chariot calling, "Bow down!" By doing these things, the king put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt.

[44]The king said to him, "I am the king, and I say that no one in all the land of Egypt may lift a hand or a foot without your permission." [45]The king gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah. He also gave Joseph a wife named Asenath, who was

the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. So Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he began serving the king of Egypt. And he left the king's court and traveled through all the land of Egypt. 47 During the seven good years, the crops in the land grew well. 48 And Joseph gathered all the food produced in Egypt during those seven years of good crops and stored the food in the cities. In every city he stored grain that had been grown in the fields around that city. 49 Joseph stored much grain, as much as the sand of the seashore—so much that he could not measure it.

50 Joseph's wife was Asenath daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On. Before the years of hunger came, Joseph and Asenath had two sons. 51 Joseph named the first son Manasseh[n] and said, "God has made me forget all the troubles I have had and all my father's family." 52 Joseph named the second son Ephraim[n] and said, "God has given me children in the land of my troubles."

53 The seven years of good crops came to an end in the land of Egypt. 54 Then the seven years of hunger began, just as Joseph had said. In all the lands people had nothing to eat, but in Egypt there was food. 55 The time of hunger became terrible in all of Egypt, and the people cried to the king for food. He said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you."

56 The hunger was everywhere in that part of the world. And Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the people of Egypt, because the time of hunger became terrible in Egypt. 57 And all the people in that part of the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain because the hunger was terrible everywhere in that part of the world.

## *The Dreams Come True*

42 Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, so he said to his sons, "Why are you just sitting here looking at one another? 2 I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy grain for us to eat, so that we will live and not die."

3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with them, because he was afraid that something terrible might happen to him. 5 Along with many other people, the sons of Israel[n] went to Egypt to buy grain, because the people in the land of Canaan were also hungry.

6 Now Joseph was governor over Egypt. He was the one who sold the grain to people who came to buy it. So Joseph's brothers came to him and bowed facedown on the ground before him. 7 When Joseph saw his brothers, he knew who they

were, but he acted as if he didn't know them. He asked unkindly, "Where do you come from?"

They answered, "We have come from the land of Canaan to buy food."

8 Joseph knew they were his brothers, but they did not know who he was. 9 And Joseph remembered his dreams about his brothers bowing to him. He said to them, "You are spies! You came to learn where the nation is weak!"

10 But his brothers said to him, "No, my master. We come as your servants just to buy food. 11 We are all sons of the same father. We are honest men, not spies."

12 Then Joseph said to them, "No! You have come to learn where this nation is weak!"

13 And they said, "We are ten of twelve brothers, sons of the same father, and we live in the land of Canaan. Our youngest brother is there with our father right now, and our other brother is gone."

14 But Joseph said to them, "I can see I was right! You are spies! 15 But I will give you a way to prove you are telling the truth. As surely as the king lives, you will not leave this place until your youngest brother comes here. 16 One of you must go and get your brother. The rest of you will stay here in prison. We will see if you are telling the truth. If not, as surely as the king lives, you are spies." 17 Then Joseph put them all in prison for three days.

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, "I am a God-fearing man. Do this and I will let you live: 19 If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison while the rest of you go and carry grain back to feed your hungry families. 20 Then bring your youngest brother back here to me. If you do this, I will know you are telling the truth, and you will not die."

The brothers agreed to this. 21 They said to each other, "We are being punished for what we did to our brother. We saw his trouble, and he begged us to save him, but we refused to listen. That is why we are in this trouble now."

22 Then Reuben said to them, "I told you not to harm the boy, but you refused to listen to me. So now we are being punished for what we did to him."

23 When Joseph talked to his brothers, he used an interpreter, so they did not know that Joseph understood what they were saying. 24 Then Joseph left them and cried. After a short time he went back and spoke to them. He took Simeon and tied him up while the other brothers watched. 25 Joseph told his servants to fill his brothers' bags with grain and to put the money the brothers had paid for the grain back in their bags. The servants were also to give them what they would need for their trip back home. And the servants did this.

26 So the brothers put the grain on their donkeys and left.

27When they stopped for the night, one of the brothers opened
his sack to get food for his donkey. Then he saw his money in
the top of the sack. 28He said to the other brothers, “The money
I paid for the grain has been put back. Here it is in my sack!”
The brothers were very frightened. They said to each other,
“What has God done to us?”

### *The Brothers Return to Jacob*

29The brothers went to their father Jacob in the land of
Canaan and told him everything that had happened. 30They
said, “The master of that land spoke unkindly to us. He accused
us of spying on his country, 31but we told him that we were
honest men, not spies. 32We told him that we were ten of twelve
brothers—sons of one father. We said that one of our brothers
was gone and that our youngest brother was with our father in
Canaan.
33“Then the master of the land said to us, ‘Here is a way I
can know you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers with
me, and take grain to feed your hungry families, and go. 34And
bring your youngest brother to me so I will know you are not
spies but honest men. Then I will give you back your brother
whom you leave with me, and you can move about freely in our
land.’”
35As the brothers emptied their sacks, each of them found
his money in his sack. When they and their father saw it, they
were afraid.
36Their father Jacob said to them, “You are robbing me of all
my children. Joseph is gone, Simeon is gone, and now you want
to take Benjamin away, too. Everything is against me.”
37Then Reuben said to his father, “You may put my two sons
to death if I don’t bring Benjamin back to you. Trust him to my
care, and I will bring him back to you.”
38But Jacob said, “I will not allow Benjamin to go with you.
His brother is dead, and he is the only son left from my wife
Rachel. I am afraid something terrible might happen to him
during the trip to Egypt. Then I would be sad until the day I
die.”

## Psalm 10:12–18

12LORD, rise up and punish the wicked.
Don’t forget those who need help.

13 Why do wicked people hate God?
They say to themselves, “God won’t punish us.”

14 LORD, surely you see these cruel and evil things;
look at them and do something.

People in trouble look to you for help.
You are the one who helps the orphans.

15 Break the power of wicked people.
Punish them for the evil they have done.

16 The LORD is King forever and ever.
Destroy from your land those nations that do not worship you.

17 LORD, you have heard what the poor people want.
Do what they ask, and listen to them.

18 Protect the orphans and put an end to suffering
so they will no longer be afraid of evil people.

## Proverbs 4:7–9

7 Wisdom is the most important thing; so get wisdom.
If it costs everything you have, get understanding.

8 Treasure wisdom, and it will make you great;
hold on to it, and it will bring you honor.

9 It will be like flowers in your hair
and like a beautiful crown on your head.”

## Matthew 14:1–21

## *How John the Baptist Was Killed*

14 At that time Herod, the ruler of Galilee, heard the reports
about Jesus. 2So he said to his servants, “Jesus is John the
Baptist, who has risen from the dead. That is why he can work
these miracles.”

3Sometime before this, Herod had arrested John, tied him
up, and put him into prison. Herod did this because of Herodias,
who had been the wife of Philip, Herod’s brother. 4John had
been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to be married to
Herodias.” 5Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the
people, because they believed John was a prophet.

6On Herod’s birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced for
Herod and his guests, and she pleased him. 7So he promised
with an oath to give her anything she wanted. 8Herodias told
her daughter what to ask for, so she said to Herod, “Give me the
head of John the Baptist here on a platter.” 9Although King
Herod was very sad, he had made a promise, and his dinner
guests had heard him. So Herod ordered that what she asked
for be done. 10He sent soldiers to the prison to cut off John’s
head. 11And they brought it on a platter and gave it to the girl,
and she took it to her mother. 12John’s followers came and got
his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

## *More than Five Thousand Fed*

13When Jesus heard what had happened to John, he left in a
boat and went to a lonely place by himself. But the crowds
heard about it and followed him on foot from the towns. 14When
he arrived, he saw a great crowd waiting. He felt sorry for them
and healed those who were sick.

15When it was evening, his followers came to him and said,
“No one lives in this place, and it is already late. Send the
people away so they can go to the towns and buy food for
themselves.”

16But Jesus answered, “They don’t need to go away. You give
them something to eat.”

17They said to him, “But we have only five loaves of bread
and two fish.”

18Jesus said, “Bring the bread and the fish to me.” 19Then he
told the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves
and the two fish and, looking to heaven, he thanked God for the
food. Jesus divided the bread and gave it to his followers, who
gave it to the people. 20All the people ate and were satisfied.

Then the followers filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of food. [21]There were about five thousand men there who ate, not counting women and children.

# January 22

## A Little Light, Please

*Jesus came to them, walking on the water … His followers … cried out in fear.*

Matthew 14:25–26

Every so often a storm will come, and I'll look up into the blackening sky and say, "God, a little light, please?" The light came for the disciples. A figure came to them walking on the water. It wasn't what they expected. Perhaps they were looking for angels to descend or heaven to open … We don't know what they were looking for. But one thing is for sure, they weren't looking for Jesus to come walking on the water …

And since Jesus came in a way they didn't expect, they almost missed seeing the answer to their prayers. And unless we look and listen closely, we risk making the same mistake. God's lights in our dark nights are as numerous as the stars, if only we'll look for them.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

### Genesis 43:1—44:34

### *The Brothers Go Back to Egypt*

43 Still no food grew in the land of Canaan. 2When Jacob's
family had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt,
Jacob said to them, "Go to Egypt again and buy a little more
grain for us to eat."

3But Judah said to Jacob, "The governor of that country
strongly warned us, 'If you don't bring your brother back with
you, you will not be allowed to see me.' 4If you will send
Benjamin with us, we will go down and buy food for you. 5But if
you refuse to send Benjamin, we will not go. The governor of
that country warned us that we would not see him if we didn't
bring Benjamin with us."

6 Israel[n] said, “Why did you tell the man you had another
brother? You have caused me a lot of trouble.”
7 The brothers answered, “He questioned us carefully about
ourselves and our family. He asked us, ‘Is your father still alive?
Do you have another brother?’ We just answered his questions.
How could we know he would ask us to bring our other brother
to him?”
8 Then Judah said to his father Jacob, “Send Benjamin with
me, and we will go at once so that we, you, and our children
may live and not die. 9 I will guarantee you that he will be safe,
and I will be personally responsible for him. If I don’t bring him
back to you, you can blame me all my life. 10 If we had not
wasted all this time, we could have already made two trips.”
11 Then their father Jacob said to them, “If it has to be that
way, then do this: Take some of the best foods in our land in
your packs. Give them to the man as a gift: some balm, some
honey, spices, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. 12 Take twice
as much money with you this time, and take back the money
that was returned to you in your sacks last time. Maybe it was a
mistake. 13 And take Benjamin with you. Now leave and go to
the man. 14 I pray that God Almighty will cause the governor to
be merciful to you and that he will allow Simeon and Benjamin
to come back with you. If I am robbed of my children, then I am
robbed of them!”
15 So the brothers took the gifts. They also took twice as
much money as they had taken the first time, and they took
Benjamin. They hurried down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.
16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the
servant in charge of his house, “Bring those men into my house.
Kill an animal and prepare a meal. Those men will eat with me
today at noon.” 17 The servant did as Joseph told him and
brought the men to Joseph’s house.
18 The brothers were afraid when they were brought to
Joseph’s house and thought, “We were brought here because of
the money that was put in our sacks on the first trip. He wants
to attack us, make us slaves, and take our donkeys.” 19 So the
brothers went to the servant in charge of Joseph’s house and
spoke to him at the door of the house. 20 They said, “Master, we
came here once before to buy food. 21 While we were going
home, we stopped for the night and when we opened our sacks
each of us found all his money in his sack. We brought that
money with us to give it back to you. 22 And we have brought
more money to pay for the food we want to buy this time. We
don’t know who put that money in our sacks.”
23 But the servant answered, “It’s all right. Don’t be afraid.
Your God, the God of your father, must have put the money in
your sacks. I got the money you paid me for the grain last time.”
Then the servant brought Simeon out to them.

[24]The servant led the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet. Then he gave their donkeys food to eat. [25]The men prepared their gift to give to Joseph when he arrived at noon, because they had heard they were going to eat with him there.

[26]When Joseph came home, the brothers gave him the gift they had brought into the house and bowed down to the ground in front of him. [27]Joseph asked them how they were doing. He said, "How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still alive?"

[28]The brothers answered, "Your servant, our father, is well. He is still alive." And they bowed low before Joseph to show him respect.

[29]When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin, who had the same mother as he, Joseph asked, "Is this your youngest brother you told me about?" Then he said to Benjamin, "God be good to you, my son!" [30]Then Joseph hurried off because he had to hold back the tears when he saw his brother Benjamin. So Joseph went into his room and cried there. [31]Then he washed his face and came out. He controlled himself and said, "Serve the meal."

[32]So they served Joseph at one table, his brothers at another table, and the Egyptians who ate with him at another table. This was because Egyptians did not like Hebrews and never ate with them. [33]Joseph's brothers were seated in front of him in order of their ages, from oldest to youngest. They looked at each other because they were so amazed. [34]Food from Joseph's table was taken to them, but Benjamin was given five times more food than the others. Joseph's brothers ate and drank freely with him.

## *Joseph Sets a Trap*

[44] Then Joseph gave a command to the servant in charge of his house. He said, "Fill the men's sacks with as much grain as they can carry, and put each man's money into his sack with the grain. [2]Put my silver cup in the sack of the youngest brother, along with his money for the grain." The servant did what Joseph told him.

[3]At dawn the brothers were sent away with their donkeys. [4]They were not far from the city when Joseph said to the servant in charge of his house, "Go after the men. When you catch up with them, say, 'Why have you paid back evil for good? [5]The cup you have stolen is the one my master uses for drinking and for explaining dreams. You have done a very wicked thing!'"

[6]So the servant caught up with the brothers and said to them what Joseph had told him to say.

[7]But the brothers said to the servant, "Why do you say these things? We would not do anything like that! [8]We brought back

to you from the land of Canaan the money we found in our sacks. So surely we would not steal silver or gold from your master's house. [9]If you find that silver cup in the sack of one of us, then let him die, and we will be your slaves."

[10]The servant said, "We will do as you say, but only the man who has taken the cup will become my slave. The rest of you may go free."

[11]Then every brother quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. [12]The servant searched the sacks, going from the oldest brother to the youngest, and found the cup in Benjamin's sack. [13]The brothers tore their clothes to show they were afraid. Then they put their sacks back on the donkeys and returned to the city.

[14]When Judah and his brothers went back to Joseph's house, Joseph was still there, so the brothers bowed facedown on the ground before him. [15]Joseph said to them, "What have you done? Didn't you know that a man like me can learn things by signs and dreams?"

[16]Judah said, "Master, what can we say? And how can we show we are not guilty? God has uncovered our guilt, so all of us will be your slaves, not just Benjamin."

[17]But Joseph said, "I will not make you all slaves! Only the man who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go back safely to your father."

[18]Then Judah went to Joseph and said, "Master, please let me speak plainly to you, and please don't be angry with me. I know that you are as powerful as the king of Egypt himself. [19]When we were here before, you asked us, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' [20]And we answered you, 'We have an old father. And we have a younger brother, who was born when our father was old. This youngest son's brother is dead, so he is the only one of his mother's children left alive, and our father loves him very much.' [21]Then you said to us, 'Bring that brother to me. I want to see him.' [22]And we said to you, 'That young boy cannot leave his father, because if he leaves him, his father would die.' [23]But you said to us, 'If you don't bring your youngest brother, you will not be allowed to see me again.' [24]So we went back to our father and told him what you had said.

[25]"Later, our father said, 'Go again and buy us a little more food.' [26]We said to our father, 'We cannot go without our youngest brother. Without our youngest brother, we will not be allowed to see the governor.' [27]Then my father said to us, 'You know that my wife Rachel gave me two sons. [28]When one son left me, I thought, "Surely he has been torn apart by a wild animal," and I haven't seen him since. [29]Now you want to take this son away from me also. But something terrible might happen to him, and I would be miserable until the day I die.' [30]Now what will happen if we go home to our father without our

youngest brother? He is so important in our father's life that
31 when our father sees the young boy is not with us, he will die.
And it will be our fault. We will cause the great sorrow that kills
our father.
32 "I gave my father a guarantee that the young boy would be
safe. I said to my father, 'If I don't bring him back to you, you
can blame me all my life.' 33 So now, please allow me to stay
here and be your slave, and let the young boy go back home
with his brothers. 34 I cannot go back to my father if the boy is
not with me. I couldn't stand to see my father that sad."

## Psalm 11:1–7

### *Trust in the Lord*

**For the director of music. Of David.**

11 I trust in the LORD for protection.
So why do you say to me,
"Fly like a bird to your mountain.

2 Like hunters, the wicked string their bows;
they set their arrows on the bowstrings.

They shoot from dark places
at those who are honest.

3 When the foundations for good collapse,
what can good people do?"

4 The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD sits on his throne in heaven.

He sees what people do;
he keeps his eye on them.

5 The LORD tests those who do right,
but he hates the wicked and those who love to hurt others.

6 He will send hot coals and burning sulfur on the wicked.
A whirlwind is what they will get.

7 The LORD does what is right, and he loves justice,
so honest people will see his face.

## Proverbs 4:10–13

10 My child, listen and accept what I say.
Then you will have a long life.

11 I am guiding you in the way of wisdom,
and I am leading you on the right path.

12 Nothing will hold you back;
you will not be overwhelmed.

13 Always remember what you have been taught,
and don't let go of it.

Keep all that you have learned;
it is the most important thing in life.

## Matthew 14:22–36

### *Jesus Walks on the Water*

22 Immediately Jesus told his followers to get into the boat and go ahead of him across the lake. He stayed there to send

the people home. [23]After he had sent them away, he went by himself up into the hills to pray. It was late, and Jesus was there alone. [24]By this time, the boat was already far away from land. It was being hit by waves, because the wind was blowing against it.

[25]Between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus came to them, walking on the water. [26]When his followers saw him walking on the water, they were afraid. They said, "It's a ghost!" and cried out in fear.

[27]But Jesus quickly spoke to them, "Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."

[28]Peter said, "Lord, if it is really you, then command me to come to you on the water."

[29]Jesus said, "Come."

And Peter left the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. [30]But when Peter saw the wind and the waves, he became afraid and began to sink. He shouted, "Lord, save me!"

[31]Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus said, "Your faith is small. Why did you doubt?"

[32]After they got into the boat, the wind became calm. [33]Then those who were in the boat worshiped Jesus and said, "Truly you are the Son of God!"

[34]When they had crossed the lake, they came to shore at Gennesaret. [35]When the people there recognized Jesus, they told people all around there that Jesus had come, and they brought all their sick to him. [36]They begged Jesus to let them touch just the edge of his coat, and all who touched it were healed.

# January 23

## God Never Gives Up

*"I am your brother Joseph … Now don't be worried or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. God sent me here ahead of you to save people's lives."*

Genesis 45:4–5

"The Lord does what is right" (Psalm 11:7). God never gives up. When Joseph was dropped into a pit by his own brothers, God didn't give up. When Moses said, "Here I am, send Aaron," God didn't give up. When the delivered Israelites wanted Egyptian slavery instead of milk and honey, God didn't give up. When Peter worshiped him at the supper and cursed him at the fire, he didn't give up.

And when human hands fastened the divine hands to a cross with spikes, it wasn't the soldiers who held the hands of Jesus steady. It was God who held them steady. God, who would give up his only Son before he'd give up on you.

from *Six Hours One Friday*

### Genesis 45:1—46:34

### *Joseph Reveals Who He Is*

45 Joseph could not control himself in front of his servants any
longer, so he cried out, "Have everyone leave me." When only
the brothers were left with Joseph, he told them who he was.
2 Joseph cried so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and the
people in the king's palace heard about it. 3 He said to his
brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But the
brothers could not answer him, because they were very afraid
of him.

4 So Joseph said to them, "Come close to me." When the
brothers came close to him, he said to them, "I am your brother
Joseph, whom you sold as a slave to go to Egypt. 5 Now don't be

worried or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. God sent me here ahead of you to save people's lives. [6]No food has grown on the land for two years now, and there will be five more years without planting or harvest. [7]So God sent me here ahead of you to make sure you have some descendants left on earth and to keep you alive in an amazing way. [8]So it was not you who sent me here, but God. God has made me the highest officer of the king of Egypt. I am in charge of his palace, and I am the master of all the land of Egypt.

[9]"So leave quickly and go to my father. Tell him, 'Your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all Egypt. Come down to me quickly. [10]Live in the land of Goshen where you will be near me. Your children, your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that you have will also be near me. [11]I will care for you during the next five years of hunger so that you and your family and all that you have will not starve.'

[12]"Now you can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that the one speaking to you is really Joseph.[13]So tell my father about how powerful I have become in Egypt. Tell him about everything you have seen. Now hurry and bring him back to me." [14]Then Joseph hugged his brother Benjamin and cried, and Benjamin cried also. [15]And Joseph kissed all his brothers and cried as he hugged them. After this, his brothers talked with him.

[16]When the king of Egypt and his officers learned that Joseph's brothers had come, they were very happy. [17]So the king said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers to load their animals and go back to the land of Canaan [18]and bring their father and their families back here to me. I will give them the best land in Egypt, and they will eat the best food we have here. [19]Tell them to take some wagons from Egypt for their children and their wives and to bring their father back also. [20]Tell them not to worry about bringing any of their things with them, because we will give them the best of what we have in Egypt."

[21]So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them wagons as the king had ordered and food for their trip. [22]He gave each brother a change of clothes, but he gave Benjamin five changes of clothes and about seven and one-half pounds of silver. [23]Joseph also sent his father ten donkeys loaded with the best things from Egypt and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and other food for his father on his trip back. [24]Then Joseph told his brothers to go. As they were leaving, he said to them, "Don't quarrel on the way home."

[25]So the brothers left Egypt and went to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. [26]They told him, "Joseph is still alive and is the ruler over all the land of Egypt." Their father was shocked and did not believe them. [27]But when the brothers told him everything Joseph had said, and when Jacob saw the wagons

Joseph had sent to carry him back to Egypt, he felt better.
28 Israel[n] said, “Now I believe you. My son Joseph is still alive,
and I will go and see him before I die.”

## *Jacob Goes to Egypt*

46 So Israel[n] took all he had and started his trip. He went to
Beersheba, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father
Isaac. 2 During the night God spoke to Israel in a vision and said,
“Jacob, Jacob.”

And Jacob answered, “Here I am.”

3 Then God said, “I am God, the God of your father. Don’t be
afraid to go to Egypt, because I will make your descendants a
great nation there. 4 I will go to Egypt with you, and I will bring
you out of Egypt again. Joseph’s own hands will close your eyes
when you die.”

5 Then Jacob left Beersheba. The sons of Israel loaded their
father, their children, and their wives in the wagons the king of
Egypt had sent. 6 They also took their farm animals and
everything they had gotten in Canaan. So Jacob went to Egypt
with all his descendants— 7 his sons and grandsons, his
daughters and granddaughters. He took all his family to Egypt
with him.

## *Jacob’s Family*

8 Now these are the names of the children of Israel who went
into Egypt (Jacob and his descendants).

Reuben was Jacob’s first son. 9 Reuben’s sons were Hanoch,
Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

10 Simeon’s sons were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar, and
Shaul (Simeon’s son by a Canaanite woman).

11 Levi’s sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

12 Judah’s sons were Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but
Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan). Perez’s sons were
Hezron and Hamul.

13 Issachar’s sons were Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron.

14 Zebulun’s sons were Sered, Elon, and Jahleel.

15 These are the sons of Leah and Jacob born in Northwest
Mesopotamia, in addition to his daughter Dinah. There were
thirty-three persons in this part of Jacob’s family.

16 Gad’s sons were Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi,
and Areli.

17 Asher’s sons were Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah, and
their sister was Serah. Beriah’s sons were Heber and Malkiel.

18 These are Jacob’s sons by Zilpah, the slave girl whom
Laban gave to his daughter Leah. There were sixteen persons in

this part of Jacob's family.
19 The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin.
20 In Egypt, Joseph became the father of Manasseh and Ephraim
by his wife Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On.
21 Benjamin's sons were Bela, Beker, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman,
Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.
22 These are the sons of Jacob by his wife Rachel. There were
fourteen persons in this part of Jacob's family.
23 Dan's son was Hushim.
24 Naphtali's sons were Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.
25 These are Jacob's sons by Bilhah, the slave girl whom
Laban gave to his daughter Rachel. There were seven persons
in this part of Jacob's family.
26 So the total number of Jacob's direct descendants who
went to Egypt was sixty-six, not counting the wives of Jacob's
sons. 27 Joseph had two sons born in Egypt, so the total number
in the family of Jacob in Egypt was seventy.

### *Jacob Arrives in Egypt*

28 Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to see Joseph in Goshen.
When Jacob and his people came into the land of Goshen,
29 Joseph prepared his chariot and went to meet his father Israel
in Goshen. As soon as Joseph saw his father, he hugged him,
and cried there for a long time.
30 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I am ready to die,
because I have seen your face and I know you are still alive."
31 Joseph said to his brothers and his father's family, "I will go
and tell the king you are here. I will say, 'My brothers and my
father's family have left the land of Canaan and have come here
to me. 32 They are shepherds and take care of farm animals, and
they have brought their flocks and their herds and everything
they own with them.' 33 When the king calls you, he will ask,
'What work do you do?' 34 This is what you should tell him: 'We,
your servants, have taken care of farm animals all our lives. Our
ancestors did the same thing.' Then the king will allow you to
settle in the land of Goshen, away from the Egyptians, because
they don't like to be near shepherds."

## Psalm 12:1–8

### *A Prayer Against Liars*

**For the director of music. Upon the sheminith. A psalm of**

**David.**

12 Save me, LORD, because the good people
are all gone;
no true believers are left on earth.

2 Everyone lies to his neighbors;
they say one thing and mean another.

3 The LORD will stop those flattering lips
and cut off those bragging tongues.

4 They say, “Our tongues will help us win.
We can say what we wish; no one is our master.”

5 But the LORD says,

“I will now rise up,
because the poor are being hurt.

Because of the moans of the helpless,
I will give them the help they want.”

6 The LORD’s words are pure,
like silver purified by fire,
like silver purified seven times over.

7 LORD, you will keep us safe;
you will always protect us from such people.

8 But the wicked are all around us;
everyone loves what is wrong.

## Proverbs 4:14–17

14 Don’t follow the ways of the wicked;
don’t do what evil people do.

15 Avoid their ways, and don’t follow them.
Stay away from them and keep on going,

16 because they cannot sleep until they do evil.
They cannot rest until they harm someone.

17 They feast on wickedness and cruelty
as if they were eating bread and drinking wine.

## Matthew 15:1–20

### *Obey God’s Law*

15 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus
from Jerusalem. They asked him, 2 “Why don’t your followers
obey the unwritten laws which have been handed down to us?
They don’t wash their hands before they eat.”
3 Jesus answered, “And why do you refuse to obey God’s
command so that you can follow your own teachings? 4 God said,
‘Honor your father and your mother,’[n] and ‘Anyone who says
cruel things to his father or mother must be put to death.’[n] 5 But
you say a person can tell his father or mother, ‘I have something
I could use to help you, but I have given it to God already.’ 6 You
teach that person not to honor his father or his mother. You
rejected what God said for the sake of your own rules. 7 You are
hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he said about you:

8 ‘These people show honor to me with words,
but their hearts are far from me.

9 Their worship of me is worthless.
The things they teach are nothing but human rules.’”

Isaiah 29:13

10 After Jesus called the crowd to him, he said, “Listen and
understand what I am saying. 11 It is not what people put into
their mouths that makes them unclean. It is what comes out of
their mouths that makes them unclean.”
12 Then his followers came to him and asked, “Do you know
that the Pharisees are angry because of what you said?”
13 Jesus answered, “Every plant that my Father in heaven has
not planted himself will be pulled up by the roots. 14 Stay away
from the Pharisees; they are blind leaders.[n] And if a blind
person leads a blind person, both will fall into a ditch.”
15 Peter said, “Explain the example to us.”
16 Jesus said, “Do you still not understand? 17 Surely you know
that all the food that enters the mouth goes into the stomach
and then goes out of the body. 18 But what people say with their
mouths comes from the way they think; these are the things
that make people unclean. 19 Out of the mind come evil
thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual sins, stealing, lying, and
speaking evil of others. 20 These things make people unclean;
eating with unwashed hands does not make them unclean.”

# January 24

## Applaud Loud and Often

*I sing to the* LORD *because he has taken care of me.*

Psalm 13:6

God has never taken his eyes off you. Not for a millisecond. He's always near. He lives to hear your heartbeat. He loves to hear your prayers. He'd die for your sin before he'd let you die in your sin, so he did.

What do you do with such a Savior? Don't you sing to him? Don't you declare, confess, and proclaim his name? Don't you bow a knee, lower a head, hammer a nail, feed the poor, and lift up your gift in worship? Of course you do.

Worship God. Applaud him loud and often. For your sake, you need it.

And for heaven's sake, he deserves it.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Genesis 47:1—48:22

#### *Jacob Settles in Goshen*

47 Joseph went in to the king and said, "My father and my
brothers have arrived from Canaan with their flocks and herds
and everything they own. They are now in the land of Goshen."
2 Joseph chose five of his brothers to introduce to the king.
3 The king said to the brothers, "What work do you do?"
And they said to him, "We, your servants, are shepherds, just
as our ancestors were." 4 They said to the king, "We have come
to live in this land, because there is no grass in the land of
Canaan for our animals to eat, and the hunger is terrible there.
So please allow us to live in the land of Goshen."
5 Then the king said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers
have come to you, 6 and you may choose any place in Egypt for
them to live. Give your father and your brothers the best land;

let them live in the land of Goshen. And if any of them are skilled shepherds, put them in charge of my sheep and cattle."

7Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and introduced him to the king, and Jacob blessed the king.

8Then the king said to Jacob, "How old are you?"

9Jacob said to him, "My life has been spent wandering from place to place. It has been short and filled with trouble—only one hundred thirty years. My ancestors lived much longer than I." 10Then Jacob blessed the king and left.

11Joseph obeyed the king and gave his father and brothers the best land in Egypt, near the city of Rameses. 12And Joseph gave his father, his brothers, and everyone who lived with them the food they needed.

## *Joseph Buys Land for the King*

13The hunger became worse, and since there was no food anywhere in the land, Egypt and Canaan became very poor. 14Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan. People paid for the grain they were buying, and he brought that money to the king's palace. 15After some time, when the people in Egypt and Canaan had no money left, they went to Joseph and said, "Please give us food. Our money is gone, and if we don't eat, we will die here in front of you."

16Joseph answered, "Since you have no money, give me your farm animals, and I will give you food in return." 17So people brought their farm animals to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses, sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. And he kept them alive by trading food for their farm animals that year.

18The next year the people came to Joseph and said, "You know we have no money left, and all our animals belong to you. We have nothing left except our bodies and our land. 19Surely both we and our land will die here in front of you. Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we will be slaves to the king, together with our land. Give us seed to plant so that we will live and not die, and the land will not become a desert."

20So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for the king. Every Egyptian sold Joseph his field, because the hunger was very great. So the land became the king's, 21and Joseph made the people slaves from one end of Egypt to the other. 22The only land he did not buy was the land the priests owned. They did not need to sell their land because the king paid them for their work. So they had money to buy food.

23Joseph said to the people, "Now I have bought you and your land for the king, so I will give you seed and you can plant your fields. 24At harvest time you must give one-fifth to the king. You may keep four-fifths for yourselves to use as seed for

the field and as food for yourselves, your families, and your children.”

25The people said, “You have saved our lives. If you like, we will become slaves of the king.”

26So Joseph made a law in Egypt, which continues today: One-fifth of everything from the land belongs to the king. The only land the king did not get was the priests’ land.

## *“Don’t Bury Me in Egypt”*

27The Israelites continued to live in the land of Goshen in Egypt. There they got possessions and had many children and grew in number.

28Jacob[n] lived in Egypt seventeen years, so he lived to be one hundred forty-seven years old. 29When Israel knew he soon would die, he called his son Joseph to him and said to him, “If you love me, put your hand under my leg.[n] Promise me you will not bury me in Egypt. 30When I die, carry me out of Egypt, and bury me where my ancestors are buried.”

Joseph answered, “I will do as you say.”

31Then Jacob said, “Promise me.” And Joseph promised him that he would do this. Then Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his walking stick.

## *Blessings for Manasseh and Ephraim*

48 Some time later Joseph learned that his father was very sick, so he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim and went to his father. 2When Joseph arrived, someone told Jacob,[n] “Your son Joseph has come to see you.” Jacob was weak, so he used all his strength and sat up on his bed.

3Then Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me there. 4He said to me, ‘I will give you many children. I will make you the father of many peoples, and I will give your descendants this land forever.’ 5Your two sons, who were born here in Egypt before I came, will be counted as my own sons. Ephraim and Manasseh will be my sons just as Reuben and Simeon are my sons. 6But if you have other children, they will be your own, and their land will be part of the land given to Ephraim and Manasseh. 7When I came from Northwest Mesopotamia, Rachel died in the land of Canaan, as we were traveling toward Ephrath. This made me very sad, and I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath.” (Today Ephrath is Bethlehem.)

8Then Israel saw Joseph’s sons and said, “Who are these boys?”

9Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons that God has given me here in Egypt.”

Israel said, “Bring your sons to me so I may bless them.”
10 At this time Israel’s eyesight was bad because he was old.
So Joseph brought the boys close to him, and Israel kissed the
boys and put his arms around them. 11 He said to Joseph, “I
thought I would never see you alive again, and now God has let
me see you and also your children.” 12 Then Joseph moved his
sons off Israel’s lap and bowed facedown to the ground. 13 He
put Ephraim on his right side and Manasseh on his left. (So
Ephraim was near Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh was near
Israel’s right hand.) Joseph brought the boys close to Israel.
14 But Israel crossed his arms and put his right hand on the head
of Ephraim, who was younger. He put his left hand on the head
of Manasseh, the firstborn son. 15 And Israel blessed Joseph and
said,

“My ancestors Abraham and Isaac served our God,
and like a shepherd God has led me all my life.

16 He was the Angel who saved me from all my troubles.
Now I pray that he will bless these boys.

May my name be known through these boys,
and may the names of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac
be known through them.

May they have many descendants
on the earth.”

17 When Joseph saw that his father put his right hand on
Ephraim’s head, he didn’t like it. So he took hold of his father’s
hand, wanting to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s
head. 18 Joseph said to his father, “You are doing it wrong,
Father. Manasseh is the firstborn son. Put your right hand on
his head.”
19 But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know.
Manasseh will be great and have many descendants. But his
younger brother will be greater, and his descendants will be
enough to make a nation.”
20 So Israel blessed them that day and said,

“When a blessing is given in Israel, they will say:
‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’”

In this way he made Ephraim greater than Manasseh.

21 Then Israel said to Joseph, “Look at me; I am about to die.
But God will be with you and will take you back to the land of
your fathers. 22 I have given you something that I did not give
your brothers—the land of Shechem that I took from the
Amorite people with my sword and my bow.”

## Psalm 13:1–6

### *A Prayer for God to Be Near*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

13 How long will you forget me, LORD? Forever?
How long will you hide from me?

2 How long must I worry
and feel sad in my heart all day?
How long will my enemy win over me?

3 LORD, look at me.
Answer me, my God;
tell me, or I will die.

4 Otherwise my enemy will say, “I have won!”
Those against me will rejoice that I’ve been defeated.

5 I trust in your love.
My heart is happy because you saved me.

6 I sing to the LORD
because he has taken care of me.

## Proverbs 4:18–19

18 The way of the good person is like the light of dawn,
growing brighter and brighter until full daylight.

19 But the wicked walk around in the dark;
they can't even see what makes them stumble.

## Matthew 15:21–39

### *Jesus Helps a Non-Jewish Woman*

21 Jesus left that place and went to the area of Tyre and
Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that area came to Jesus and
cried out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter
has a demon, and she is suffering very much."
23 But Jesus did not answer the woman. So his followers came
to Jesus and begged him, "Tell the woman to go away. She is
following us and shouting."
24 Jesus answered, "God sent me only to the lost sheep, the
people of Israel."
25 Then the woman came to Jesus again and bowed before
him and said, "Lord, help me!"
26 Jesus answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread
and give it to the dogs."
27 The woman said, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the
crumbs that fall from their masters' table."
28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! I will
do what you asked." And at that moment the woman's daughter
was healed.

### *Jesus Heals Many People*

29 After leaving there, Jesus went along the shore of Lake
Galilee. He went up on a hill and sat there.
30 Great crowds came to Jesus, bringing with them the lame,
the blind, the crippled, those who could not speak, and many
others. They put them at Jesus' feet, and he healed them. 31 The
crowd was amazed when they saw that people who could not
speak before were now able to speak. The crippled were made
strong. The lame could walk, and the blind could see. And they
praised the God of Israel for this.

### *More than Four Thousand Fed*

[32]Jesus called his followers to him and said, “I feel sorry for these people, because they have already been with me three days, and they have nothing to eat. I don’t want to send them away hungry. They might faint while going home.”

[33]His followers asked him, “How can we get enough bread to feed all these people? We are far away from any town.”

[34]Jesus asked, “How many loaves of bread do you have?”

They answered, “Seven, and a few small fish.”

[35]Jesus told the people to sit on the ground. [36]He took the seven loaves of bread and the fish and gave thanks to God. Then he divided the food and gave it to his followers, and they gave it to the people. [37]All the people ate and were satisfied. Then his followers filled seven baskets with the leftover pieces of food. [38]There were about four thousand men there who ate, besides women and children. [39]After sending the people home, Jesus got into the boat and went to the area of Magadan.

# January 25

## The CEO of Heaven

*Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.*

Proverbs 4:23

[God] wants you to "think and act like Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). But how? The answer is surprisingly simple. We can be transformed if we make one decision: *I will submit my thoughts to the authority of Jesus …*

Jesus claims to be the CEO of heaven and earth. He has the ultimate say on everything, especially our thoughts. He has more authority, for example, than your parents. Your parents may say you are no good, but Jesus says you are valuable, and he has authority over parents …

Jesus also has authority over your ideas. Suppose you have an idea that you want to rob a grocery store. Jesus, however, has made it clear that stealing is wrong. If you have given him authority over your ideas, then the idea of stealing cannot remain in your thoughts … To have a pure heart, we must submit all thoughts to the authority of Christ. If we are willing to do that, he will change us to be like him.

from *Just Like Jesus*

### Genesis 49:1—50:26

### *Jacob Blesses His Sons*

49 Then Jacob called his sons to him. He said, "Come here to
me, and I will tell you what will happen to you in the future.

2 "Come together and listen, sons of Jacob.
Listen to Israel, your father."

3 “Reuben, my first son, you are my strength.
Your birth showed I could be a father.

You have the highest position among my sons,
and you are the most powerful.

4 But you are uncontrolled like water,
so you will no longer lead your brothers.

This is because you got into your father’s bed
and shamed me by having sexual relations with my slave girl.

5 “Simeon and Levi are brothers
who used their swords to do violence.

6 I will not join their secret talks,
and I will not meet with them to plan evil.

They killed men because they were angry,
and they crippled oxen just for fun.

7 May their anger be cursed, because it is too violent.
May their violence be cursed, because it is too cruel.

I will divide them up among the tribes of Jacob
and scatter them through all the tribes of Israel.

8 “Judah, your brothers will praise you.
You will grab your enemies by the neck,
and your brothers will bow down to you.

9 Judah is like a young lion.
You have returned from killing, my son.

Like a lion, he stretches out and lies down to rest,

and no one is brave enough to wake him.

10 Kings will come from Judah’s family;
someone from Judah will always be on the throne.

Judah will rule until Shiloh comes,
and the nations will obey him.

11 He ties his donkey to a grapevine,
his young donkey to the best branch.

He can afford to use wine to wash his clothes
and the best wine to wash his robes.

12 His eyes are dark like the color of wine,
and his teeth are as white as the color of milk.

13 “Zebulun will live near the sea.
His shore will be a safe place for ships,
and his land will reach as far as Sidon.

14 “Issachar is like a strong donkey
who lies down while carrying his load.

15 When he sees his resting place is good
and how pleasant his land is,

he will put his back to the load
and become a slave.

16 “Dan will rule his own people
like the other tribes in Israel.

17 Dan will be like a snake by the side of the road,
a dangerous snake lying near the path.

That snake bites a horse's leg,
and the rider is thrown off backward.

18 "LORD, I wait for your salvation.
19 "Robbers will attack Gad,
but he will defeat them and drive them away.

20 "Asher's land will grow much good food;
he will grow food fit for a king.

21 "Naphtali is like a female deer that runs free,
that has beautiful fawns.

22 "Joseph is like a grapevine that produces much fruit,
a healthy vine watered by a spring,
whose branches grow over the wall.

23 Archers attack him violently
and shoot at him angrily,

24 but he aims his bow well.
His arms are made strong.

He gets his power from the Mighty God of Jacob
and his strength from the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.

25 Your father's God helps you.
God Almighty blesses you.

He blesses you with rain from above,
with water from springs below,

with many babies born to your wives,
and many young ones born to your animals.

26 The blessings of your father are greater

than the blessings of the oldest mountains,
greater than the good things of the long-lasting hills.

May these blessings rest on the head of Joseph,
on the forehead of the one who was separated from his brothers.

27 “Benjamin is like a hungry wolf.
In the morning he eats what he has caught,
and in the evening he divides what he has taken.”

28 These are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them. He gave each son the blessing that was right for him. 29 Then Israel gave them a command and said, “I am about to die. Bury me with my ancestors in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite. 30 That cave is in the field of Machpelah east of Mamre in the land of Canaan. Abraham bought the field and cave from Ephron the Hittite for a burying place. 31 Abraham and Sarah his wife are buried there. Isaac and Rebekah his wife are buried there, and I buried my wife Leah there. 32 The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittite people.” 33 After Jacob finished talking to his sons, he lay down. He put his feet back on the bed, took his last breath, and died.

## *Jacob’s Burial*

50 When Jacob died, Joseph hugged his father and cried over him and kissed him. 2 He commanded the doctors who served him to prepare his father’s body, so the doctors prepared Jacob’s body to be buried. 3 It took the doctors forty days to prepare his body (the usual time it took). And the Egyptians had a time of sorrow for Jacob that lasted seventy days.

4 When this time of sorrow had ended, Joseph spoke to the king’s officers and said, “If you think well of me, please tell this to the king: 5 ‘When my father was near death, I made a promise to him that I would bury him in a cave in the land of Canaan, in a burial place that he cut out for himself. So please let me go and bury my father, and then I will return.’”

6 The king answered, “Keep your promise. Go and bury your father.”

7 So Joseph went to bury his father. All the king’s officers, the elders of his court, and all the elders of Egypt went with Joseph. 8 Everyone who lived with Joseph and his brothers went with him, as well as everyone who lived with his father. They left only their children, their flocks, and their herds in the land of

Goshen. [9]They went with Joseph in chariots and on horses. It was a very large group.

[10]When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan River, they cried loudly and bitterly for his father. Joseph's time of sorrow continued for seven days. [11]The people that lived in Canaan saw the sadness at the threshing floor of Atad and said, "Those Egyptians are showing great sorrow!" So now that place is named Sorrow of the Egyptians.

[12]So Jacob's sons did as their father commanded. [13]They carried his body to the land of Canaan and buried it in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre. Abraham had bought this cave and field from Ephron the Hittite to use as a burial place. [14]After Joseph buried his father, he returned to Egypt, along with his brothers and everyone who had gone with him to bury his father.

## *The Brothers Fear Joseph*

[15]After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph is still angry with us? We did many wrong things to him. What if he plans to pay us back?" [16]So they sent a message to Joseph that said, "Your father gave this command before he died. [17]He said to us, 'You have done wrong and have sinned and done evil to Joseph. Tell Joseph to forgive you, his brothers.' So now, Joseph, we beg you to forgive our wrong. We are the servants of the God of your father." When Joseph received the message, he cried.

[18]And his brothers went to him and bowed low before him and said, "We are your slaves."

[19]Then Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Can I do what only God can do? [20]You meant to hurt me, but God turned your evil into good to save the lives of many people, which is being done. [21]So don't be afraid. I will take care of you and your children." So Joseph comforted his brothers and spoke kind words to them.

[22]Joseph continued to live in Egypt with all his father's family. He died when he was one hundred ten years old. [23]During Joseph's life Ephraim had children and grandchildren, and Joseph's son Manasseh had a son named Makir. Joseph accepted Makir's children as his own.

## *The Death of Joseph*

[24]Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will take care of you. He will lead you out of this land to the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." [25]Then Joseph had the sons of Israel make a promise. He said, "Promise me that you will carry my bones with you out of Egypt."

[26]Joseph died when he was one hundred ten years old. Doctors prepared his body for burial, and then they put him in a coffin in Egypt.

## Psalm 14:1–7

### *The Unbelieving Fool*

**For the director of music. Of David.**

[14] Fools say to themselves,
“There is no God.”

Fools are evil and do terrible things;
there is no one who does anything good.

[2]The LORD looked down from heaven on all people
to see if anyone understood,
if anyone was looking to God for help.

[3]But all have turned away.
Together, everyone has become evil.

There is no one who does anything good,
not even one.

[4]Don’t the wicked understand?

They destroy my people as if they were eating bread.
They do not ask the LORD for help.

[5]But the wicked are filled with terror,
because God is with those who do what is right.

6 The wicked upset the plans of the poor,
but the LORD will protect them.

7 I pray that victory will come to Israel from Mount Zion!
May the LORD bring them back.

Then the people of Jacob will rejoice,
and the people of Israel will be glad.

## Proverbs 4:20–24

20 My child, pay attention to my words;
listen closely to what I say.

21 Don't ever forget my words;
keep them always in mind.

22 They are the key to life for those who find them;
they bring health to the whole body.

23 Be careful what you think,
because your thoughts run your life.

24 Don't use your mouth to tell lies;
don't ever say things that are not true.

## Matthew 16:1–28

### *The Leaders Ask for a Miracle*

16 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus, wanting to trick him. So they asked him to show them a miracle from God.
2 Jesus answered,[n] "At sunset you say we will have good

weather, because the sky is red. [3]And in the morning you say that it will be a rainy day, because the sky is dark and red. You see these signs in the sky and know what they mean. In the same way, you see the things that I am doing now, but you don't know their meaning. [4]Evil and sinful people ask for a miracle as a sign, but they will not be given any sign, except the sign of Jonah."[n] Then Jesus left them and went away.

## *Guard Against Wrong Teachings*

[5]Jesus' followers went across the lake, but they had forgotten to bring bread. [6]Jesus said to them, "Be careful! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

[7]His followers discussed the meaning of this, saying, "He said this because we forgot to bring bread."

[8]Knowing what they were talking about, Jesus asked them, "Why are you talking about not having bread? Your faith is small. [9]Do you still not understand? Remember the five loaves of bread that fed the five thousand? And remember that you filled many baskets with the leftovers? [10]Or the seven loaves of bread that fed the four thousand and the many baskets you filled then also? [11]I was not talking to you about bread. Why don't you understand that? I am telling you to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." [12]Then the followers understood that Jesus was not telling them to beware of the yeast used in bread but to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

## *Peter Says Jesus Is the Christ*

[13]When Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his followers, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

[14]They answered, "Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are Elijah, and still others say you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

[15]Then Jesus asked them, "And who do you say Iam?"

[16]Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

[17]Jesus answered, "You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because no person taught you that. My Father in heaven showed you who I am. [18]So I tell you, you are Peter.[n] On this rock I will build my church, and the power of death will not be able to defeat it. [19]I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; the things you don't allow on earth will be the things that God does not allow, and the things you allow on earth will be the things that God allows." [20]Then Jesus warned his followers not to tell anyone he was the Christ.

## *Jesus Says that He Must Die*

21From that time on Jesus began telling his followers that he must go to Jerusalem, where the Jewish elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law would make him suffer many things. He told them he must be killed and then be raised from the dead on the third day.

22Peter took Jesus aside and told him not to talk like that. He said, “God save you from those things, Lord! Those things will never happen to you!”

23Then Jesus said to Peter, “Go away from me, Satan![n] You are not helping me! You don’t care about the things of God, but only about the things people think are important.”

24Then Jesus said to his followers, “If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing even to give up their lives to follow me. 25Those who want to save their lives will give up true life, and those who give up their lives for me will have true life. 26It is worthless to have the whole world if they lose their souls. They could never pay enough to buy back their souls. 27The Son of Man will come again with his Father’s glory and with his angels. At that time, he will reward them for what they have done. 28I tell you the truth, some people standing here will see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom before they die.”

# January 26

## God Cares About You

*He saw the troubles of the people of Israel, and he was concerned about them.*

Exodus 2:25

consider the earth! Our globe's weight has been estimated at six sextillion tons (a six with twenty-one zeroes). Yet it is precisely tilted at twenty-three degrees; any more or any less and our seasons would be lost in a melted polar flood. Though our globe revolves at the rate of one-thousand miles per hour or twenty-five thousand miles per day or nine million miles per year, none of us tumbles into orbit …

As you stand … observing God's workshop, let me pose a few questions. If he is able to place the stars in their sockets and suspend the sky like a curtain, do you think it is remotely possible that God is able to guide your life? If your God is mighty enough to ignite the sun, could it be that he is mighty enough to light your path? If he cares enough about the planet Saturn to give it rings or Venus to make it sparkle, is there an outside chance that he cares enough about you to meet your needs?

from *The Great House of God*

### Exodus 1:1—2:25

### *Jacob's Family Grows Strong*

1 When Jacob[n] went to Egypt, he took his sons, and each son
took his own family with him. These are the names of the sons
of Israel: 2Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, 3Issachar, Zebulun,
Benjamin, 4Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. 5There was a total of
seventy people who were descendants of Jacob. Jacob's son
Joseph was already in Egypt.
6Some time later, Joseph and his brothers died, along with all

the people who had lived at that same time. 7But the people of Israel had many children, and their number grew greatly. They became very strong, and the country of Egypt was filled with them.

## *Trouble for the People of Israel*

8Then a new king began to rule Egypt, who did not know who Joseph was. 9This king said to his people, “Look! The people of Israel are too many and too strong for us to handle! 10If we don’t make plans against them, the number of their people will grow even more. Then if there is a war, they might join our enemies and fight us and escape from the country!”

11So the Egyptians made life hard for the Israelites. They put slave masters over them, who forced the Israelites to build the cities Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king. 12But the harder the Egyptians forced the Israelites to work, the more the Israelites grew in number and spread out. So the Egyptians became very afraid of them 13and demanded even more of them. 14They made their lives bitter. They forced the Israelites to work hard to make bricks and mortar and to do all kinds of work in the fields. The Egyptians were not merciful to them in all their painful work.

15Two Hebrew nurses, named Shiphrah and Puah, helped the Israelite women give birth to their babies. The king of Egypt said to the nurses, 16“When you are helping the Hebrew women give birth to their babies, watch! If the baby is a girl, let her live, but if it is a boy, kill him!” 17But the nurses feared God, so they did not do as the king told them; they let all the boy babies live. 18Then the king of Egypt sent for the nurses and said, “Why did you do this? Why did you let the boys live?”

19The nurses said to him, “The Hebrew women are much stronger than the Egyptian women. They give birth to their babies before we can get there.” 20God was good to the nurses. And the Hebrew people continued to grow in number, so they became even stronger. 21Because the nurses feared God, he gave them families of their own.

22So the king commanded all his people, “Every time a boy is born to the Hebrews, you must throw him into the Nile River, but let all the girl babies live.”

## *Baby Moses*

2 Now a man from the family of Levi married a woman who was also from the family of Levi. 2She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw how wonderful the baby was, she hid him for three months. 3But after three months she was not

able to hide the baby any longer, so she got a basket made of reeds and covered it with tar so that it would float. She put the baby in the basket. Then she put the basket among the tall stalks of grass at the edge of the Nile River. [4]The baby's sister stood a short distance away to see what would happen to him.

[5]Then the daughter of the king of Egypt came to the river to take a bath, and her servant girls were walking beside the river. When she saw the basket in the tall grass, she sent her slave girl to get it. [6]The king's daughter opened the basket and saw the baby boy. He was crying, so she felt sorry for him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew babies."

[7]Then the baby's sister asked the king's daughter, "Would you like me to go and find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for you?"

[8]The king's daughter said, "Go!" So the girl went and got the baby's own mother.

[9]The king's daughter said to the woman, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took her baby and nursed him. [10]When the child grew older, the woman took him to the king's daughter, and she adopted the baby as her own son. The king's daughter named him Moses,[n] because she had pulled him out of the water.

## *Moses Tries to Help*

[11]Moses grew and became a man. One day he visited his people and saw that they were forced to work very hard. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew man, one of Moses' own people. [12]Moses looked all around and saw that no one was watching, so he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand.

[13]The next day Moses returned and saw two Hebrew men fighting each other. He said to the one that was in the wrong, "Why are you hitting one of your own people?"

[14]The man answered, "Who made you our ruler and judge? Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"

Moses was afraid and thought, "Now everyone knows what I did."

[15]When the king heard what Moses had done, he tried to kill him. But Moses ran away from the king and went to live in the land of Midian. There he sat down near a well.

## *Moses in Midian*

[16]There was a priest in Midian who had seven daughters. His daughters went to that well to get water to fill the water troughs for their father's flock. [17]Some shepherds came and chased the girls away, but Moses defended the girls and

watered their flock.
18When they went back to their father Reuel,[n] he asked them, “Why have you come home early today?”
19The girls answered, “The shepherds chased us away, but an Egyptian defended us. He got water for us and watered our flock.”
20He asked his daughters, “Where is this man? Why did you leave him? Invite him to eat with us.”
21Moses agreed to stay with Jethro, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses to be his wife. 22Zipporah gave birth to a son. Moses named him Gershom,[n] because Moses was a stranger in a land that was not his own.
23After a long time, the king of Egypt died. The people of Israel groaned, because they were forced to work very hard. When they cried for help, God heard them. 24God heard their cries, and he remembered the agreement he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25He saw the troubles of the people of Israel, and he was concerned about them.

## Psalm 15:1–5

### *What the Lord Demands*

**A psalm of David.**

15 LORD, who may enter your Holy Tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?

2Only those who are innocent
and who do what is right.

Such people speak the truth from their hearts

3 and do not tell lies about others.

They do no wrong to their neighbors
and do not gossip.

[4]They do not respect hateful people
but honor those who honor the LORD.

They keep their promises to their neighbors,
even when it hurts.

[5]They do not charge interest on money they lend
and do not take money to hurt innocent people.

Whoever does all these things will never be destroyed.

## Proverbs 4:25–27

[25]Keep your eyes focused on what is right,
and look straight ahead to what is good.

[26]Be careful what you do,
and always do what is right.

[27]Don't turn off the road of goodness;
keep away from evil paths.

## Matthew 17:1–27

### *Jesus Talks with Moses and Elijah*

[17] Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, the brother of James, up on a high mountain by themselves. [2]While they watched, Jesus' appearance was changed; his face became bright like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. [3]Then Moses and Elijah[n] appeared to them, talking with Jesus.

[4]Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you want, I will put up three tents here—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

5While Peter was talking, a bright cloud covered them. A
voice came from the cloud and said, “This is my Son, whom I
love, and I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!”
6When his followers heard the voice, they were so frightened
they fell to the ground. 7But Jesus went to them and touched
them and said, “Stand up. Don’t be afraid.” 8When they looked
up, they saw Jesus was now alone.
9As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded
them not to tell anyone about what they had seen until the Son
of Man had risen from the dead.
10Then his followers asked him, “Why do the teachers of the
law say that Elijah must come first?”
11Jesus answered, “They are right to say that Elijah is
coming and that he will make everything the way it should be.
12But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not
recognize him. They did to him whatever they wanted to do. It
will be the same with the Son of Man; those same people will
make the Son of Man suffer.” 13Then the followers understood
that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist.

## *Jesus Heals a Sick Boy*

14When Jesus and his followers came back to the crowd, a
man came to Jesus and bowed before him. 15The man said,
“Lord, have mercy on my son. He has epilepsy[n] and is suffering
very much, because he often falls into the fire or into the water.
16I brought him to your followers, but they could not cure him.”
17Jesus answered, “You people have no faith, and your lives
are all wrong. How long must I put up with you? How long must
I continue to be patient with you? Bring the boy here.” 18Jesus
commanded the demon inside the boy. Then the demon came
out, and the boy was healed from that time on.
19The followers came to Jesus when he was alone and asked,
“Why couldn’t we force the demon out?”
20Jesus answered, “Because your faith is too small. I tell you
the truth, if your faith is as big as a mustard seed, you can say
to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. All
things will be possible for you. [21That kind of spirit comes out
only if you use prayer and fasting.]”[n]

## *Jesus Talks About His Death*

22While Jesus’ followers were gathering in Galilee, he said to
them, “The Son of Man will be handed over to people, 23and
they will kill him. But on the third day he will be raised from the
dead.” And the followers were filled with sadness.

## *Jesus Talks About Paying Taxes*

[24]When Jesus and his followers came to Capernaum, the men who collected the Temple tax came to Peter. They asked, “Does your teacher pay the Temple tax?”

[25]Peter answered, “Yes, Jesus pays the tax.”

Peter went into the house, but before he could speak, Jesus said to him, “What do you think? The kings of the earth collect different kinds of taxes. But who pays the taxes—the king’s children or others?”

[26]Peter answered, “Other people pay the taxes.”

Jesus said to Peter, “Then the children of the king don’t have to pay taxes. [27]But we don’t want to upset these tax collectors. So go to the lake and fish. After you catch the first fish, open its mouth and you will find a coin. Take that coin and give it to the tax collectors for you and me.”

# January 27

# Our Unchanging God

*"When you go to the people of Israel, tell them, 'I am sent me to you.'"*

Exodus 3:14

DO you know anyone who goes around saying, "I am"? Neither do I. When we say "I am," we always add another word. "I am *happy*." "I am *sad*." "I am *strong*." "I am *Max*." God, however, starkly states, "I am" and adds nothing else.

"You are what?" we want to ask. "I am," he replies. God needs no descriptive word because he never changes. God is what he is. He is what he has always been. His immutability motivated the psalmist to declare, "But you never change" (Psalm 102:27). The writer is saying, "You are the One who is. You never change." Yahweh is an unchanging God.

from *Traveling Light*

## Exodus 3:1—4:31

### *The Burning Bush*

3 One day Moses was taking care of Jethro's flock. (Jethro was
the priest of Midian and also Moses' father-in-law.) When Moses
led the flock to the west side of the desert, he came to Sinai, the
mountain of God. 2There the angel of the LORD appeared to him
in flames of fire coming out of a bush. Moses saw that the bush
was on fire, but it was not burning up. 3So he said, "I will go
closer to this strange thing. How can a bush continue burning
without burning up?"

4When the LORD saw Moses was coming to look at the bush,
God called to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

5Then God said, "Do not come any closer. Take off your
sandals, because you are standing on holy ground. 6I am the

God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

7The LORD said, "I have seen the troubles my people have suffered in Egypt, and I have heard their cries when the Egyptian slave masters hurt them. I am concerned about their pain, 8and I have come down to save them from the Egyptians. I will bring them out of that land and lead them to a good land with lots of room—a fertile land. It is the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 9I have heard the cries of the people of Israel, and I have seen the way the Egyptians have made life hard for them. 10So now I am sending you to the king of Egypt. Go! Bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt!"

11But Moses said to God, "I am not a great man! How can I go to the king and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?"

12God said, "I will be with you. This will be the proof that I am sending you: After you lead the people out of Egypt, all of you will worship me on this mountain."

13Moses said to God, "When I go to the Israelites, I will say to them, 'The God of your ancestors sent me to you.' What if the people say, 'What is his name?' What should I tell them?"

14Then God said to Moses, "I am who I am.[n] When you go to the people of Israel, tell them, 'I am sent me to you.'"

15God also said to Moses, "This is what you should tell the people: 'The LORD is the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He sent me to you.' This will always be my name, by which people from now on will know me.

16"Go and gather the elders and tell them this: 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me. He said, I care about you, and I have seen what has happened to you in Egypt. 17I promised I would take you out of your troubles in Egypt. I will lead you to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites —a fertile land.'

18"The elders will listen to you. And then you and the elders of Israel will go to the king of Egypt and tell him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, appeared to us. Let us travel three days into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.'

19"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go. Only a great power will force him to let you go, 20so I will use my great power against Egypt. I will strike Egypt with all the miracles that will happen in that land. After I do that, he will let you go. 21I will cause the Egyptians to think well of the Israelites. So when you leave, they will give gifts to your people. 22Each woman should ask her Egyptian neighbor and any Egyptian woman living in her house for gifts—silver, gold, and clothing. You should put those gifts on your children when you

leave Egypt. In this way you will take with you the riches of the Egyptians.”

## *Proof for Moses*

4 Then Moses answered, “What if the people of Israel do not
believe me or listen to me? What if they say, ‘The LORD did not
appear to you’?”

2The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

Moses answered, “It is my walking stick.”

3The LORD said, “Throw it on the ground.”

So Moses threw it on the ground, and it became a snake.
Moses ran from the snake, 4but the LORD said to him, “Reach out
and grab the snake by its tail.” When Moses reached out and
took hold of the snake, it again became a stick in his hand. 5The
LORD said, “This is so that the Israelites will believe that the
LORD appeared to you. I am the God of their ancestors, the God
of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

6Then the LORD said to Moses, “Put your hand inside your
coat.” So Moses put his hand inside his coat. When he took it
out, it was white with a skin disease.

7Then he said, “Now put your hand inside your coat again.”
So Moses put his hand inside his coat again. When he took it
out, his hand was healthy again, like the rest of his skin.

8Then the LORD said, “If the people do not believe you or pay
attention to the first miracle, they may believe you when you
show them this second miracle. 9After these two miracles, if
they still do not believe or listen to you, take some water from
the Nile River and pour it on the dry ground. The water will
become blood when it touches the ground.”

10But Moses said to the LORD, “Please, Lord, I have never
been a skilled speaker. Even now, after talking to you, I cannot
speak well. I speak slowly and can’t find the best words.”

11Then the LORD said to him, “Who made a person’s mouth?
And who makes someone deaf or not able to speak? Or who
gives a person sight or blindness? It is I, the LORD. 12Now go! I
will help you speak, and I will teach you what to say.”

13But Moses said, “Please, Lord, send someone else.”

14The LORD became angry with Moses and said, “Your brother
Aaron, from the family of Levi, is a skilled speaker. He is already
coming to meet you, and he will be happy when he sees you.
15You will speak to Aaron and tell him what to say. I will help
both of you to speak and will teach you what to do. 16Aaron will
speak to the people for you. You will tell him what God says, and
he will speak for you. 17Take your walking stick with you, and
use it to do the miracles.”

## *Moses Returns to Egypt*

18 Moses went back to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to
him, “Let me go back to my people in Egypt. I want to see if
they are still alive.”
Jethro said to Moses, “Go! I wish you well.”
19 While Moses was still in Midian, the LORD said to him, “Go
back to Egypt, because the men who wanted to kill you are
dead now.”
20 So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey,
and started back to Egypt. He took with him the walking stick of
God.
21 The LORD said to Moses, “When you get back to Egypt, do
all the miracles I have given you the power to do. Show them to
the king of Egypt. But I will make the king very stubborn, and
he will not let the people go. 22 Then say to the king, ‘This is
what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son. 23 I told you to let
my son go so he may worship me. But you refused to let Israel
go, so I will kill your firstborn son.’”
24 As Moses was on his way to Egypt, he stopped at a resting
place for the night. The LORD met him there and tried to kill him.
25 But Zipporah took a flint knife and circumcised her son.
Taking the skin, she touched Moses’ feet with it and said to him,
“You are a bridegroom of blood to me.” 26 She said, “You are a
bridegroom of blood,” because she had to circumcise her son.
So the LORD let Moses alone.
27 Meanwhile the LORD said to Aaron, “Go out into the desert
to meet Moses.” When Aaron went, he met Moses at Sinai, the
mountain of God, and kissed him. 28 Moses told Aaron
everything the LORD had said to him when he sent him to Egypt.
He also told him about the miracles which the LORD had
commanded him to do.
29 Moses and Aaron gathered all the elders of the Israelites,
30 and Aaron told them everything that the LORD had told Moses.
Then Moses did the miracles for all the people to see, 31 and the
Israelites believed. When they heard that the LORD was
concerned about them and had seen their troubles, they bowed
down and worshiped him.

## Psalm 16:1–6

### *The Lord Takes Care of His People*

**A miktam of David.**

16 Protect me, God,
because I trust in you.

2 I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord.
Every good thing I have comes from you.”

3 As for the godly people in the world,
they are the wonderful ones I enjoy.

4 But those who turn to idols
will have much pain.

I will not offer blood to those idols
or even speak their names.

5 No, the LORD is all I need.
He takes care of me.

6 My share in life has been pleasant;
my part has been beautiful.

## Proverbs 5:1–6

### *Warning About Adultery*

5 My son, pay attention to my wisdom;
listen to my words of understanding.

2 Be careful to use good sense,
and watch what you say.

3 The words of another man’s wife may seem sweet as honey;
they may be as smooth as olive oil.

4 But in the end she will bring you sorrow,
causing you pain like a two-edged sword.

5 She is on the way to death;
her steps are headed straight to the grave.

6 She gives little thought to life.
She doesn't even know that her ways are wrong.

## Matthew 18:1–20

### *Who Is the Greatest?*

18 At that time the followers came to Jesus and asked, "Who is
greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
2 Jesus called a little child to him and stood the child before
his followers. 3 Then he said, "I tell you the truth, you must
change and become like little children. Otherwise, you will
never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 The greatest person in the
kingdom of heaven is the one who makes himself humble like
this child.
5 "Whoever accepts a child in my name accepts me. 6 If one of
these little children believes in me, and someone causes that
child to sin, it would be better for that person to have a large
stone tied around the neck and be drowned in the sea. 7 How
terrible for the people of the world because of the things that
cause them to sin. Such things will happen, but how terrible for
the one who causes them to happen! 8 If your hand or your foot
causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for
you to lose part of your body and live forever than to have two
hands and two feet and be thrown into the fire that burns
forever. 9 If your eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it
away. It is better for you to have only one eye and live forever
than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

### *A Lost Sheep*

10 "Be careful. Don't think these little children are worth
nothing. I tell you that they have angels in heaven who are
always with my Father in heaven. [11 The Son of Man came to
save lost people.][n]
12 "If a man has a hundred sheep but one of the sheep gets

lost, he will leave the other ninety-nine on the hill and go to look for the lost sheep. 13I tell you the truth, if he finds it he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that were never lost. 14In the same way, your Father in heaven does not want any of these little children to be lost.

## *When a Person Sins Against You*

15"If your fellow believer sins against you,[n] go and tell him in private what he did wrong. If he listens to you, you have helped that person to be your brother or sister again. 16But if he refuses to listen, go to him again and take one or two other people with you. 'Every case may be proved by two or three witnesses.'[n] 17If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, then treat him like a person who does not believe in God or like a tax collector.

18"I tell you the truth, the things you don't allow on earth will be the things God does not allow. And the things you allow on earth will be the things that God allows.

19"Also, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about something and pray for it, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20This is true because if two or three people come together in my name, I am there with them."

# January 28

## Claiming Courage

*You will teach me how to live a holy life.*

Psalm 16:11

Are you a brief journey away from painful encounters? Are you only steps away from the walls of your own heartache? Learn a lesson from your master. Don't march into battle with the enemy without first claiming the courage from God's promises. May I give you a few examples?

When you are confused: "'I know what I am planning for you,' says the LORD. 'I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you'" (Jeremiah 29:11).

If you feel weighted by yesterday's failures: "So now, those who are in Christ Jesus are not judged guilty" (Romans 8:1).

On those nights when you wonder where God is: "I am the Holy One, and I am among you" (Hosea 11:9).

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Exodus 5:1—6:30

#### *Moses and Aaron Before the King*

5 After Moses and Aaron talked to the people, they went to the
king of Egypt and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel,
says: 'Let my people go so they may hold a feast for me in the
desert.'"

2But the king of Egypt said, "Who is the LORD? Why should I
obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will
not let Israel go."

3Then Aaron and Moses said, "The God of the Hebrews has
met with us. Now let us travel three days into the desert to offer
sacrifices to the LORD our God. If we don't do this, he may kill us
with a disease or in war."

4But the king said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you

taking the people away from their work? Go back to your jobs!
5There are very many Hebrews, and now you want them to quit
working!”
6That same day the king gave a command to the slave
masters and foremen. 7He said, “Don’t give the people straw to
make bricks as you used to do. Let them gather their own straw.
8But they must still make the same number of bricks as they did
before. Do not accept fewer. They have become lazy, and that is
why they are asking me, ‘Let us go to offer sacrifices to our
God.’ 9Make these people work harder and keep them busy;
then they will not have time to listen to the lies of Moses.”
10So the slave masters and foremen went to the Israelites
and said, “This is what the king says: I will no longer give you
straw. 11Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it.
But you must make as many bricks as you made before.” 12So
the people went everywhere in Egypt looking for dry stalks to
use for straw. 13The slave masters kept forcing the people to
work harder. They said, “You must make just as many bricks as
you did when you were given straw.” 14The king’s slave masters
had made the Israelite foremen responsible for the work the
people did. The Egyptian slave masters beat these men and
asked them, “Why aren’t you making as many bricks as you
made in the past?”
15Then the Israelite foremen went to the king and
complained, “Why are you treating us, your servants, this way?
16You give us no straw, but we are commanded to make bricks.
Our slave masters beat us, but it is your own people’s fault.”
17The king answered, “You are lazy! You don’t want to work!
That is why you ask to leave here and make sacrifices to the
LORD. 18Now, go back to work! We will not give you any straw,
but you must make just as many bricks as you did before.”
19The Israelite foremen knew they were in trouble, because
the king had told them, “You must make just as many bricks
each day as you did before.” 20As they were leaving the meeting
with the king, they met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for
them. 21So they said to Moses and Aaron, “May the LORD punish
you. You caused the king and his officers to hate us. You have
given them an excuse to kill us.”

## *Moses Complains to God*

22Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Lord, why have
you brought this trouble on your people? Is this why you sent
me here? 23I went to the king and said what you told me to say,
but ever since that time he has made the people suffer. And you
have done nothing to save them.”
6 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do
to the king of Egypt. I will use my great power against him, and

he will let my people go. Because of my power, he will force them out of his country."

2Then God said to Moses, "I am the LORD. 3I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name God Almighty, but they did not know me by my name, the LORD. 4I also made my agreement with them to give them the land of Canaan. They lived in that land, but it was not their own. 5Now I have heard the cries of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are treating as slaves, and I remember my agreement. 6So tell the people of Israel that I say to them, 'I am the LORD. I will save you from the hard work the Egyptians force you to do. I will make you free, so you will not be slaves to the Egyptians. I will free you by my great power, and I will punish the Egyptians terribly. 7I will make you my own people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the LORD your God, the One who saves you from the hard work the Egyptians force you to do. 8I will lead you to the land that I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give you that land to own. I am the LORD.'"

9So Moses told this to the Israelites, but they would not listen to him. They were discouraged, and their slavery was hard.

10Then the LORD said to Moses, 11"Go tell the king of Egypt that he must let the Israelites leave his land."

12But Moses answered, "The Israelites will not listen to me, so surely the king will not listen to me either. I am not a good speaker."

13But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them orders about the Israelites and the king of Egypt. He commanded them to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

## *Families of Israel*

14These are the leaders of the families of Israel:

Israel's first son, Reuben, had four sons: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. These are the family groups of Reuben.

15Simeon's sons were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. These are the family groups of Simeon.

16Levi lived one hundred thirty-seven years. These are the names of his sons according to their family history: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

17Gershon had two sons, Libni and Shimei, with their families.

18Kohath lived one hundred thirty-three years. The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

19The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi.

These are the family groups of Levi, according to their family history.

[20]Amram married his father's sister Jochebed, who gave birth to Aaron and Moses. Amram lived one hundred thirty-seven years.

[21]Izhar's sons were Korah, Nepheg, and Zicri.

[22]Uzziel's sons were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri.

[23]Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon. Elisheba gave birth to Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

[24]The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These are the family groups of the Korahites.

[25]Eleazar son of Aaron married a daughter of Putiel, and she gave birth to Phinehas.

These are the leaders of the family groups of the Levites.

[26]This was the Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Lead the people of Israel out of Egypt by their divisions." [27]Aaron and Moses are the ones who talked to the king of Egypt and told him to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

### *God Repeats His Call to Moses*

[28]The LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt [29]and said, "I am the LORD. Tell the king of Egypt everything I tell you."

[30]But Moses answered, "I am not a good speaker. The king will not listen to me."

## Psalm 16:7–11

[7]I praise the LORD because he advises me.
Even at night, I feel his leading.

[8]I keep the LORD before me always.
Because he is close by my side,
I will not be hurt.

[9]So I rejoice and am glad.
Even my body has hope,

[10]because you will not leave me in the grave.
You will not let your holy one rot.

[11]You will teach me how to live a holy life.
Being with you will fill me with joy;
at your right hand I will find pleasure forever.

## Proverbs 5:7–14

[7]Now, my sons, listen to me,
and don’t ignore what I say.

[8]Stay away from such a woman.
Don’t even go near the door of her house,

[9]or you will give your riches to others,
and the best years of your life will be given to someone cruel.

[10]Strangers will enjoy your wealth,
and what you worked so hard for will go to someone else.

[11]You will groan at the end of your life
when your health is gone.

[12]Then you will say, “I hated being told what to do!
I would not listen to correction!

[13]I would not listen to my teachers
or pay attention to my instructors.

[14]I came close to being completely ruined
in front of a whole group of people.”

## Matthew 18:21–35

## *An Unforgiving Servant*

[21]Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, when my
fellow believer sins against me, how many times must I forgive
him? Should I forgive him as many as seven times?”
[22]Jesus answered, “I tell you, you must forgive him more
than seven times. You must forgive him even if he wrongs you
seventy times seven.
[23]“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who decided to
collect the money his servants owed him. [24]When the king
began to collect his money, a servant who owed him several
million dollars was brought to him. [25]But the servant did not
have enough money to pay his master, the king. So the master
ordered that everything the servant owned should be sold, even
the servant’s wife and children. Then the money would be used
to pay the king what the servant owed.
[26]“But the servant fell on his knees and begged, ‘Be patient
with me, and I will pay you everything I owe.’ [27]The master felt
sorry for his servant and told him he did not have to pay it back.
Then he let the servant go free.
[28]“Later, that same servant found another servant who owed
him a few dollars. The servant grabbed him around the neck
and said, ‘Pay me the money you owe me!’
[29]“The other servant fell on his knees and begged him, ‘Be
patient with me, and I will pay you everything I owe.’
[30]“But the first servant refused to be patient. He threw the
other servant into prison until he could pay everything he owed.
[31]When the other servants saw what had happened, they were
very sorry. So they went and told their master all that had
happened.
[32]“Then the master called his servant in and said, ‘You evil
servant! Because you begged me to forget what you owed, I told
you that you did not have to pay anything. [33]You should have
showed mercy to that other servant, just as I showed mercy to
you.’ [34]The master was very angry and put the servant in prison
to be punished until he could pay everything he owed.
[35]“This king did what my heavenly Father will do to you if
you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

# January 29

## What Size Is God?

*“For God all things are possible.”*

Matthew 19:26

Nature is God’s workshop. The sky is his resume. The universe is his calling card. You want to know who God is? See what he has done. You want to know his power? Take a look at his creation. Curious about his strength? Pay a visit to his home address: 1 Billion Starry Sky Avenue.

He is untainted by the atmosphere of sin, unbridled by the time line of history, unhindered by the weariness of the body.

What controls you doesn’t control him. What troubles you doesn’t trouble him. What fatigues you doesn’t fatigue him. Is an eagle disturbed by traffic? No, he rises above it. Is the whale perturbed by a hurricane? Of course not, he plunges beneath it. Is the lion flustered by the mouse standing directly in his way? No, he steps over it.

How much more is God able to soar above, plunge beneath, and step over the troubles of the earth!

from *The Great House of God*

### Exodus 7:1—8:32

7 The LORD said to Moses, “I have made you like God to the king
of Egypt, and your brother Aaron will be like a prophet for you.
2Tell Aaron your brother everything that I command you, and let
him tell the king of Egypt to let the Israelites leave his country.
3But I will make the king stubborn. I will do many miracles in
Egypt, 4but he will still refuse to listen. So then I will punish
Egypt terribly, and I will lead my divisions, my people the
Israelites, out of that land. 5I will punish Egypt with my power,
and I will bring the Israelites out of that land. Then they will
know I am the LORD.”

6Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded them.
7Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three when

they spoke to the king.

## *Aaron's Walking Stick Becomes a Snake*

8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 9 "Moses, when the king
asks you to do a miracle, tell Aaron to throw his walking stick
down in front of the king, and it will become a snake."
10 So Moses and Aaron went to the king as the LORD had
commanded. Aaron threw his walking stick down in front of the
king and his officers, and it became a snake.
11 So the king called in his wise men and his magicians, and
with their tricks the Egyptian magicians were able to do the
same thing. 12 They threw their walking sticks on the ground,
and their sticks became snakes. But Aaron's stick swallowed
theirs. 13 Still the king was stubborn and refused to listen to
Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

## *The Water Becomes Blood*

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The king is being stubborn
and refuses to let the people go. 15 In the morning the king will
go out to the Nile River. Go meet him by the edge of the river,
and take with you the walking stick that became a snake. 16 Tell
him: The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you. He said,
'Let my people go worship me in the desert.' Until now you have
not listened. 17 This is what the LORD says: 'This is how you will
know that I am the LORD. I will strike the water of the Nile River
with this stick in my hand, and the water will change into blood.
18 Then the fish in the Nile will die, and the river will begin to
stink. The Egyptians will not be able to drink the water from the
Nile.'"
19 The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron: 'Take the walking
stick in your hand and stretch your hand over the rivers, canals,
ponds, and pools in Egypt.' The water will become blood
everywhere in Egypt, both in wooden buckets and in stone
jars."
20 So Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded.
In front of the king and his officers, Aaron raised his walking
stick and struck the water in the Nile River. So all the water in
the Nile changed into blood. 21 The fish in the Nile died, and the
river began to stink, so the Egyptians could not drink water
from it. Blood was everywhere in the land of Egypt.
22 Using their tricks, the magicians of Egypt did the same
thing. So the king was stubborn and refused to listen to Moses
and Aaron, just as the LORD had said. 23 The king turned and
went into his palace and ignored what Moses and Aaron had
done. 24 The Egyptians could not drink the water from the Nile,
so all of them dug along the bank of the river, looking for water

to drink.

## *The Frogs*

25 Seven days passed after the LORD changed the Nile River.
8 Then the LORD told Moses, “Go to the king of Egypt and tell
him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Let my people go to worship
me. 2 If you refuse, I will punish Egypt with frogs. 3 The Nile
River will be filled with frogs. They will come up into your
palace, into your bedroom, on your bed, into the houses of your
officers, and onto your people. They will come into your ovens
and into your baking pans. 4 The frogs will jump all over you,
your people, and your officers.’”

5 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron to hold his walking
stick in his hand over the rivers, canals, and ponds. Make frogs
come up out of the water onto the land of Egypt.”

6 So Aaron held his hand over all the waters of Egypt, and the
frogs came up out of the water and covered the land of Egypt.
7 The magicians used their tricks to do the same thing, so even
more frogs came up onto the land of Egypt.

8 The king called for Moses and Aaron and said, “Pray to the
LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people. I will let
your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD.”

9 Moses said to the king, “Please set the time when I should
pray for you, your people, and your officers. Then the frogs will
leave you and your houses and will remain only in the Nile.”

10 The king answered, “Tomorrow.”

Moses said, “What you want will happen. By this you will
know that there is no one like the LORD our God. 11 The frogs will
leave you, your houses, your officers, and your people. They will
remain only in the Nile.”

12 After Moses and Aaron left the king, Moses asked the LORD
about the frogs he had sent to the king. 13 And the LORD did as
Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the yards, and in
the fields. 14 The Egyptians put them in piles, and the whole
country began to stink. 15 But when the king saw that they were
free of the frogs, he became stubborn again. He did not listen to
Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

## *The Gnats*

16 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron to raise his
walking stick and strike the dust on the ground. Then
everywhere in Egypt the dust will change into gnats.” 17 They
did this, and when Aaron raised the walking stick that was in
his hand and struck the dust on the ground, everywhere in
Egypt the dust changed into gnats. The gnats got on the people
and animals. 18 Using their tricks, the magicians tried to do the

same thing, but they could not make the dust change into gnats. The gnats remained on the people and animals. [19]So the magicians told the king that the power of God had done this. But the king was stubborn and refused to listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

### *The Flies*

[20]The LORD told Moses, "Get up early in the morning, and meet the king of Egypt as he goes out to the river. Tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go so they can worship me. [21]If you don't let them go, I will send swarms of flies into your houses. The flies will be on you, your officers, and your people. The houses of Egypt will be full of flies, and they will be all over the ground, too. [22]But I will not treat the Israelites the same as the Egyptian people. There will not be any flies in the land of Goshen, where my people live. By this you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land. [23]I will treat my people differently from your people. This miracle will happen tomorrow.'"

[24]So the LORD did as he had said, and great swarms of flies came into the king's palace and his officers' houses. All over Egypt flies were ruining the land. [25]The king called for Moses and Aaron and told them, "Offer sacrifices to your God here in this country."

[26]But Moses said, "It wouldn't be right to do that, because the Egyptians hate the sacrifices we offer to the LORD our God. If they see us offering sacrifices they hate, they will throw stones at us and kill us. [27]Let us make a three-day journey into the desert. We must offer sacrifices to the LORD our God there, as the LORD told us to do."

[28]The king said, "I will let you go so that you may offer sacrifices to the LORD your God in the desert, but you must not go very far away. Now go and pray for me."

[29]Moses said, "I will leave and pray to the LORD, and he will take the flies away from you, your officers, and your people tomorrow. But do not try to trick us again. Do not stop the people from going to offer sacrifices to the LORD."

[30]So Moses left the king and prayed to the LORD, [31]and the LORD did as he asked. He removed the flies from the king, his officers, and his people so that not one fly was left. [32]But the king became stubborn again and did not let the people go.

## Psalm 17:1–5

## *A Prayer for Protection*

**A prayer of David.**

17 LORD, hear me begging for fairness; listen to my cry for help.

Pay attention to my prayer,
because I speak the truth.

2You will judge that I am right;
your eyes can see what is true.

3You have examined my heart;
you have tested me all night.

You questioned me without finding anything wrong;
I have not sinned with my mouth.

4I have obeyed your commands,
so I have not done what evil people do.

5I have done what you told me;
I have not failed.

## Proverbs 5:15–20

15Be faithful to your own wife,
just as you drink water from your own well.

16Don’t pour your water in the streets;
don’t give your love to just any woman.

17These things are yours alone
and shouldn’t be shared with strangers.

18 Be happy with the wife you married when you were young.
She gives you joy, as your fountain gives you water.

19 She is as lovely and graceful as a deer.
Let her love always make you happy;
let her love always hold you captive.

20 My son, don't be held captive by a woman who takes part in adultery.
Don't fondle a woman who is not your wife.

## Matthew 19:1–30

### *Jesus Teaches About Divorce*

19 After Jesus said all these things, he left Galilee and went into the area of Judea on the other side of the Jordan River. 2 Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus and tried to trick him. They asked, "Is it right for a man to divorce his wife for any reason he chooses?"

4 Jesus answered, "Surely you have read in the Scriptures: When God made the world, 'he made them male and female.'[n] 5 And God said, 'So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body.'[n] 6 So there are not two, but one. God has joined the two together, so no one should separate them."

7 The Pharisees asked, "Why then did Moses give a command for a man to divorce his wife by giving her divorce papers?"

8 Jesus answered, "Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because you refused to accept God's teaching, but divorce was not allowed in the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman is guilty of adultery.[n] The only reason for a man to divorce his wife is if his wife has sexual relations with another man."

10 The followers said to him, "If that is the only reason a man can divorce his wife, it is better not to marry."

11 Jesus answered, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but God has made some able to accept it. 12 There are different reasons why some men cannot marry. Some men were born without the ability to become fathers. Others were made that way later in life by other people. And some men have given up

marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. But the person who can marry should accept this teaching about marriage.”[n]

## *Jesus Welcomes Children*

13 Then the people brought their little children to Jesus so he could put his hands on them[n] and pray for them. His followers told them to stop, 14 but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people who are like these children.” 15 After Jesus put his hands on the children, he left there.

## *A Rich Young Man’s Question*

16 A man came to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to have life forever?”

17 Jesus answered, “Why do you ask me about what is good? Only God is good. But if you want to have life forever, obey the commands.”

18 The man asked, “Which commands?”

Jesus answered, “‘You must not murder anyone; you must not be guilty of adultery; you must not steal; you must not tell lies about your neighbor; 19 honor your father and mother;[n] and love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”[n]

20 The young man said, “I have obeyed all these things. What else do I need to do?”

21 Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, then go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor. If you do this, you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”

22 But when the young man heard this, he left sorrowfully, because he was rich.

23 Then Jesus said to his followers, “I tell you the truth, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Yes, I tell you that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

25 When Jesus’ followers heard this, they were very surprised and asked, “Then who can be saved?”

26 Jesus looked at them and said, “For people this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

27 Peter said to Jesus, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. So what will we have?”

28 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, when the age to come has arrived, the Son of Man will sit on his great throne. All of you who followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And all those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother,[n] children, or farms to follow me will get much more than they left, and they will have

life forever. [30]Many who are first now will be last in the future.
And many who are last now will be first in the future.

# January 30

## Nothing to Offer

*I call to you, God, and you answer me. Listen to me now, and hear what I say.*

Psalm 17:6

Nicodemus came to Jesus in the middle of the night. The centurion came in the middle of the day. The leper and the sinful woman appeared in the middle of crowds. Zacchaeus appeared in the middle of a tree. Matthew had a party for him.

The educated. The powerful. The rejected. The sick. The lonely. The wealthy. Who would have ever assembled such a crew? All they had in common were their empty hope chests, long left vacant by charlatans and profiteers. Though they had nothing to offer, they asked for everything: a new birth, a second chance, a fresh start, a clean conscience. And without exception their requests were honored.

from *Six Hours One Friday*

## Exodus 9:1—10:29

### *The Disease on the Farm Animals*

9 Then the LORD told Moses, “Go to the king of Egypt and tell
him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let
my people go to worship me. 2If you refuse to let them go and
continue to hold them, 3the LORD will punish you. He will send a
terrible disease on your farm animals that are in the fields. He
will cause your horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, goats, and
sheep to become sick. 4But the LORD will treat Israel’s animals
differently from the animals of Egypt. None of the animals that
belong to the Israelites will die. 5The LORD has set tomorrow as
the time he will do this in the land.’” 6The next day the LORD did
as he promised. All the farm animals in Egypt died, but none of
the animals belonging to Israelites died. 7The king sent people

to see what had happened to the animals of Israel, and they found that not one of them had died. But the king was still stubborn and did not let the people go.

## *The Boils*

8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Fill your hands with
ashes from a furnace. Moses, throw the ashes into the air in
front of the king of Egypt. 9 The ashes will spread like dust
through all the land of Egypt. They will cause boils to break out
and become sores on the skin of people and animals everywhere
in the land.”
10 So Moses and Aaron took ashes from a furnace and went
and stood before the king. Moses threw ashes into the air,
which caused boils to break out and become sores on people
and animals. 11 The magicians could not stand before Moses,
because all the Egyptians had boils, even the magicians. 12 But
the LORD made the king stubborn, so he refused to listen to
Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

## *The Hail*

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning
and go to the king of Egypt. Tell him, ‘This is what the LORD, the
God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go to worship me. 14 If
you don’t, this time I will punish you, your officers, and your
people, with all my power. Then you will know there is no one in
the whole land like me. 15 By now I could have used my power
and caused a terrible disease that would have destroyed you
and your people from the earth. 16 But I have let you live for this
reason: to show you my power so that my name will be talked
about in all the earth. 17 You are still against my people and do
not want to let them go. 18 So at this time tomorrow, I will send a
terrible hailstorm, the worst in Egypt since it became a nation.
19 Now send for your animals and whatever you have in the
fields, and bring them into a safe place. The hail will fall on
every person or animal that is still in the fields. If they have not
been brought in, they will die.’” 20 Some of the king’s officers
respected the word of the LORD and hurried to bring their slaves
and animals inside. 21 But others ignored the LORD’s message
and left their slaves and animals in the fields.
22 The LORD told Moses, “Raise your hand toward the sky.
Then the hail will start falling in all the land of Egypt. It will fall
on people, animals, and on everything that grows in the fields of
Egypt.” 23 When Moses raised his walking stick toward the sky,
the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to
the earth. So he caused hail to fall upon the land of Egypt.
24 There was hail, and lightning flashed as it hailed—the worst

hailstorm in Egypt since it had become a nation. 25The hail destroyed all the people and animals that were in the fields in all the land of Egypt. It also destroyed everything that grew in the fields and broke all the trees in the fields. 26The only place it did not hail was in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

27The king sent for Moses and Aaron and told them, “This time I have sinned. The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28Pray to the LORD. We have had enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will let you go; you do not have to stay here any longer.”

29Moses told the king, “When I leave the city, I will raise my hands to the LORD in prayer, and the thunder and hail will stop. Then you will know that the earth belongs to the LORD. 30But I know that you and your officers do not yet fear the LORD God.”

31The flax was in bloom, and the barley had ripened, so these crops were destroyed. 32But both wheat crops ripen later, so they were not destroyed.

33Moses left the king and went outside the city. He raised his hands to the LORD, and the thunder and hail stopped. The rain also stopped falling to the ground. 34When the king saw that the rain, hail, and thunder had stopped, he sinned again, and he and his officers became stubborn. 35So the king became stubborn and refused to let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses.

## *The Locusts*

10 The LORD said to Moses, “Go to the king of Egypt. I have made him and his officers stubborn so I could show them my powerful miracles. 2I also did this so you could tell your children and your grandchildren how I was hard on the Egyptians. Tell them about the miracles I did among them so that all of you will know that I am the LORD.”

3So Moses and Aaron went to the king and told him, “This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘How long will you refuse to be sorry for what you have done? Let my people go to worship me. 4If you refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country. 5They will cover the land so that no one will be able to see the ground. They will eat anything that was left from the hailstorm and the leaves from every tree growing in the field. 6They will fill your palaces and all your officers’ houses, as well as the houses of all the Egyptians. There will be more locusts than your fathers or ancestors have ever seen—more than there have been since people began living in Egypt.’” Then Moses turned and walked away from the king.

7The king’s officers asked him, “How long will this man make

trouble for us? Let the Israelites go to worship the LORD their God. Don't you know that Egypt is ruined?"

[8]So Moses and Aaron were brought back to the king. He said to them, "Go and worship the LORD your God. But tell me, just who is going?"

[9]Moses answered, "We will go with our young and old people, our sons and daughters, and our flocks and herds, because we are going to have a feast to honor the LORD."

[10]The king said to them, "The LORD will really have to be with you if ever I let you and all of your children leave Egypt. See, you are planning something evil! [11]No! Only the men may go and worship the LORD, which is what you have been asking for." Then the king forced Moses and Aaron out of his palace.

[12]The LORD told Moses, "Raise your hand over the land of Egypt, and the locusts will come. They will spread all over the land of Egypt and will eat all the plants the hail did not destroy."

[13]So Moses raised his walking stick over the land of Egypt, and the LORD caused a strong wind to blow from the east. It blew across the land all that day and night, and when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. [14]Swarms of locusts covered all the land of Egypt and settled everywhere. There were more locusts than ever before or after, [15]and they covered the whole land so that it was black. They ate everything that was left after the hail—every plant in the field and all the fruit on the trees. Nothing green was left on any tree or plant anywhere in Egypt.

[16]The king quickly called for Moses and Aaron. He said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. [17]Now forgive my sin this time. Pray to the LORD your God, and ask him to stop this punishment that kills."

[18]Moses left the king and prayed to the LORD. [19]So the LORD changed the wind. He made a very strong wind blow from the west, and it blew the locusts away into the Red Sea. Not one locust was left anywhere in Egypt. [20]But the LORD caused the king to be stubborn again, and he did not let the Israelites go.

## *The Darkness*

[21]Then the LORD told Moses, "Raise your hand toward the sky, and darkness will cover the land of Egypt. It will be so dark you will be able to feel it." [22]Moses raised his hand toward the sky, and total darkness was everywhere in Egypt for three days. [23]No one could see anyone else, and no one could go anywhere for three days. But the Israelites had light where they lived.

[24]Again the king of Egypt called for Moses. He said, "All of you may go and worship the LORD. You may take your women and children with you, but you must leave your flocks and herds here."

25 Moses said, “You must let us have animals to use as
sacrifices and burnt offerings, because we have to offer them to
the LORD our God. 26 So we must take our animals with us; not a
hoof will be left behind. We have to use some of the animals to
worship the LORD our God. We won’t know exactly what we will
need to worship the LORD until we get there.”
27 But the LORD made the king stubborn again, so he refused
to let them go. 28 Then he told Moses, “Get out of here, and
don’t come again! The next time you see me, you will die.”
29 Then Moses told the king, “I’ll do what you say. I will not
come to see you again.”

## Psalm 17:6–15

6 I call to you, God,
and you answer me.

Listen to me now,
and hear what I say.

7 Your love is wonderful.
By your power you save those who trust you
from their enemies.

8 Protect me as you would protect your own eye.
Hide me under the shadow of your wings.

9 Keep me from the wicked who attack me,
from my enemies who surround me.

10 They are selfish
and brag about themselves.

11 They have chased me until they have surroundedme.
They plan to throw me to the ground.

12 They are like lions ready to kill;
like lions, they sit in hiding.

13 LORD, rise up, face the enemy, and throw them down.
Save me from the wicked with your sword.

14 LORD, save me by your power
from those whose reward is in this life.

They have plenty of food.
They have many sons
and leave much money to their children.

15 Because I have lived right, I will see your face.
When I wake up, I will see your likeness and be satisfied.

## Proverbs 5:21–23

21 The LORD sees everything you do,
and he watches where you go.

22 An evil man will be caught in his wicked ways;
the ropes of his sins will tie him up.

23 He will die because he does not control himself,
and he will be held captive by his foolishness.

## Matthew 20:1–16

### *A Story About Workers*

20 "The kingdom of heaven is like a person who owned some land. One morning, he went out very early to hire some people

to work in his vineyard. [2]The man agreed to pay the workers one coin[n] for working that day. Then he sent them into the vineyard to work. [3]About nine o'clock the man went to the marketplace and saw some other people standing there, doing nothing. [4]So he said to them, 'If you go and work in my vineyard, I will pay you what your work is worth.' [5]So they went to work in the vineyard. The man went out again about twelve o'clock and three o'clock and did the same thing. [6]About five o'clock the man went to the marketplace again and saw others standing there. He asked them, 'Why did you stand here all day doing nothing?' [7]They answered, 'No one gave us a job.' The man said to them, 'Then you can go and work in my vineyard.'

[8]"At the end of the day, the owner of the vineyard said to the boss of all the workers, 'Call the workers and pay them. Start with the last people I hired and end with those I hired first.'

[9]"When the workers who were hired at five o'clock came to get their pay, each received one coin. [10]When the workers who were hired first came to get their pay, they thought they would be paid more than the others. But each one of them also received one coin. [11]When they got their coin, they complained to the man who owned the land. [12]They said, 'Those people were hired last and worked only one hour. But you paid them the same as you paid us who worked hard all day in the hot sun.' [13]But the man who owned the vineyard said to one of those workers, 'Friend, I am being fair to you. You agreed to work for one coin. [14]So take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same pay that I gave you. [15]I can do what I want with my own money. Are you jealous because I am good to those people?'

[16]"So those who are last now will someday be first, and those who are first now will someday be last."

# January 31

## Our Servant Master

*"The Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people."*

Matthew 20:28

AS a young boy, I read a Russian fable about a master and a servant who went on a journey to a city. Many of the details I've forgotten but the ending I remember. Before the two men could reach the destination they were caught in a blinding blizzard. They lost their direction and were unable to reach the city before nightfall.

The next morning concerned friends went searching for the two men. They finally found the master, frozen to death, facedown in the snow. When they lifted him they found the servant—cold but alive. He survived and told how the master had voluntarily placed himself on top of the servant so the servant could live.

I hadn't thought of that story in years. But when I read what Christ said he would do for us, the story surfaced—for Jesus is the master who died for the servants.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Exodus 11:1—12:51

### *The Death of the Firstborn*

11 Now the LORD had told Moses, "I have one more way to
punish the king and the people of Egypt. After this, the king will
send all of you away from Egypt. When he does, he will force
you to leave completely. 2Tell the men and women of Israel to
ask their neighbors for things made of silver and gold." 3The
LORD had caused the Egyptians to respect the Israelites, and
both the king's officers and the Egyptian people considered
Moses to be a great man.

4So Moses said to the king, “This is what the LORD says:
‘About midnight tonight I will go through all Egypt. 5Every
firstborn son in the land of Egypt will die—from the firstborn
son of the king, who sits on his throne, to the firstborn of the
slave girl grinding grain. Also the firstborn farm animals will
die. 6There will be loud outcries everywhere in Egypt, worse
than any time before or after this. 7But not even a dog will bark
at the Israelites or their animals.’ Then you will know that the
LORD treats Israel differently from Egypt. 8All your officers will
come to me. They will bow facedown to the ground before me
and say, ‘Leave and take all your people with you.’ After that, I
will leave.” Then Moses very angrily left the king.

9The LORD had told Moses, “The king will not listen to you
and Aaron so that I may do many miracles in the land of Egypt.”
10Moses and Aaron did all these great miracles in front of the
king. But the LORD made him stubborn, and the king would not
let the Israelites leave his country.

## *The First Passover*

12 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt:
2“This month will be the beginning of months, the first month of
the year for you. 3Tell the whole community of Israel that on the
tenth day of this month each man must get one lamb for the
people in his house. 4If there are not enough people in his house
to eat a whole lamb, he must share it with his closest neighbor,
considering the number of people. There must be enough lamb
for everyone to eat. 5The lamb must be a one-year-old male that
has nothing wrong with it. This animal can be either a young
sheep or a young goat. 6Take care of the animals until the
fourteenth day of the month. On that day all the people of the
community of Israel will kill them in the evening before dark.
7The people must take some of the blood and put it on the sides
and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the
lambs. 8On this night they must roast the lamb over a fire. They
must eat it with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. 9Do
not eat the lamb raw or boiled in water. Roast the whole lamb
over a fire—with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10You must
not leave any of it until morning, but if any of it is left over until
morning, you must burn it with fire.

11“This is the way you must eat it: You must be fully dressed
as if you were going on a trip. You must have your sandals on
and your walking stick in your hand. You must eat it in a hurry;
this is the LORD’s Passover.

12“That night I will go through the land of Egypt and kill all
the firstborn animals and people in the land of Egypt. I will also
punish all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. 13But the blood will
be a sign on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I

will pass over you. Nothing terrible will hurt you when I punish the land of Egypt.

14"You are always to remember this day and celebrate it with a feast to the LORD. Your descendants are to honor the LORD with this feast from now on. 15For this feast you must eat bread made without yeast for seven days. On the first day, you are to remove all the yeast from your houses. No one should eat any yeast for the full seven days of the feast, or that person will be cut off from Israel. 16You are to have holy meetings on the first and last days of the feast. You must not do any work on these days; the only work you may do is to prepare your meals. 17You must celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because on this very day I brought your divisions of people out of Egypt. So all of your descendants must celebrate this day. This is a law that will last from now on. 18In the first month of the year you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. 19For seven days there must not be any yeast in your houses. Anybody who eats yeast during this time, either an Israelite or non-Israelite, must be cut off from the community of Israel. 20During this feast you must not eat anything made with yeast. You must eat only bread made without yeast wherever you live."

21Then Moses called all the elders of Israel together and told them, "Get the animals for your families and kill the lamb for the Passover. 22Take a branch of the hyssop plant, dip it into the bowl filled with blood, and then wipe the blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes. No one may leave that house until morning. 23When the LORD goes through Egypt to kill the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes, and he will pass over that house. He will not let the one who brings death come into your houses and kill you.

24"You must keep this command as a law for you and your descendants from now on. 25Do this when you go to the land the LORD has promised to give you. 26When your children ask you, 'Why are we doing these things?' 27you will say, 'This is the Passover sacrifice to honor the LORD. When we were in Egypt, the LORD passed over the houses of Israel, and when he killed the Egyptians, he saved our homes.'" Then the people bowed down and worshiped the LORD. 28They did just as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

29At midnight the LORD killed all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt—from the firstborn of the king who sat on the throne to the firstborn of the prisoner in jail. Also, all the firstborn farm animals died. 30The king, his officers, and all the Egyptians got up during the night because someone had died in every house. So there was a loud outcry everywhere in Egypt.

## *Israel Leaves Egypt*

31During the night the king called for Moses and Aaron and
said, “Get up and leave my people. You and your people may do
as you have asked; go and worship the LORD. 32Take all of your
flocks and herds as you have asked, and go. And also bless me.”
33The Egyptians also asked the Israelites to hurry and leave,
saying, “If you don’t leave, we will all die!”
34So the people took their dough before the yeast was added.
They wrapped the bowls for making dough in clothing and
carried them on their shoulders. 35The Israelites did what
Moses told them to do and asked their Egyptian neighbors for
things made of silver and gold and for clothing. 36The LORD
caused the Egyptians to think well of them, and the Egyptians
gave the people everything they asked for. So the Israelites took
rich gifts from them.
37The Israelites traveled from Rameses to Succoth. There
were about six hundred thousand men walking, not including
the women and children. 38Many other people who were not
Israelites went with them, as well as a large number of sheep,
goats, and cattle. 39The Israelites used the dough they had
brought out of Egypt to bake loaves of bread without yeast. The
dough had no yeast in it, because they had been rushed out of
Egypt and had no time to get food ready for their trip.
40The people of Israel had lived in Egypt for four hundred
thirty years; 41on the very day the four hundred thirty years
ended, the LORD’s divisions of people left Egypt. 42That night the
LORD kept watch to bring them out of Egypt, and so on this same
night the Israelites are to keep watch to honor the LORD from
now on.
43The LORD told Moses and Aaron, “Here are the rules for
Passover: No foreigner is to eat the Passover. 44If someone buys
a slave and circumcises him, the slave may eat the Passover.
45But neither a person who lives for a short time in your country
nor a hired worker may eat it.
46“The meal must be eaten inside a house; take none of the
meat outside the house. Don’t break any of the bones. 47The
whole community of Israel must take part in this feast. 48A
foreigner who lives with you may share in the LORD’s Passover if
all the males in his house become circumcised. Then, since he
will be like a citizen of Israel, he may share in the meal. But a
man who is not circumcised may not eat the Passover meal.
49The same rules apply to an Israelite born in the country or to
a foreigner living there.”
50So all the Israelites did just as the LORD had commanded
Moses and Aaron. 51On that same day the LORD led the Israelites
out of Egypt by their divisions.

## Psalm 18:1–6

### *A Song of Victory*

**For the director of music. By the LORD's servant, David. David sang this song to the LORD when the LORD had saved him from Saul and all his other enemies.**

18 I love you, LORD. You are my strength.
2 The LORD is my rock, my protection, my Savior.
My God is my rock.
I can run to him for safety.

He is my shield and my saving strength, my defender.

3 I will call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and I will be saved from my enemies.

4 The ropes of death came around me;
the deadly rivers overwhelmed me.

5 The ropes of death wrapped around me.
The traps of death were before me.

6 In my trouble I called to the LORD.
I cried out to my God for help.

From his temple he heard my voice;
my call for help reached his ears.

## Proverbs 6:1–5

### *Dangers of Being Foolish*

6 My child, be careful about giving a guarantee
for somebody else's loan,
about promising to pay what someone else owes.

2 You might get trapped by what you say;
you might be caught by your own words.

3 My child, if you have done this and are under your neighbor's control,
here is how to get free.

Don't be proud. Go to your neighbor
and beg to be free from your promise.

4 Don't go to sleep
or even rest your eyes,

5 but free yourself like a deer running from a hunter,
like a bird flying away from a trapper.

## Matthew 20:17–34

### *Jesus Talks About His Own Death*

17 While Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he took his twelve followers aside privately and said to them, 18 "Look, we are going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be turned over to the leading priests and the teachers of the law, and they will say that he must die. 19 They will give the Son of Man to the non-Jewish people to laugh at him and beat him with whips and crucify him. But on the third day, he will be raised to life again."

### *A Mother Asks Jesus a Favor*

20 Then the wife of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons. She bowed before him and asked him to do something for her.
21 Jesus asked, "What do you want?"

She said, “Promise that one of my sons will sit at your right side and the other will sit at your left side in your kingdom.”

22But Jesus said, “You don’t understand what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink?”[n]

The sons answered, “Yes, we can.”

23Jesus said to them, “You will drink from my cup. But I cannot choose who will sit at my right or my left; those places belong to those for whom my Father has prepared them.”

24When the other ten followers heard this, they were angry with the two brothers.

25Jesus called all the followers together and said, “You know that the rulers of the non-Jewish people love to show their power over the people. And their important leaders love to use all their authority. 26But it should not be that way among you. Whoever wants to become great among you must serve the rest of you like a servant. 27Whoever wants to become first among you must serve the rest of you like a slave. 28In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people.”

## *Jesus Heals Two Blind Men*

29When Jesus and his followers were leaving Jericho, a great many people followed him. 30Two blind men sitting by the road heard that Jesus was going by, so they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

31The people warned the blind men to be quiet, but they shouted even more, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

32Jesus stopped and said to the blind men, “What do you want me to do for you?”

33They answered, “Lord, we want to see.”

34Jesus felt sorry for the blind men and touched their eyes, and at once they could see. Then they followed Jesus.

# February 1

## God Goes with Us

*The LORD showed them the way; during the day he went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud, and during the night he was in a pillar of fire to give them light.*

Exodus 13:21

When God calls us into the deep valley of death, he will be with us. Dare we think that he would abandon us in the moment of death? ... Would the shepherd require his sheep to journey to the highlands alone? Of course not. Would God require his child to journey to eternity alone? Absolutely not! He is with you!

What God said to Moses, he says to you: "I myself will go with you, and I will give you victory" (Exodus 33:14).

What God said to Jacob, he says to you: "I am with you and will protect you everywhere you go" (Genesis 28:15).

What God said to Joshua, he says to you: "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forget you" (Joshua 1:5).

from *Traveling Light*

### Exodus 13:1—14:31

#### *The Law of the Firstborn*

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, 2"Give every firstborn male to
me. Every firstborn male among the Israelites belongs to me,
whether human or animal."

3Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, the day you
left Egypt. You were slaves in that land, but the LORD with his
great power brought you out of it. You must not eat bread made
with yeast. 4Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving Egypt.
5The LORD will lead you to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites,
Amorites, Hivites, and Jebusites. This is the land he promised
your ancestors he would give you, a fertile land. There you must

celebrate this feast during the first month of every year. [6]For seven days you must eat bread made without yeast, and on the seventh day there will be a feast to honor the LORD. [7]So for seven days you must not eat any bread made with yeast. There must be no bread made with yeast anywhere in your land. [8]On that day you should tell your son: 'We are having this feast because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' [9]This feast will help you remember, like a mark on your hand or a reminder on your forehead. This feast will remind you to speak the LORD's teachings, because the LORD used his great power to bring you out of Egypt. [10]So celebrate this feast every year at the right time.

[11]"And when the LORD takes you into the land of the Canaanites, the land he promised to give you and your ancestors, [12]you must give him every firstborn male. Also every firstborn male animal must be given to the LORD. [13]Buy back every firstborn donkey by offering a lamb. But if you don't want to buy the donkey back, then break its neck. You must buy back from the LORD every firstborn of your sons.

[14]"From now on when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you will answer, 'With his great power, the LORD brought us out from Egypt, the land where we were slaves. [15]The king of Egypt was stubborn and refused to let us leave. But the LORD killed every firstborn male in Egypt, both human and animal. That is why I sacrifice every firstborn male animal to the LORD, and that is why I buy back each of my firstborn sons from the LORD.' [16]This feast is like a mark on your hand and a reminder on your forehead to help you remember that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his great power."

## *The Way Out of Egypt*

[17]When the king sent the people out of Egypt, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was the shortest way. God said, "If they have to fight, they might change their minds and go back to Egypt." [18]So God led them through the desert toward the Red Sea. The Israelites were dressed for fighting when they left the land of Egypt.

[19]Moses carried the bones of Joseph with him, because before Joseph died, he had made the Israelites promise to do this. He had said, "When God saves you, remember to carry my bones with you out of Egypt."

[20]The Israelites left Succoth and camped at Etham, on the edge of the desert. [21]The LORD showed them the way; during the day he went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud, and during the night he was in a pillar of fire to give them light. In this way they could travel during the day or night. [22]The pillar of cloud was always with them during the day, and the pillar of fire was

always with them at night.
14 Then the LORD said to Moses, 2"Tell the Israelites to turn back
to Pi Hahiroth and to camp between Migdol and the Red Sea.
Camp across from Baal Zephon, on the shore of the sea. 3The
king will think, 'The Israelites are lost, trapped by the desert.' 4I
will make the king stubborn again so he will chase after them,
but I will defeat the king and his army. This will bring honor to
me, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." The
Israelites did just as they were told.

## *The King Chases the Israelites*

5When the king of Egypt was told that the Israelites had left,
he and his officers changed their minds about them. They said,
"What have we done? We have let the Israelites leave. We have
lost our slaves!" 6So the king prepared his war chariot and took
his army with him. 7He took six hundred of his best chariots,
together with all the other chariots of Egypt, each with an
officer in it. 8The LORD made the king of Egypt stubborn, so he
chased the Israelites, who were leaving victoriously. 9The
Egyptians—with all the king's horses, chariot drivers, and army
—chased the Israelites. They caught up with them while they
were camped by the Red Sea, near Pi Hahiroth and Baal
Zephon.

10When the Israelites saw the king and his army coming after
them, they were very frightened and cried to the LORD for help.
11They said to Moses, "What have you done to us? Why did you
bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert? There were plenty of
graves for us in Egypt. 12We told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone; we
will stay and serve the Egyptians.' Now we will die in the
desert."

13But Moses answered, "Don't be afraid! Stand still and you
will see the LORD save you today. You will never see these
Egyptians again after today. 14You only need to remain calm; the
LORD will fight for you."

15Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to
me? Command the Israelites to start moving. 16Raise your
walking stick and hold it over the sea so that the sea will split
and the people can cross it on dry land. 17I will make the
Egyptians stubborn so they will chase the Israelites, but I will
be honored when I defeat the king and all of his chariot drivers
and chariots. 18When I defeat the king, his chariot drivers, and
chariots, the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD."

19Now the angel of God that usually traveled in front of
Israel's army moved behind them. Also, the pillar of cloud
moved from in front of the people and stood behind them. 20So
the cloud came between the Egyptians and the Israelites. This
made it dark for the Egyptians but gave light to the Israelites.

So the cloud kept the two armies apart all night.

21Then Moses held his hand over the sea. All that night the LORD drove back the sea with a strong east wind, making the sea become dry ground. The water was split, 22and the Israelites went through the sea on dry land, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

23Then all the king's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers followed them into the sea. 24When morning came, the LORD looked down from the pillar of cloud and fire at the Egyptian army and made them panic. 25He kept the wheels of the chariots from turning, making it hard to drive the chariots. The Egyptians shouted, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them and against Egypt."

26Then the LORD told Moses, "Hold your hand over the sea so that the water will come back over the Egyptians, their chariots, and chariot drivers." 27So Moses raised his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its place. The Egyptians tried to run from it, but the LORD swept them away into the sea. 28The water returned, covering the chariots, chariot drivers, and all the king's army that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

29But the Israelites crossed the sea on dry land, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. 30So that day the LORD saved the Israelites from the Egyptians, and the Israelites saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore. 31When the Israelites saw the great power the LORD had used against the Egyptians, they feared the LORD, and they trusted him and his servant Moses.

## Psalm 18:7–19

7The earth trembled and shook.
The foundations of the mountains began to shake.
They trembled because the LORD was angry.

8Smoke came out of his nose,
and burning fire came out of his mouth.
Burning coals went before him.

9He tore open the sky and came down
with dark clouds under his feet.

10 He rode a creature with wings and flew.
He raced on the wings of the wind.

11 He made darkness his covering, his shelter around him,
surrounded by fog and clouds.

12 Out of the brightness of his presence came clouds
with hail and lightning.

13 The LORD thundered from heaven;
the Most High raised his voice,
and there was hail and lightning.

14 He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies.
His many bolts of lightning confused them with fear.

15 LORD, you spoke strongly.
The wind blew from your nose.

Then the valleys of the sea appeared,
and the foundations of the earth were seen.

16 The LORD reached down from above and took me;
he pulled me from the deep water.

17 He saved me from my powerful enemies,
from those who hated me, because they were too strong for me.

18 They attacked me at my time of trouble,
but the LORD supported me.

19 He took me to a safe place.
Because he delights in me, he saved me.

## Proverbs 6:6–11

6 Go watch the ants, you lazy person.
Watch what they do and be wise.

7 Ants have no commander,
no leader or ruler,

8 but they store up food in the summer
and gather their supplies at harvest.

9 How long will you lie there, you lazy person?
When will you get up from sleeping?

10 You sleep a little; you take a nap.
You fold your hands and lie down to rest.

11 So you will be as poor as if you had been robbed;
you will have as little as if you had been held up.

## Matthew 21:1–22

### *Jesus Enters Jerusalem as a King*

21 As Jesus and his followers were coming closer to Jerusalem,
they stopped at Bethphage at the hill called the Mount of
Olives. From there Jesus sent two of his followers 2 and said to
them, “Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it, you
will quickly find a donkey tied there with its colt. Untie them
and bring them to me. 3 If anyone asks you why you are taking
the donkeys, say that the Master needs them, and he will send
them at once.”
4 This was to bring about what the prophet had said:

5 “Tell the people of Jerusalem,

‘Your king is coming to you.

He is gentle and riding on a donkey,
on the colt of a donkey.’”

Isaiah 62:11; Zechariah 9:9

6The followers went and did what Jesus told them to do.
7They brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus and laid their
coats on them, and Jesus sat on them. 8Many people spread
their coats on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and
spread them on the road. 9The people were walking ahead of
Jesus and behind him, shouting,

“Praise[n] to the Son of David!

God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Psalm 118:26

Praise to God in heaven!”

10When Jesus entered Jerusalem, all the city was filled with
excitement. The people asked, “Who is this man?”
11The crowd said, “This man is Jesus, the prophet from the
town of Nazareth in Galilee.”

## *Jesus Goes to the Temple*

12Jesus went into the Temple and threw out all the people
who were buying and selling there. He turned over the tables of
those who were exchanging different kinds of money, and he
upset the benches of those who were selling doves. 13Jesus said
to all the people there, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘My
Temple will be called a house for prayer.’[n] But you are changing
it into a ‘hideout for robbers.’”[n]
14The blind and crippled people came to Jesus in the Temple,
and he healed them. 15The leading priests and the teachers of
the law saw that Jesus was doing wonderful things and that the
children were praising him in the Temple, saying, “Praise[n] to
the Son of David.” All these things made the priests and the
teachers of the law very angry.
16They asked Jesus, “Do you hear the things these children
are saying?”
Jesus answered, “Yes. Haven’t you read in the Scriptures,

‘You have taught children and babies to sing praises’?”[n]

17 Then Jesus left and went out of the city to Bethany, where
he spent the night.

## *The Power of Faith*

18 Early the next morning, as Jesus was going back to the city,
he became hungry. 19 Seeing a fig tree beside the road, Jesus
went to it, but there were no figs on the tree, only leaves. So
Jesus said to the tree, “You will never again have fruit.” The tree
immediately dried up.

20 When his followers saw this, they were amazed. They
asked, “How did the fig tree dry up so quickly?”

21 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and
do not doubt, you will be able to do what I did to this tree and
even more. You will be able to say to this mountain, ‘Go, fall into
the sea.’ And if you have faith, it will happen. 22 If you believe,
you will get anything you ask for in prayer.”

# February 2

## Enough for Today

*"I will cause food to fall like rain from the sky for all of you. Every day the people must go out and gather what they need for that day."*

Exodus 16:4

God liberated his children from slavery and created a path through the sea. He gave them a cloud to follow in the day and a fire to see at night. And he gave them food. He met their most basic need: He filled their bellies.

Each morning the manna came. Each evening the quail appeared. "Trust me. Trust me and I will give you what you need." The people were told to take just enough for one day. Their needs would be met, one day at a time.

"Just take enough for today," was God's message. "Let me worry about tomorrow."

The Father wanted the people to trust him.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Exodus 15:1—16:36

### *The Song of Moses*

15 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

"I will sing to the LORD,
because he is worthy of great honor.

He has thrown the horse and its rider
into the sea.

[2]The LORD gives me strength and makes me sing;
he has saved me.

He is my God,
and I will praise him.

He is the God of my ancestors,
and I will honor him.

[3]The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.

[4]The chariots and soldiers of the king of Egypt
he has thrown into the sea.

The king's best officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.

[5]The deep waters covered them,
and they sank to the bottom like a rock.

[6]Your right hand, LORD,
is amazingly strong.

LORD, your right hand
broke the enemy to pieces.

[7]In your great victory
you destroyed those who were against you.

Your anger destroyed them,
like fire burning straw.

[8]Just a blast of your breath,
and the waters piled up.

The moving water stood like a wall;
the deep waters became solid in the middle of the sea.

9 “The enemy bragged,
‘I’ll chase them and catch them.

I’ll take all their riches;
I’ll take all I want.

I’ll pull out my sword,
and my hand will destroy them.’

10 But you blew on them with your breath
and covered them with the sea.

They sank like lead
in the raging water.

11 “Are there any gods like you, LORD?
There are no gods like you.
You are wonderfully holy,
amazingly powerful,
a worker of miracles.

12 You reached out with your right hand,
and the earth swallowed our enemies.

13 You keep your loving promise
and lead the people you have saved.

With your strength you will guide them
to your holy place.

14 “The other nations will hear this and tremble with fear;
terror will take hold of the Philistines.

15 The leaders of the tribes of Edom will be very frightened;

the powerful men of Moab will shake with fear;
the people of Canaan will lose all their courage.

16 Terror and horror will fall on them.

When they see your strength,
they will be as still as a rock.

They will be still until your people pass by, LORD.
They will be still until the people you have taken as your own pass by.

17 You will lead your people and place them
on your very own mountain,

the place that you, LORD, made for yourself to live,
the temple, LORD, that your hands have made.

18 The LORD will be king forever!”
19 The horses, chariot drivers, and chariots of the king of Egypt went into the sea, and the LORD covered them with water from the sea. But the Israelites walked through the sea on dry land. 20 Then Aaron’s sister Miriam, a prophetess, took a tambourine in her hand. All the women followed her, playing tambourines and dancing. 21 Miriam told them:

“Sing to the LORD,
because he is worthy of great honor;

he has thrown the horse and its rider
into the sea.”

## *Bitter Water Becomes Good*

22 Moses led the Israelites away from the Red Sea into the Desert of Shur. They traveled for three days in the desert but

found no water. 23Then they came to Marah, where there was water, but they could not drink it because it was too bitter. (That is why the place was named Marah.[n]) 24The people grumbled to Moses and asked, “What will we drink?”

25So Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When Moses threw the tree into the water, the water became good to drink.

There the LORD gave the people a rule and a law to live by, and there he tested their loyalty to him. 26He said, “You must obey the LORD your God and do what he says is right. If you obey all his commands and keep his rules, I will not bring on you any of the sicknesses I brought on the Egyptians. I am the LORD who heals you.”

27Then the people traveled to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. So the people camped there near the water.

## *The People Demand Food*

16 The whole Israelite community left Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which was between Elim and Sinai; they arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left Egypt. 2Then the whole Israelite community grumbled to Moses and Aaron in the desert. 3They said to them, “It would have been better if the LORD had killed us in the land of Egypt. There we had meat to eat and all the food we wanted. But you have brought us into this desert to starve us to death.”

4Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will cause food to fall like rain from the sky for all of you. Every day the people must go out and gather what they need for that day. I want to see if the people will do what I teach them. 5On the sixth day of each week, they are to gather twice as much as they gather on other days. Then they are to prepare it.”

6So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites: “This evening you will know that the LORD is the one who brought you out of Egypt. 7Tomorrow morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard you grumble against him. We are nothing, so you are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.” 8And Moses said, “Each evening the LORD will give you meat to eat, and every morning he will give you all the bread you want, because he has heard you grumble against him. You are not grumbling against Aaron and me, because we are nothing; you are grumbling against the LORD.”

9Then Moses said to Aaron, “Speak to the whole community of the Israelites, and say to them, ‘Meet together in the presence of the LORD, because he has heard your grumblings.’”

10While Aaron was speaking to the whole community of the Israelites, they looked toward the desert. There the glory of the

LORD appeared in a cloud.

11The LORD said to Moses, 12"I have heard the grumblings of
the people of Israel. So tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat,
and every morning you will eat all the bread you want. Then you
will know I am the LORD your God.'"

13That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the
morning dew lay around the camp. 14When the dew was gone,
thin flakes like frost were on the desert ground. 15When the
Israelites saw it, they asked each other, "What is it?" because
they did not know what it was.

So Moses told them, "This is the bread the LORD has given
you to eat. 16The LORD has commanded, 'Each one of you must
gather what he needs, about two quarts for every person in
your family.'"

17So the people of Israel did this; some people gathered
much, and some gathered little. 18Then they measured it. The
person who gathered more did not have too much, nor did the
person who gathered less have too little. Each person gathered
just as much as he needed.

19Moses said to them, "Don't keep any of it to eat the next
day." 20But some of the people did not listen to Moses and kept
part of it to eat the next morning. It became full of worms and
began to stink, so Moses was angry with those people.

21Every morning each person gathered as much food as he
needed, but when the sun became hot, it melted away.

22On the sixth day the people gathered twice as much food—
four quarts for every person. When all the leaders of the
community came and told this to Moses, 23he said to them,
"This is what the LORD commanded, because tomorrow is the
Sabbath, the LORD's holy day of rest. Bake what you want to
bake, and boil what you want to boil today. Save the rest of the
food until tomorrow morning."

24So the people saved it until the next morning, as Moses
had commanded, and none of it began to stink or have worms in
it. 25Moses told the people, "Eat the food you gathered
yesterday. Today is a Sabbath, the LORD's day of rest; you will
not find any out in the field today. 26You should gather the food
for six days, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day. On that day
there will not be any food on the ground."

27On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather
food, but they couldn't find any. 28Then the LORD said to Moses,
"How long will you people refuse to obey my commands and
teachings? 29Look, the LORD has made the Sabbath a day of rest
for you. So on the sixth day he will give you enough food for two
days, but on the seventh day each of you must stay where you
are. Do not go anywhere." 30So the people rested on the
seventh day.

31The people of Israel called the food manna. It was like

small white seeds and tasted like wafers made with honey.

32Then Moses said, “The LORD said, ‘Save two quarts of this
food for your descendants. Then they can see the food I gave
you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.’”

33Moses told Aaron, “Take a jar and fill it with two quarts of
manna. Then place it before the LORD, and save it for your
descendants.” 34So Aaron did what the LORD had commanded
Moses. He put the jar of manna in front of the Agreement to
keep it safe. 35The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until
they came to the land where they settled—the edge of the land
of Canaan. 36The measure they used for the manna was two
quarts, or one-tenth of an ephah.[n]

## Psalm 18:20–29

20The LORD spared me because I did what was right.
Because I have not done evil, he has rewarded me.

21I have followed the ways of the LORD;
I have not done evil by turning away from my God.

22I remember all his laws
and have not broken his rules.

23I am innocent before him;
I have kept myself from doing evil.

24The LORD rewarded me because I did what was right,
because I did what the LORD said was right.

25LORD, you are loyal to those who are loyal,
and you are good to those who are good.

26You are pure to those who are pure,
but you are against those who are bad.

27 You save the humble,
but you bring down those who are proud.

28 LORD, you give light to my lamp.
My God brightens the darkness around me.

29 With your help I can attack an army.
With God's help I can jump over a wall.

## Proverbs 6:12–15

12 Some people are wicked and no good.
They go around telling lies,

13 winking with their eyes, tapping with their feet,
and making signs with their fingers.

14 They make evil plans in their hearts
and are always starting arguments.

15 So trouble will strike them in an instant;
suddenly they will be so hurt no one can help them.

## Matthew 21:23–46

### *Leaders Doubt Jesus' Authority*

23 Jesus went to the Temple, and while he was teaching there,
the leading priests and the elders of the people came to him.
They said, "What authority do you have to do these things? Who
gave you this authority?"
24 Jesus answered, "I also will ask you a question. If you
answer me, then I will tell you what authority I have to do these
things. 25 Tell me: When John baptized people, did that come
from God or just from other people?"

They argued about Jesus' question, saying, "If we answer, 'John's baptism was from God,' Jesus will say, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' [26]But if we say, 'It was from people,' we are afraid of what the crowd will do because they all believe that John was a prophet."

[27]So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus said to them, "Then I won't tell you what authority I have to do these things.

## *A Story About Two Sons*

[28]"Tell me what you think about this: A man had two sons. He went to the first son and said, 'Son, go and work today in my vineyard.' [29]The son answered, 'I will not go.' But later the son changed his mind and went. [30]Then the father went to the other son and said, 'Son, go and work today in my vineyard.' The son answered, 'Yes, sir, I will go and work,' but he did not go. [31]Which of the two sons obeyed his father?"

The priests and leaders answered, "The first son."

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God before you do. [32]John came to show you the right way to live. You did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Even after seeing this, you still refused to change your ways and believe him.

## *A Story About God's Son*

[33]"Listen to this story: There was a man who owned a vineyard. He put a wall around it and dug a hole for a winepress and built a tower. Then he leased the land to some farmers and left for a trip. [34]When it was time for the grapes to be picked, he sent his servants to the farmers to get his share of the grapes. [35]But the farmers grabbed the servants, beat one, killed another, and then killed a third servant with stones. [36]So the man sent some other servants to the farmers, even more than he sent the first time. But the farmers did the same thing to the servants that they had done before. [37]So the man decided to send his son to the farmers. He said, 'They will respect my son.' [38]But when the farmers saw the son, they said to each other, 'This son will inherit the vineyard. If we kill him, it will be ours!' [39]Then the farmers grabbed the son, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. [40]So what will the owner of the vineyard do to these farmers when he comes?"

[41]The priests and leaders said, "He will surely kill those evil men. Then he will lease the vineyard to some other farmers who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

[42]Jesus said to them, "Surely you have read this in the

Scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
became the cornerstone.

The Lord did this,
and it is wonderful to us.’

Psalm 118:22–23

43 “So I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away
from you and given to people who do the things God wants in
his kingdom. 44 The person who falls on this stone will be
broken, and on whomever that stone falls, that person will be
crushed.” n

45 When the leading priests and the Pharisees heard these
stories, they knew Jesus was talking about them. 46 They wanted
to arrest him, but they were afraid of the people, because the
people believed that Jesus was a prophet.

# February 3

## The Cure for Disappointment

*The ways of God are without fault.*

Psalm 18:30

when God doesn't do what we want, it's not easy. Never has been. Never will be. But faith is the conviction that God knows more than we do about this life and he will get us through it.

Remember, disappointment is cured by revamped expectations.

I like the story about the fellow who went to the pet store in search of a singing parakeet. Seems he was a bachelor and his house was too quiet. The store owner had just the bird for him, so the man bought it.

The next day the bachelor came home from work to a house full of music. He went to the cage to feed the bird and noticed for the first time that the parakeet had only one leg.

He felt cheated that he'd been sold a one-legged bird, so he called and complained.

"What do you want," the store owner responded, "a bird who can sing or a bird who can dance?"

Good question for times of disappointment.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Exodus 17:1—18:27

### *Water from a Rock*

17 The whole Israelite community left the Desert of Sin and traveled from place to place, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. 2So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why are you testing the LORD?"

3But the people were very thirsty for water, so they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Was it to kill us, our children, and our farm animals with thirst?”

4So Moses cried to the LORD, “What can I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me to death.”

5The LORD said to Moses, “Go ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you. Carry with you the walking stick that you used to strike the Nile River. Now go! 6I will stand in front of you on a rock at Mount Sinai. Hit that rock with the stick, and water will come out of it so that the people can drink.” Moses did these things as the elders of Israel watched. 7He named that place Massah,[n] because the Israelites tested the LORD when they asked, “Is the LORD with us or not?” He also named it Meribah,[n] because they quarreled.

## *The Amalekites Fight Israel*

8At Rephidim the Amalekites came and fought the Israelites. 9So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some men and go and fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill, holding the walking stick of God in my hands.”

10Joshua obeyed Moses and went to fight the Amalekites, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites would win the fight, but when Moses put his hands down, the Amalekites would win. 12Later, when Moses’ arms became tired, the men put a large rock under him, and he sat on it. Then Aaron and Hur held up Moses’ hands—Aaron on one side and Hur on the other. They kept his hands steady until the sun went down. 13So Joshua defeated the Amalekites in this battle.

14Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write about this battle in a book so people will remember. And be sure to tell Joshua, because I will completely destroy the Amalekites from the earth.”

15Then Moses built an altar and named it The LORD Is My Banner. 16Moses said, “I lifted my hands toward the LORD’s throne. The LORD will fight against the Amalekites forever.”

## *Jethro Visits Moses*

18 Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, was the priest of Midian. He heard about everything that God had done for Moses and his people, the Israelites, and how the LORD had led the Israelites out of Egypt. 2Now Moses had sent his wife Zipporah to Jethro, his father-in-law, 3along with his two sons. The first son was named Gershom,[n] because when he was born, Moses said, “I am

a stranger in a foreign country.” 4The other son was named Eliezer,[n] because when he was born, Moses said, “The God of my father is my help. He saved me from the king of Egypt.”

5So Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took Moses’ wife and his two sons and went to Moses. He was camped in the desert near the mountain of God. 6Jethro had sent a message ahead to Moses that said, “I, Jethro, your father-in-law, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons.”

7So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. After the two men asked about each other’s health, they went into Moses’ tent. 8Moses told his father-in-law everything the LORD had done to the king and the Egyptians to help Israel. He told about all the problems they had faced along the way and how the LORD had saved them.

9Jethro was very happy to hear all the good things the LORD had done for Israel when he had saved them from the Egyptians. 10He said, “Praise the LORD. He has saved you from the Egyptians and their king, and he has saved the people from the power of the Egyptians. 11Now I know the LORD is greater than all gods, because he did this to those who looked down on Israel.” 12Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, gave a whole burnt offering and other sacrifices to God. Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to Moses’ father-in-law to eat the holy meal together before God.

13The next day Moses solved disagreements among the people, and the people stood around him from morning until night. 14When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he asked, “What is all this you are doing for the people? Why are you the only one to solve disagreements? All the people are standing around you from morning until night!”

15Then Moses said to his father-in-law, “It is because the people come to me for God’s help in solving their disagreements. 16When people have a disagreement, they come to me, and I decide who is right. I tell them God’s laws and teachings.”

17Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “You are not doing this right. 18You and the people who come to you will get too tired. This is too much work for you; you can’t do it by yourself. 19Now listen to me, and I will give you some advice. I want God to be with you. You must speak to God for the people and tell him about their disagreements. 20Warn them about the laws and teachings, and teach them the right way to live and what they should do. 21But choose some capable men from among the people—men who respect God, who can be trusted, and who will not change their decisions for money. Make these men officers over the people, to rule over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. 22Let these officers solve the

disagreements among the people all the time. They can bring the hard cases to you, but they can decide the simple cases themselves. That will make it easier for you, because they will share the work with you. 23If you do this as God commands you, then you will be able to do your job, and all the people will go home with their disagreements solved."

24So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. 25He chose capable men from all the Israelites and made them leaders over the people; they were officers over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. 26These officers solved disagreements among the people all the time. They brought the hard cases to Moses, but they decided the simple cases themselves.

27So Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro went back to his own home.

## Psalm 18:30–42

30The ways of God are without fault.
The LORD's words are pure.

He is a shield to those who trust him.

31Who is God? Only the LORD.
Who is the Rock? Only our God.

32God is my protection.
He makes my way free from fault.

33He makes me like a deer that does not stumble;
he helps me stand on the steep mountains.

34He trains my hands for battle
so my arms can bend a bronze bow.

35You protect me with your saving shield.
You support me with your right hand.

You have stooped to make me great.

36 You give me a better way to live,
so I live as you want me to.

37 I chased my enemies and caught them.
I did not quit until they were destroyed.

38 I crushed them so they couldn’t rise up again.
They fell beneath my feet.

39 You gave me strength in battle.
You made my enemies bow before me.

40 You made my enemies turn back,
and I destroyed those who hated me.

41 They called for help,
but no one came to save them.

They called to the LORD,
but he did not answer them.

42 I beat my enemies into pieces, like dust in the wind.
I poured them out like mud in the streets.

## Proverbs 6:16–19

16 There are six things the LORD hates.
There are seven things he cannot stand:
17 a proud look,
a lying tongue,
hands that kill innocent people,
18 a mind that thinks up evil plans,
feet that are quick to do evil,

19 a witness who lies,
and someone who starts arguments among families.

# Matthew 22:1–22

## *A Story About a Wedding Feast*

22 Jesus again used stories to teach them. He said, 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. 3 The king invited some people to the feast. When the feast was ready, the king sent his servants to tell the people, but they refused to come.

4 "Then the king sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited that my feast is ready. I have killed my best bulls and calves for the dinner, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'

5 "But the people refused to listen to the servants and left to do other things. One went to work in his field, and another went to his business. 6 Some of the other people grabbed the servants, beat them, and killed them. 7 The king was furious and sent his army to kill the murderers and burn their city.

8 "After that, the king said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready. I invited those people, but they were not worthy to come. 9 So go to the street corners and invite everyone you find to come to my feast.' 10 So the servants went into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man who was not dressed for a wedding. 12 The king said, 'Friend, how were you allowed to come in here? You are not dressed for a wedding.' But the man said nothing. 13 So the king told some servants, 'Tie this man's hands and feet. Throw him out into the darkness, where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.'

14 "Yes, many are invited, but only a few are chosen."

## *Is It Right to Pay Taxes or Not?*

15 Then the Pharisees left that place and made plans to trap Jesus in saying something wrong. 16 They sent some of their own followers and some people from the group called Herodians.[n] They said, "Teacher, we know that you are an honest man and that you teach the truth about God's way. You are not afraid of what other people think about you, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 So tell us what you think. Is it right

to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

18But knowing that these leaders were trying to trick him,
Jesus said, “You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me?
19Show me a coin used for paying the tax.” So the men showed
him a coin.[n] 20Then Jesus asked, “Whose image and name are
on the coin?”

21The men answered, “Caesar’s.”

Then Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar the things that are
Caesar’s, and give to God the things that are God’s.”

22When the men heard what Jesus said, they were amazed
and left him and went away.

# February 4

## A Quiet Day of Rest

*"Remember to keep the Sabbath holy."*

Exodus 20:8

Ever feel the wheels of your life racing faster and faster as you speed past the people you love? Could you use a reminder on how to slow it all down? If so, read what Jesus did during the last Sabbath of his life. Start in the Gospel of Matthew. Didn't find anything? Try Mark. Read what Mark recorded about the way Jesus spent the Sabbath. Nothing there either? Strange. What about Luke? What does Luke say? Not a reference to the day? Not a word about it? Well, try John. Surely John mentions the Sabbath. He doesn't? No reference? Hmmmm. Looks like Jesus was quiet that day.

"Wait a minute. That's it?" That's it.

"You mean with one week left to live, Jesus observed the Sabbath?" As far as we can tell.

"You mean with all those apostles to train and people to teach, he took a day to rest and worship?" Apparently so.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Exodus 19:1—20:26

### *Israel Camps at Sinai*

19 Exactly three months after the Israelites had left Egypt, they
reached the Desert of Sinai. 2When they left Rephidim, they
came to the Desert of Sinai and camped in the desert in front of
the mountain. 3Then Moses went up on the mountain to God.
The LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "Say this to
the family of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4'Every one of
you has seen what I did to the people of Egypt. You saw how I
carried you out of Egypt, as if on eagle's wings. And I brought
you here to me. 5So now if you obey me and keep my

agreement, you will be my own possession, chosen from all nations. Even though the whole earth is mine, [6]you will be my kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' You must tell the Israelites these words."

[7]So Moses went down and called the elders of the people together. He told them all the words the LORD had commanded him to say. [8]All the people answered together, "We will do everything he has said." Then Moses took their answer back to the LORD.

[9]And the LORD said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud and speak to you. The people will hear me speaking with you and will always trust you." Then Moses told the LORD what the people had said.

[10]The LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and have them spend today and tomorrow preparing themselves. They must wash their clothes [11]and be ready by the day after tomorrow. On that day I, the LORD, will come down on Mount Sinai, and all the people will see me. [12]But you must set a limit around the mountain that the people are not to cross. Tell them not to go up on the mountain and not to touch the foot of it. Anyone who touches the mountain must be put to death [13]with stones or shot with arrows. No one is allowed to touch him. Whether it is a person or an animal, he will not live. But the trumpet will make a long blast, and only then may the people go up on the mountain."

[14]After Moses went down from the mountain to the people, he made them prepare themselves for service to God, and they washed their clothes. [15]Then Moses said to the people, "Be ready in three days. Do not have sexual relations during this time."

[16]On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud on the mountain. There was a very loud blast from a trumpet, and all the people in the camp trembled. [17]Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. [18]Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD came down on it in fire. The smoke rose from the mountain like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain shook wildly. [19]The sound from the trumpet became louder. Then Moses spoke, and the voice of God answered him.

[20]When the LORD came down on top of Mount Sinai, he called Moses to come up to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. [21]The LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people that they must not force their way through to see me. If they do, many of them will die. [22]Even the priests, who may come near me, must first prepare themselves. If they don't, I, the LORD, will punish them."

[23]Moses told the LORD, "The people cannot come up on

Mount Sinai, because you yourself told us, ‘Set a limit around the mountain, and set it apart as holy.’”

24The LORD said to him, “Go down and bring Aaron up with you, but don’t allow the priests or the people to force their way through. They must not come up to the LORD, or I will punish them.”

25So Moses went down to the people and told them these things.

## *The Ten Commandments*

20 Then God spoke all these words: 2“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves.

3“You must not have any other gods except me.

4“You must not make for yourselves an idol that looks like anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the water below the land. 5You must not worship or serve any idol, because I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God. If you hate me, I will punish your children, and even your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. 6But I show kindness to thousands who love me and obey my commands.

7“You must not use the name of the LORD your God thoughtlessly; the LORD will punish anyone who misuses his name.

8“Remember to keep the Sabbath holy. 9Work and get everything done during six days each week, 10but the seventh day is a day of rest to honor the LORD your God. On that day no one may do any work: not you, your son or daughter, your male or female slaves, your animals, or the foreigners living in your cities. 11The reason is that in six days the LORD made everything —the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. On the seventh day he rested. So the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12“Honor your father and your mother so that you will live a long time in the land that the LORD your God is going to give you.

13“You must not murder anyone.

14“You must not be guilty of adultery.

15“You must not steal.

16“You must not tell lies about your neighbor.

17“You must not want to take your neighbor’s house. You must not want his wife or his male or female slaves, or his ox or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

18When the people heard the thunder and the trumpet, and when they saw the lightning and the smoke rising from the mountain, they shook with fear and stood far away from the mountain. 19Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself, and

we will listen. But don't let God speak to us, or we will die."
20Then Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid, because
God has come to test you. He wants you to respect him so you
will not sin."
21The people stood far away from the mountain while Moses
went near the dark cloud where God was. 22Then the LORD told
Moses to say these things to the Israelites: "You yourselves
have seen that I talked with you from heaven. 23You must not
use gold or silver to make idols for yourselves; do not worship
these gods in addition to me.
24"Make an altar of dirt for me, and sacrifice on it your whole
burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and your
cattle. Worship me in every place that I choose, and I will come
and bless you. 25If you use stones to make an altar for me, don't
use stones that you have shaped with tools. When you use any
tools on them, you make them unsuitable for use in worship.
26And you must not go up to my altar on steps, or people will be
able to see under your clothes."

## Psalm 18:43–45

43You saved me when the people attacked me.
You made me the leader of nations.
People I never knew serve me.

44As soon as they hear me, they obey me.
Foreigners obey me.

45They all become afraid
and tremble in their hiding places.

## Proverbs 6:20–25

### *Warning About Adultery*

20My son, keep your father's commands,

and don’t forget your mother’s teaching.

21 Keep their words in mind forever
as though you had them tied around your neck.

22 They will guide you when you walk.
They will guard you when you sleep.
They will speak to you when you are awake.

23 These commands are like a lamp;
this teaching is like a light.

And the correction that comes from them
will help you have life.

24 They will keep you from sinful women
and from the pleasing words of another man’s unfaithful wife.

25 Don’t desire her because she is beautiful.
Don’t let her capture you by the way she looks at you.

## Matthew 22:23–46

### *Some Sadducees Try to Trick Jesus*

23 That same day some Sadducees came to Jesus and asked him a question. (Sadducees believed that people would not rise from the dead.) 24 They said, “Teacher, Moses said if a married man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. 25 Once there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died. Since he had no children, his brother married the widow. 26 Then the second brother also died. The same thing happened to the third brother and all the other brothers. 27 Finally, the woman died. 28 Since all seven men had married her, when people rise from the dead, whose wife will she be?”

29 Jesus answered, “You don’t understand, because you don’t

know what the Scriptures say, and you don't know about the power of God. [30]When people rise from the dead, they will not marry, nor will they be given to someone to marry. They will be like the angels in heaven. [31]Surely you have read what God said to you about rising from the dead. [32]God said, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'[n] God is the God of the living, not the dead."

[33]When the people heard this, they were amazed at Jesus' teaching.

## *The Most Important Command*

[34]When the Pharisees learned that the Sadducees could not argue with Jesus' answers to them, the Pharisees met together. [35]One Pharisee, who was an expert on the law of Moses, asked Jesus this question to test him: [36]"Teacher, which command in the law is the most important?"

[37]Jesus answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'[n] [38]This is the first and most important command. [39]And the second command is like the first: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'[n] [40]All the law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commands."

## *Jesus Questions the Pharisees*

[41]While the Pharisees were together, Jesus asked them, [42]"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"

They answered, "The Christ is the Son of David."

[43]Then Jesus said to them, "Then why did David call him 'Lord'? David, speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit, said,

[44]"'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit by me at my right side,
until I put your enemies under your control."'

Psalm 110:1

[45]David calls the Christ 'Lord,' so how can the Christ be his son?"

[46]None of the Pharisees could answer Jesus' question, and after that day no one was brave enough to ask him any more questions.

# February 5

## Simplify Your Faith

*"You have only one Master, the Christ."*

Matthew 23:10

There are some who position themselves between you and God. There are some who suggest the only way to get to God is through them. There is the great teacher who has the final word on Bible teaching. There is the father who must bless your acts. There is the spiritual master who will tell you what God wants you to do. Jesus' message for complicated religion is to remove these middlemen. "You have only one Master, the Christ."

He's not saying that you don't need teachers, elders, or counselors. He is saying, however, that we are all brothers and sisters and have equal access to the Father. Simplify your faith by seeking God for yourself. No confusing ceremonies necessary. No mysterious rituals required. No elaborate channels of command or levels of access.

You have a Bible? You can study. You have a heart? You can pray. You have a mind? You can think.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## Exodus 21:1—22:31

### *Laws for Living*

21 Then God said to Moses, "These are the laws for living that
you will give to the Israelites:

2"If you buy a Hebrew slave, he will serve you for six years.
In the seventh year you are to set him free, and he will have to
pay nothing. 3If he is not married when he becomes your slave,
he must leave without a wife. But if he is married when he
becomes your slave, he may take his wife with him. 4If the
slave's master gives him a wife, and she gives birth to sons or
daughters, the woman and her children will belong to the

master. When the slave is set free, only he may leave.
5“But if the slave says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my
children, and I don’t want to go free,’ 6then the slave’s master
must take him to God. The master is to take him to a door or
doorframe and punch a hole through the slave’s ear using a
sharp tool. Then the slave will serve that master all his life.
7“If a man sells his daughter as a slave, the rules for setting
her free are different from the rules for setting the male slaves
free. 8If the master wanted to marry her but then decided he
was not pleased with her, he must let one of her close relatives
buy her back. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because
he has treated her unfairly. 9If the man who bought her
promises to let the woman marry his son, he must treat her as a
daughter. 10If the man who bought her marries another woman,
he must not keep his first wife from having food or clothing or
sexual relations. 11If he does not give her these three things,
she may go free, and she owes him no money.

## *Laws About Injuries*

12“Anyone who hits a person and kills him must be put to
death. 13But if a person kills someone accidentally, God allowed
that to happen, so the person must go to a place I will choose.
14But if someone plans and murders another person on purpose,
put him to death, even if he has run to my altar for safety.
15“Anyone who hits his father or his mother must be put to
death.
16“Anyone who kidnaps someone and either sells him as a
slave or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.
17“Anyone who says cruel things to his father or mother must
be put to death.
18“If two men argue, and one hits the other with a rock or
with his fist, the one who is hurt but not killed might have to
stay in bed. 19Later if he is able to get up and walk around
outside with his walking stick, the one who hit him is not to be
punished. But he must pay the injured man for the loss of his
time, and he must support the injured man until he is
completely healed.
20“If a man beats his male or female slave with a stick, and
the slave dies on the spot, the owner must be punished. 21But if
the slave gets well after a day or two, the owner will not be
punished since the slave belongs to him.
22“Suppose two men are fighting and hit a pregnant woman,
causing the baby to come out. If there is no further injury, the
man who caused the accident must pay money—whatever
amount the woman’s husband says and the court allows. 23But if
there is further injury, then the punishment that must be paid is
life for life, 24eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for

foot, [25]burn for burn, wound for wound, and bruise for bruise.

[26]"If a man hits his male or female slave in the eye, and the eye is blinded, the man is to free the slave to pay for the eye.[27]If a master knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, the man is to free the slave to pay for the tooth.

[28]"If a man's bull kills a man or woman, you must kill that bull by throwing stones at it, and you should not eat the bull. But the owner of the bull is not guilty. [29]However, suppose the bull has hurt people in the past and the owner, though warned, did not keep it in a pen. Then if it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned to death, and the owner must also be put to death. [30]But if the family of the dead person accepts money, the one who owned the bull may buy back his life, but he must pay whatever is demanded. [31]Use this same law if the bull kills a person's son or daughter. [32]If the bull kills a male or female slave, the owner must pay the master the price for a new slave, or twelve ounces of silver, and the bull must also be stoned to death.

[33]"If a man takes the cover off a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and another man's ox or donkey comes and falls into it, [34]the owner of the pit must pay the owner of the animal for the loss. The dead animal will belong to the one who pays.

[35]"If a man's bull kills another man's bull, they must sell the bull that is alive. Both men will get half of the money and half of the bull that was killed. [36]But if a person's bull has hurt other animals in the past and the owner did not keep it in a pen, that owner must pay bull for bull, and the dead animal is his.

## *Property Laws*

[22] "If a man steals a bull or a sheep and kills or sells it, he must pay back five bulls for the one bull he stole and four sheep for the one sheep he stole.

[2–4]"The robber who is caught must pay back what he stole. If he owns nothing, he must be sold as a slave to pay for what he stole. If the stolen animal is found alive with the robber, he must give the owner two animals for every animal he stole, whether it was a bull, donkey, or sheep.

"If a thief is killed while breaking into a house at night, the one who killed him is not guilty of murder. But if this happens during the day, he is guilty of murder.

[5]"If a man lets his farm animal graze in his field or vineyard, and it wanders into another man's field or vineyard, the owner of the animal must pay back the loss from the best of his crop.

[6]"Suppose a man starts a fire that spreads through the thornbushes to his neighbor's field. If the fire burns his neighbor's growing grain or grain that has been stacked, or if it burns his whole field, the person who started the fire must pay

for what was burned.

7"Suppose a man gives his neighbor money or other things to keep for him and those things are stolen from the neighbor's house. If the thief is caught, he must pay back twice as much as he stole. 8But if the thief is never found, the owner of the house must make a promise before God that he has not stolen his neighbor's things.

9"Suppose two men disagree about who owns something—whether ox, donkey, sheep, clothing, or something else that is lost. If each says, 'This is mine,' each man must bring his case to God. God's judges will decide who is guilty, and that person must pay the other man twice as much as the object is worth.

10"Suppose a man asks his neighbor to keep his donkey, ox, sheep, or some other animal for him, and that animal dies, gets hurt, or is taken away, without anyone seeing what happened. 11That neighbor must promise before the LORD that he did not harm or kill the other man's animal, and the owner of the animal must accept his promise made before God. The neighbor does not have to pay the owner for the animal. 12But if the animal was stolen from the neighbor, he must pay the owner for it. 13If wild animals killed it, the neighbor must bring the body as proof, and he will not have to pay for the animal that was killed.

14"If a man borrows an animal from his neighbor, and it gets hurt or dies while the owner is not there, the one who borrowed it must pay the owner for the animal. 15But if the owner is with the animal, the one who borrowed it does not have to pay. If the animal was rented, the rental price covers the loss.

## *Laws and Relationships*

16"Suppose a man finds a woman who is not pledged to be married and has never had sexual relations with a man. If he tricks her into having sexual relations with him, he must give her family the payment to marry her, and she will become his wife. 17But if her father refuses to allow his daughter to marry him, the man must still give the usual payment for a bride who has never had sexual relations.

18"Put to death any woman who does evil magic.

19"Put to death anyone who has sexual relations with an animal.

20"Destroy completely any person who makes a sacrifice to any god except the LORD.

21"Do not cheat or hurt a foreigner, because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

22"Do not cheat a widow or an orphan. 23If you do, and they cry out to me for help, I certainly will hear their cry. 24And I will be very angry and kill you in war. Then your wives will become

widows, and your children will become orphans.

25 “If you lend money to one of my people who is poor, do not
treat him as a moneylender would. Charge him nothing for
using your money. 26 If your neighbor gives you his coat as a
promise for the money he owes you, you must give it back to
him by sunset, 27 because it is the only cover to keep his body
warm. He has nothing else to sleep in. If he cries out to me for
help, I will listen, because I am merciful.

28 “You must not speak against God or curse a leader of your
people.

29 “Do not hold back your offering from the first of your
harvest and the first wine that you make. Also, you must give
me your firstborn sons. 30 You must do the same with your bulls
and your sheep. Let the firstborn males stay with their mothers
for seven days, and on the eighth day you must give them to me.

31 “You are to be my holy people. You must not eat the meat
of any animal that has been killed by wild animals. Instead, give
it to the dogs.

## Psalm 18:46–50

46 The LORD lives!
May my Rock be praised.
Praise the God who saves me!

47 God gives me victory over my enemies
and brings people under my rule.

48 He saves me from my enemies.

You set me over those who hate me.
You saved me from violent people.

49 So I will praise you, LORD, among the nations.
I will sing praises to your name.

50 The LORD gives great victories to his king.
He is loyal to his appointed king,

to David and his descendants forever.

## Proverbs 6:26–29

26 A prostitute will treat you like a loaf of bread,
and a woman who takes part in adultery may cost you your life.

27 You cannot carry hot coals against your chest
without burning your clothes,

28 and you cannot walk on hot coals
without burning your feet.

29 The same is true if you have sexual relations with another man’s wife.
Anyone who does so will be punished.

## Matthew 23:1–22

### *Jesus Accuses Some Leaders*

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his followers, 2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees have the authority to tell you what the law of Moses says. 3 So you should obey and follow whatever they tell you, but their lives are not good examples for you to follow. They tell you to do things, but they themselves don’t do them. 4 They make strict rules and try to force people to obey them, but they are unwilling to help those who struggle under the weight of their rules.

5 “They do good things so that other people will see them. They enlarge the little boxes[n] holding Scriptures that they wear, and they make their special prayer clothes very long. 6 Those Pharisees and teachers of the law love to have the most important seats at feasts and in the synagogues. 7 They love people to greet them with respect in the marketplaces, and they love to have people call them ‘Teacher.’

8 “But you must not be called ‘Teacher,’ because you have
only one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters together.
9 And don’t call any person on earth ‘Father,’ because you have
one Father, who is in heaven. 10 And you should not be called
‘Master,’ because you have only one Master, the Christ.
11 Whoever is your servant is the greatest among you.
12 Whoever makes himself great will be made humble. Whoever
makes himself humble will be made great.

13 “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees!
You are hypocrites! You close the door for people to enter the
kingdom of heaven. You yourselves don’t enter, and you stop
others who are trying to enter. [14 How terrible for you, teachers
of the law and Pharisees. You are hypocrites. You take away
widows’ houses, and you say long prayers so that people will
notice you. So you will have a worse punishment.][n]

15 “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees!
You are hypocrites! You travel across land and sea to find one
person who will change to your ways. When you find that
person, you make him more fit for hell than you are.

16 “How terrible for you! You guide the people, but you are
blind. You say, ‘If people swear by the Temple when they make a
promise, that means nothing. But if they swear by the gold that
is in the Temple, they must keep that promise.’ 17 You are blind
fools! Which is greater: the gold or the Temple that makes that
gold holy? 18 And you say, ‘If people swear by the altar when
they make a promise, that means nothing. But if they swear by
the gift on the altar, they must keep that promise.’ 19 You are
blind! Which is greater: the gift or the altar that makes the gift
holy? 20 The person who swears by the altar is really using the
altar and also everything on the altar. 21 And the person who
swears by the Temple is really using the Temple and also
everything in the Temple. 22 The person who swears by heaven
is also using God’s throne and the One who sits on that throne.

# February 6

## See What God Has Done!

*The heavens declare the glory of God.*

Psalm 19:1

How vital that we pray, armed with the knowledge that God is in heaven. Pray with any lesser conviction and your prayers are timid, shallow, and hollow. But spend some time walking in the workshop of the heavens, seeing what God has done, and watch how your prayers are energized …

Behold the sun! Every square yard of the sun is constantly emitting 130,000 horse power, or the equivalent of 450 eight-cylinder automobile engines. And yet our sun, as powerful as it is, is but one minor star in the 100 billion orbs which make up our Milky Way Galaxy. Hold a dime in your fingers and extend it arm's length toward the sky, allowing it to eclipse your vision, and you will block out fifteen million stars from your view … By showing us the heavens, Jesus is showing us his Father's workshop … he taps us on the shoulder and says, "Your Father can handle that for you."

from *The Great House of God*

### Exodus 23:1—24:18

#### *Laws About Fairness*

23 "You must not tell lies. If you are a witness in court, don't help a wicked person by telling lies.

2"You must not do wrong just because everyone else is doing it. If you are a witness in court, you must not ruin a fair trial. You must not tell lies just because everyone else is. 3If a poor person is in court, you must not take his side just because he is poor.

4"If you see your enemy's ox or donkey wandering away, you must return it to him. 5If you see that your enemy's donkey has

fallen because its load is too heavy, do not leave it there. You must help your enemy get the donkey back on its feet.

6“You must not be unfair to a poor person when he is in court. 7You must not lie when you accuse someone in court. Never allow an innocent or honest person to be put to death as punishment, because I will not treat guilty people as if they were innocent.

8“You must not accept money from a person who wants you to lie in court, because such money will not let you see what is right. Such money makes good people tell lies.

9“You must not mistreat a foreigner. You know how it feels to be a foreigner, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

## *Laws for the Sabbath*

10“For six years you are to plant and harvest crops on your land. 11Then during the seventh year, do not plow or plant your land. If any food grows there, allow the poor people to have it, and let the wild animals eat what is left. You should do the same with your vineyards and your orchards of olive trees.

12“You should work six days a week, but on the seventh day you must rest. This lets your ox and your donkey rest, and it also lets the slave born in your house and the foreigner be refreshed.

13“Be sure to do all that I have said to you. You must not even say the names of other gods; those names must not come out of your mouth.

## *Three Yearly Feasts*

14“Three times each year you must hold a feast to honor me. 15You must celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the way I commanded you. For seven days you must eat bread that is made without yeast at the set time during the month of Abib, the month when you came out of Egypt. No one is to come to worship me without bringing an offering.

16“You must celebrate the Feast of Weeks. Offer to God the first things you harvest from the crops you planted in your fields.

“You must celebrate the Feast of Shelters in the fall, when you gather all the crops from your fields.

17“So three times during every year all your males must come to worship the LORD God.

18“You must not offer animal blood along with anything that has yeast in it.

“You must not save any of the fat from the sacrifice for the next day.

19“You must bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to

the Holy Tent[n] of the LORD your God.

"You must not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.

## *God Will Help Israel*

20"I am sending an angel ahead of you, who will protect you as you travel. He will lead you to the place I have prepared. 21Pay attention to the angel and obey him. Do not turn against him; he will not forgive such turning against him because my power is in him. 22If you listen carefully to all he says and do everything that I tell you, I will be an enemy to your enemies. I will fight all who fight against you. 23My angel will go ahead of you and take you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and I will destroy them.

24"You must not bow down to their gods or worship them. You must not live the way those people live. You must destroy their idols, breaking into pieces the stone pillars they use in worship. 25If you worship the LORD your God, I will bless your bread and your water. I will take away sickness from you. 26None of your women will have her baby die before it is born, and all women will have children. I will allow you to live long lives.

27"I will make your enemies afraid of me. I will confuse any people you fight against, and I will make all your enemies run away from you. 28I will send terror ahead of you that will force the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites out of your way. 29But I will not force all those people out in only one year. If I did, the land would become a desert and the wild animals would become too many for you. 30Instead, I will force those people out slowly, until there are enough of you to take over the land.

31"I will give you the land from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give you power over the people who now live in the land, and you will force them out ahead of you. 32You must not make an agreement with those people or with their gods. 33You must not let them live in your land, or they will make you sin against me. If you worship their gods, you will be caught in a trap."

## *God and Israel Make Their Agreement*

24 The LORD told Moses, "You, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel must come up to me and worship me from a distance. 2Then Moses alone must come near me; the others must not come near. The rest of the people must not come up the mountain with Moses."

3Moses told the people all the LORD's words and laws for living. Then all of the people answered out loud together, "We

will do all the things the LORD has said." [4]So Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. And he got up early the next morning and built an altar near the bottom of the mountain. He set up twelve stones, one stone for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. [5]Then Moses sent young Israelite men to offer whole burnt offerings and to sacrifice young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. [6]Moses put half of the blood of these animals in bowls, and he sprinkled the other half of the blood on the altar. [7]Then he took the Book of the Agreement and read it so the people could hear him. And they said, "We will do everything that the LORD has said; we will obey."

[8]Then Moses took the blood from the bowls and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "This is the blood that begins the Agreement, the Agreement which the LORD has made with you about all these words."

[9]Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up the mountain [10]and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was a surface that looked as if it were paved with blue sapphire stones, and it was as clear as the sky! [11]These leaders of the Israelites saw God, but God did not destroy them. Then they ate and drank together.

### *God Promises Moses the Stone Tablets*

[12]The LORD said to Moses, "Come up the mountain to me. Wait there, and I will give you two stone tablets. On these are the teachings and the commands I have written to instruct the people."

[13]So Moses and his helper Joshua set out, and Moses went up to Sinai, the mountain of God. [14]Moses said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone who has a disagreement with others can take it to them."

### *Moses Meets with God*

[15]When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it. [16]The glory of the LORD came down on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from inside the cloud. [17]To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a fire burning on top of the mountain. [18]Then Moses went into the cloud and went higher up the mountain. He was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

## Psalm 19:1–6

## *God's Works and Word*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

19 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the skies announce what his hands
have made.

2 Day after day they tell the story;
night after night they tell it again.

3 They have no speech or words;
they have no voice to be heard.

4 But their message goes out through all the world;
their words go everywhere on earth.

The sky is like a home for the sun.
5 The sun comes out like a bridegroom from his bedroom.
It rejoices like an athlete eager to run a race.

6 The sun rises at one end of the sky
and follows its path to the other end.
Nothing hides from its heat.

## Proverbs 6:30–31

30 People don't hate a thief
when he steals because he is hungry.

31 But if he is caught, he must pay back seven times what he stole,
and it may cost him everything he owns.

## Matthew 23:23–39

23 “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees!
You are hypocrites! You give to God one-tenth of everything you
earn—even your mint, dill, and cumin.[n] But you don’t obey the
really important teachings of the law—justice, mercy, and being
loyal. These are the things you should do, as well as those other
things. 24 You guide the people, but you are blind! You are like a
person who picks a fly out of a drink and then swallows a
camel![n]
25 “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees!
You are hypocrites! You wash the outside of your cups and
dishes, but inside they are full of things you got by cheating
others and by pleasing only yourselves. 26 Pharisees, you are
blind! First make the inside of the cup clean, and then the
outside of the cup can be truly clean.
27 “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees!
You are hypocrites! You are like tombs that are painted white.
Outside, those tombs look fine, but inside, they are full of the
bones of dead people and all kinds of unclean things. 28 It is the
same with you. People look at you and think you are good, but
on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and evil.
29 “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees!
You are hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets, and you
show honor to the graves of those who lived good lives. 30 You
say, ‘If we had lived during the time of our ancestors, we would
not have helped them kill the prophets.’ 31 But you give proof
that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.
32 And you will complete the sin that your ancestors started.
33 “You are snakes! A family of poisonous snakes! How are
you going to escape God’s judgment? 34 So I tell you this: I am
sending to you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of
them you will kill and crucify. Some of them you will beat in
your synagogues and chase from town to town. 35 So you will be
guilty for the death of all the good people who have been killed
on earth—from the murder of that good man Abel to the murder
of Zechariah[n] son of Berakiah, whom you murdered between
the Temple and the altar. 36 I tell you the truth, all of these
things will happen to you people who are living now.

### *Jesus Feels Sorry for Jerusalem*

37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone to
death those who are sent to you. Many times I wanted to gather
your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but
you did not let me. 38 Now your house will be left completely

empty. [39]I tell you, you will not see me again until that time
when you will say, ‘God bless the One who comes in the name of
the Lord.’”[n]

# February 7

## Go the Distance

*"Those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved."*

Matthew 24:13

Jesus doesn't say if you succeed you will be saved. Or if you come out on top you will be saved. He says if you endure. An accurate rendering would be, "If you hang in there until the end … if you go the distance."

The Brazilians have a great phrase for this. In Portuguese, a person who has the ability to hang in and not give up has *garra*. *Garra* means "claws." What imagery! A person with *garra* has claws that burrow into the side of the cliff and keep him from falling.

So do the saved. They may get close to the edge; they may even stumble and slide. But they will dig their nails into the rock of God and hang on.

Jesus gives you this assurance. Hang on. He'll make sure you get home.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Exodus 25:1—26:37

### *Gifts for the Lord*

25 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Tell the Israelites to bring me gifts.
Receive for me the gifts each person wants to give. 3These are
the gifts that you should receive from them: gold, silver, bronze;
4blue, purple, and red thread; fine linen, goat hair, 5sheepskins
that are dyed red; fine leather; acacia wood; 6olive oil to burn in
the lamps; spices for sweet-smelling incense, and the special
olive oil poured on a person's head to make him a priest; 7onyx
stones, and other jewels to be put on the holy vest and the chest
covering.

8"The people must build a holy place for me so that I can live

among them. [9]Build this Holy Tent and everything in it by the plan I will show you.

## *The Ark of the Agreement*

[10]"Use acacia wood and build an Ark forty-five inches long, twenty-seven inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. [11]Cover the Ark inside and out with pure gold, and put a gold strip all around it. [12]Make four gold rings for the Ark and attach them to its four feet, two rings on each side. [13]Then make poles from acacia wood and cover them with gold. [14]Put the poles through the rings on the sides of the Ark, and use these poles to carry it. [15]These poles must always stay in the rings of the Ark. Do not take them out. [16]Then put in the Ark the Agreement which I will make with you.

[17]"Then make a lid of pure gold for the Ark; this is the mercy seat. Make it forty-five inches long and twenty-seven inches wide. [18]Then hammer gold to make two creatures with wings, and put one on each end of the lid. [19]Attach one creature on one end of the lid and the other creature on the other end. Make them to be one piece with the lid at the ends. [20]The creatures' wings should be spread upward, covering the lid, and the creatures are to face each other across the lid. [21]Put this lid on top of the Ark, and put in the Ark the Agreement which I will make with you. [22]I will meet with you there, above the lid between the two winged creatures on the Ark of the Agreement. There I will give you all my commands for the Israelites.

## *The Table*

[23]"Make a table out of acacia wood, thirty-six inches long, eighteen inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. [24]Cover it with pure gold, and put a gold strip around it. [25]Make a frame three inches high that stands up all around the edge, and put a gold strip around it. [26]Then make four gold rings. Attach them to the four corners of the table where the four legs are. [27]Put the rings close to the frame around the top of the table, because they will hold the poles for carrying it. [28]Make the poles out of acacia wood, cover them with gold, and carry the table with these poles. [29]Make the plates and bowls for the table, as well as the jars and cups, out of pure gold. They will be used for pouring out the drink offerings. [30]On this table put the bread that shows you are in my presence so that it is always there in front of me.

## *The Lampstand*

31 “Hammer pure gold to make a lampstand. Its base, stand,
flower-like cups, buds, and petals must all be joined together in
one piece. 32 The lampstand must have six branches going out
from its sides—three on one side and three on the other. 33 Each
branch must have three cups shaped like almond flowers on it.
Each cup must have a bud and a petal. Each of the six branches
going out from the lampstand must be the same. 34 And there
must be four more cups made like almond flowers on the
lampstand itself. These cups must also have buds and petals.
35 Put a bud under each pair of branches that goes out from the
lampstand. Each of the six branches going out from the
lampstand must be the same. 36 The branches, buds, and
lampstand must be made of one piece, hammered out of pure
gold.

37 “Then make seven small oil lamps and put them on the
lampstand so that they give light to the area in front of it. 38 The
wick trimmers and trays must be made of pure gold. 39 Use
seventy-five pounds of pure gold to make the lampstand and
everything with it. 40 Be very careful to make them by the plan I
showed you on the mountain.

## *The Holy Tent*

26 “Make for the Holy Tent ten curtains of fine linen and blue,
purple, and red thread. Have a skilled craftsman sew designs of
creatures with wings on the pieces of cloth. 2 Make each curtain
the same size—forty-two feet long and six feet wide. 3 Sew five
curtains together for one set, and sew the other curtains
together for the second set. 4 Make loops of blue cloth on the
edge of the end curtain of one set, and do the same for the end
curtain of the other set. 5 Make fifty loops on the end curtain of
the first set and fifty loops on the end curtain of the second set.
These loops must be opposite each other. 6 And make fifty gold
hooks to join the two sets of curtains so that the Holy Tent is
one piece.

7 “Then make another tent that will cover the Holy Tent,
using eleven curtains made from goat hair. 8 All these curtains
must be the same size—forty-five feet long and six feet wide.
9 Sew five of the curtains together into one set. Then sew the
other six curtains together into the second set. Fold the sixth
curtain double over the front of the Tent. 10 Make fifty loops
down the edge of the end curtain of one set, and do the same
for the end curtain of the other set. 11 Then make fifty bronze
hooks and put them in the loops to join the tent together so that
the covering is one piece. 12 Let the extra half piece of cloth
hang over the back of the Holy Tent. 13 There will be eighteen
inches hanging over the sides of the Holy Tent, to protect it.

14 Make a covering for the Holy Tent from sheepskins colored
red, and over that make a covering from fine leather.
15 "Use acacia wood to make upright frames for the Holy
Tent. 16 Each frame must be fifteen feet long and twenty-seven
inches wide, 17 with two pegs side by side. Every frame must be
made the same way. 18 Make twenty frames for the south side of
the Holy Tent. 19 Each frame must have two silver bases to go
under it, a peg fitting into each base. You must make forty silver
bases for the frames. 20 Make twenty more frames for the north
side of the Holy Tent 21 and forty silver bases for them—two
bases for each frame. 22 You must make six frames for the rear
or west end of the Holy Tent 23 and two frames for each corner
at the rear. 24 The two frames are to be doubled at the bottom
and joined at the top with a metal ring. Both corner frames
must be made this way. 25 So there will be a total of eight frames
at the rear of the Tent, and there will be sixteen silver bases—
two bases under each frame.
26 "Make crossbars of acacia wood to connect the upright
frames of the Holy Tent. Make five crossbars to hold the frames
together on one side 27 and five to hold the frames together on
the other side. Also make five crossbars to hold the frames
together on the west end, at the rear. 28 The middle crossbar is
to be set halfway up the frames, and it is to run along the entire
length of each side and rear. 29 Make gold rings on the sides of
the frames to hold the crossbars, and cover the frames and the
crossbars with gold. 30 Set up the Holy Tent by the plan shown
to you on the mountain.
31 "Make a curtain of fine linen and blue, purple, and red
thread, and have a skilled craftsman sew designs of creatures
with wings on it. 32 Hang the curtain by gold hooks on four posts
of acacia wood that are covered with gold, and set them in four
silver bases. 33 Hang the curtain from the hooks in the roof, and
put the Ark of the Agreement containing the two stone tablets
behind it. This curtain will separate the Holy Place from the
Most Holy Place. 34 Put the lid on the Ark of the Agreement in
the Most Holy Place.
35 "Outside the curtain, put the table on the north side of the
Holy Tent. Put the lampstand on the south side of the Holy Tent
across from the table.

## *The Entrance of the Holy Tent*

36 "Then, for the entrance of the Tent, make a curtain with
fine linen and blue, purple, and red thread. Someone who can
sew well is to sew designs on it. 37 Make five posts of acacia
wood covered with gold. Make gold hooks for them on which to
hang the curtain, and make five bronze bases for them.

## Psalm 19:7–14

7 The teachings of the LORD are perfect;
they give new strength.

The rules of the LORD can be trusted;
they make plain people wise.

8 The orders of the LORD are right;
they make people happy.

The commands of the LORD are pure;
they light up the way.

9 Respect for the LORD is good;
it will last forever.

The judgments of the LORD are true;
they are completely right.

10 They are worth more than gold,
even the purest gold.

They are sweeter than honey,
even the finest honey.

11 By them your servant is warned.
Keeping them brings great reward.

12 People cannot see their own mistakes.
Forgive me for my secret sins.

13 Keep me from the sins of pride;

don’t let them rule me.

Then I can be pure
and innocent of the greatest of sins.

14 I hope my words and thoughts please you.
LORD, you are my Rock, the one who saves me.

## Proverbs 6:32–35

32 A man who takes part in adultery has no sense;
he will destroy himself.

33 He will be beaten up and disgraced,
and his shame will never go away.

34 Jealousy makes a husband very angry,
and he will have no pity when he gets revenge.

35 He will accept no payment for the wrong;
he will take no amount of money.

## Matthew 24:1–35

### *The Temple Will Be Destroyed*

24 As Jesus left the Temple and was walking away, his followers
came up to show him the Temple’s buildings. 2 Jesus asked, “Do
you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, not one stone
will be left on another. Every stone will be thrown down to the
ground.”

3 Later, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his
followers came to be alone with him. They said, “Tell us, when
will these things happen? And what will be the sign that it is
time for you to come again and for this age to end?”

4 Jesus answered, “Be careful that no one fools you. 5 Many
will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will
fool many people. 6 You will hear about wars and stories of wars
that are coming, but don’t be afraid. These things must happen
before the end comes. 7 Nations will fight against other nations;
kingdoms will fight against other kingdoms. There will be times
when there is no food for people to eat, and there will be
earthquakes in different places. 8 These things are like the first
pains when something new is about to be born.
9 “Then people will arrest you, hand you over to be hurt, and
kill you. They will hate you because you believe in me. 10 At that
time, many will lose their faith, and they will turn against each
other and hate each other. 11 Many false prophets will come and
cause many people to believe lies. 12 There will be more and
more evil in the world, so most people will stop showing their
love for each other. 13 But those people who keep their faith
until the end will be saved. 14 The Good News about God’s
kingdom will be preached in all the world, to every nation. Then
the end will come.
15 “Daniel the prophet spoke about ‘a blasphemous object
that brings destruction.’[n] You will see this standing in the holy
place.” (You who read this should understand what it means.)
16 “At that time, the people in Judea should run away to the
mountains. 17 If people are on the roofs[n] of their houses, they
must not go down to get anything out of their houses. 18 If
people are in the fields, they must not go back to get their
coats. 19 At that time, how terrible it will be for women who are
pregnant or have nursing babies! 20 Pray that it will not be
winter or a Sabbath day when these things happen and you
have to run away, 21 because at that time there will be much
trouble. There will be more trouble than there has ever been
since the beginning of the world until now, and nothing as bad
will ever happen again. 22 God has decided to make that terrible
time short. Otherwise, no one would go on living. But God will
make that time short to help the people he has chosen. 23 At that
time, someone might say to you, ‘Look, there is the Christ!’ Or
another person might say, ‘There he is!’ But don’t believe them.
24 False Christs and false prophets will come and perform great
wonders and miracles. They will try to fool even the people God
has chosen, if that is possible. 25 Now I have warned you about
this before it happens.
26 “If people tell you, ‘The Christ is in the desert,’ don’t go
there. If they say, ‘The Christ is in the inner room,’ don’t believe
it. 27 When the Son of Man comes, he will be seen by everyone,
like lightning flashing from the east to the west. 28 Wherever the
dead body is, there the vultures will gather.
29 “Soon after the trouble of those days,

‘the sun will grow dark,
and the moon will not give its light.

The stars will fall from the sky.
And the powers of the heavens will be shaken.’

Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

30“At that time, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the
sky. Then all the peoples of the world will cry. They will see the
Son of Man coming on clouds in the sky with great power and
glory. 31He will use a loud trumpet to send his angels all around
the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from every
part of the world.
32“Learn a lesson from the fig tree: When its branches
become green and soft and new leaves appear, you know
summer is near. 33In the same way, when you see all these
things happening, you will know that the time is near, ready to
come. 34I tell you the truth, all these things will happen while
the people of this time are still living. 35Earth and sky will be
destroyed, but the words I have said will never be destroyed.

# February 8

## Heavenly Rewards

*"When the master comes and finds the servant doing his work, the servant will be blessed."*

Matthew 24:46

[The stadium] is packed today. Since Friday, [Mark] McGwire has hit not one or two home runs, but three. For thirty-seven years, no one could hit more than sixty-one homers in one season; now the St. Louis slugger has hit sixty-eight. And he isn't finished … The fans are on their feet before he comes to bat; they stay on their feet long after he crosses the plate …

Not everyone can be a Mark McGwire. For every million who aspire, only one achieves. The vast majority of us don't hit the big ball, don't feel the ticker tape, don't wear the gold medal, don't give the valedictory address.

And that's OK. We understand that in the economy of earth, there are a limited number of crowns.

The economy of heaven, however, is refreshingly different. Heavenly rewards are not limited to a chosen few, but "to all those who have waited with love for him to come again" (2 Timothy 4:8).

from *When Christ Comes*

### Exodus 27:1—28:43

### *The Altar for Burnt Offerings*

27 "Make an altar of acacia wood, four and one-half feet high. It should be square—seven and one-half feet long and seven and one-half feet wide. 2Make each of the four corners of the altar stick out like a horn, in such a way that the corners with their horns are all one piece. Then cover the whole altar with bronze.

3"Use bronze to make all the tools and dishes that will be used on the altar: the pots to remove the ashes, the shovels, the

bowls for sprinkling blood, the meat forks, and the pans for carrying the burning wood.

4"Make a large bronze screen to hold the burning wood, and put a bronze ring at each of the four corners of it. 5Put the screen inside the altar, under its rim, halfway up from the bottom.

6"Make poles of acacia wood for the altar, and cover them with bronze. 7Put the poles through the rings on both sides of the altar to carry it. 8Make the altar out of boards and leave the inside hollow. Make it as you were shown on the mountain.

## *The Courtyard of the Holy Tent*

9"Make a wall of curtains to form a courtyard around the Holy Tent. The south side should have a wall of fine linen curtains one hundred fifty feet long. 10Hang the curtains with silver hooks and bands on twenty bronze posts with twenty bronze bases. 11The north side must also be one hundred fifty feet long. Hang its curtains on silver hooks and bands on twenty bronze posts with twenty bronze bases.

12"The west end of the courtyard must have a wall of curtains seventy-five feet long, with ten posts and ten bases on that wall. 13The east end of the courtyard must also be seventy-five feet long. 14On one side of the entry, there is to be a wall of curtains twenty-two and one-half feet long, held up by three posts on three bases. 15On the other side of the entry, there is also to be a wall of curtains twenty-two and one-half feet long, held up by three posts on three bases.

16"The entry to the courtyard is to be a curtain thirty feet wide, made of fine linen with blue, purple, and red thread. Someone who can sew well is to sew designs on it. It is to be held up by four posts on four bases. 17All the posts around the courtyard must have silver bands and hooks and bronze bases. 18The courtyard must be one hundred fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide, with a wall of curtains around it seven and one-half feet high, made of fine linen. The bases in which the posts are set must be bronze. 19All the things used in the Holy Tent and all the tent pegs for the Holy Tent and the wall around the courtyard must be made of bronze.

## *Oil for the Lamp*

20"Command the people of Israel to bring you pure olive oil, made from pressed olives, to keep the lamps on the lampstand burning. 21Aaron and his sons must keep the lamps burning before the LORD from evening till morning. This will be in the Meeting Tent, outside the curtain which is in front of the Ark. The Israelites and their descendants must obey this rule from

now on.

## *Clothes for the Priests*

28 “Tell your brother Aaron to come to you, along with his sons
Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Separate them from the
other Israelites to serve me as priests. 2Make holy clothes for
your brother Aaron to give him honor and beauty. 3Tell all the
skilled craftsmen to whom I have given wisdom to make special
clothes for Aaron—clothes to show that he belongs to me so that
he may serve me as a priest. 4These are the clothes they must
make: a chest covering, a holy vest, an outer robe, a woven
inner robe, a turban, and a cloth belt. The craftsmen must make
these holy clothes for your brother Aaron and his sons. Then
they may serve me as priests. 5The craftsmen must use gold and
blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen.

## *The Holy Vest*

6“Use gold and blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen to
make the holy vest; skilled craftsmen are to make it. 7At each
top corner of this holy vest there will be a pair of shoulder
straps tied together over each shoulder.
8“The craftsmen will very carefully weave a belt on the holy
vest that is made with the same materials—gold and blue,
purple and red thread, and fine linen.
9“Take two onyx stones and write the names of the twelve
sons of Israel on them, 10six on one stone and six on the other.
Write the names in order, from the oldest son to the youngest.
11Carve the names of the sons of Israel on these stones in the
same way a person carves words and designs on a seal. Put gold
around the stones to hold them on the holy vest. 12Then put the
two stones on the two straps of the holy vest as reminders of
the twelve sons of Israel. Aaron is to wear their names on his
shoulders in the presence of the LORD as reminders of the sons
of Israel. 13Make two gold pieces to hold the stones 14and two
chains of pure gold, twisted together like a rope. Attach the
chains to the two gold pieces that hold the stones.

## *The Chest Covering*

15“Make a chest covering to help in making decisions. The
craftsmen should make it as they made the holy vest, using gold
and blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen. 16The chest
covering must be square—nine inches long and nine inches
wide—and folded double to make a pocket. 17Put four rows of
beautiful gems on the chest covering: The first row must have a

ruby, topaz, and yellow quartz; [18]the second must have
turquoise, a sapphire, and an emerald; [19]the third must have a
jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; [20]the fourth must have a
chrysolite, an onyx, and a jasper. Put gold around these jewels
to attach them to the chest covering. [21]There must be twelve
jewels on the chest covering—one jewel for each of the names
of the sons of Israel. Carve the name of one of the twelve tribes
on each of the stones as you would carve a seal.

[22]"Make chains of pure gold, twisted together like rope, for
the chest covering. [23]Make two gold rings and put them on the
two upper corners of the chest covering. [24]Attach the two gold
chains to the two rings at the upper corners of the chest
covering. [25]Attach the other ends of the two chains to the two
gold pieces on the shoulder straps in the front of the holy vest.

[26]"Make two gold rings and put them at the two lower
corners of the chest covering, on the inside edge next to the
holy vest. [27]Make two more gold rings and attach them to the
bottom of the shoulder straps in the front of the holy vest. Put
them close to the seam above the woven belt of the holy vest.
[28]Join the rings of the chest covering to the rings of the holy
vest with blue ribbon, connecting it to the woven belt so the
chest covering will not swing out from the holy vest.

[29]"When Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will wear the
names of the sons of Israel over his heart, on the chest covering
that helps in making decisions. This will be a continual
reminder before the LORD. [30]And put the Urim and Thummim
inside the chest covering so that they will be on Aaron's heart
when he goes before the LORD. They will help in making
decisions for the Israelites. So Aaron will always carry them
with him when he is before the LORD.

[31]"Make the outer robe to be worn under the holy vest, using
only blue cloth. [32]Make a hole in the center for Aaron's head,
with a woven collar around the hole so it will not tear. [33]Make
balls like pomegranates of blue, purple, and red thread, and
hang them around the bottom of the outer robe with gold bells
between them. [34]All around the bottom of the outer robe there
should be a gold bell and a pomegranate ball, a gold bell and a
pomegranate ball. [35]Aaron must wear this robe when he serves
as priest. The ringing of the bells will be heard when he enters
and leaves the Holy Place before the LORD so that Aaron will not
die.

[36]"Make a strip of pure gold and carve these words on it as
you would carve a seal: 'Holy to the LORD.' [37]Use blue ribbon to
tie it to the turban; put it on the front of the turban. [38]Aaron
must wear this on his forehead. In this way, he will be blamed if
anything is wrong with the gifts of the Israelites. Aaron must
always wear this on his head so the LORD will accept the gifts of
the people.

39 “Make the woven inner robe of fine linen, and make the
turban of fine linen also. Make the cloth belt with designs sewn
on it. 40 Also make woven inner robes, cloth belts, and
headbands for Aaron’s sons, to give them honor and beauty.
41 Put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, and
pour olive oil on their heads to appoint them as priests. Make
them belong to me so they may serve me as priests.
42 “Make for them linen underclothes to cover them from the
waist to the upper parts of the legs. 43 Aaron and his sons must
wear these underclothes when they enter the Meeting Tent and
anytime they come near the altar to serve as priests in the Holy
Place. If they do not wear these clothes, they will be guilty of
wrong, and they will die. This will be a law that will last from
now on for Aaron and all his descendants.

## Psalm 20:1–5

### *A Prayer for the King*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

20 May the LORD answer you in times of trouble.
May the God of Jacob protect you.

2 May he send you help from his Temple
and support you from Mount Zion.

3 May he remember all your offerings
and accept all your sacrifices. *Selah*

4 May he give you what you want
and make all your plans succeed,

5 and we will shout for joy when you succeed,
and we will raise a flag in the name of our God.

May the LORD give you all that you ask for.

## Proverbs 7:1–5

### *The Woman of Adultery*

7 My son, remember what I say, and treasure my commands.

2Obey my commands, and you will live.
Guard my teachings as you would your own eyes.

3Remind yourself of them;
write them on your heart as if on a tablet.

4Treat wisdom as a sister,
and make understanding your closest friend.

5Wisdom and understanding will keep you away from adultery,
away from the unfaithful wife and her pleasing words.

## Matthew 24:36–51

### *When Will Jesus Come Again?*

36"No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son.[n] Only the Father knows. 37When the Son of Man comes, it will be like what happened during Noah's time. 38In those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving their children to be married, until the day Noah entered the boat. 39They knew nothing about what was happening until the flood came and destroyed them. It will be the same when the Son of Man comes. 40Two men will be in the field. One will be taken, and the other will be left. 41Two women will be grinding grain with a mill.[n] One will be taken, and the other will be left.

42"So always be ready, because you don't know the day your

Lord will come. [43]Remember this: If the owner of the house
knew what time of night a thief was coming, the owner would
watch and not let the thief break in. [44]So you also must be
ready, because the Son of Man will come at a time you don't
expect him.
[45]"Who is the wise and loyal servant that the master trusts to
give the other servants their food at the right time? [46]When the
master comes and finds the servant doing his work, the servant
will be blessed. [47]I tell you the truth, the master will choose
that servant to take care of everything he owns. [48]But suppose
that evil servant thinks to himself, 'My master will not come
back soon,' [49]and he begins to beat the other servants and eat
and get drunk with others like him? [50]The master will come
when that servant is not ready and is not expecting him. [51]Then
the master will cut him in pieces and send him away to be with
the hypocrites, where people will cry and grind their teeth with
pain.

# February 9

## Uniquely You

*"He gave ... to each one as much as he could handle."*

Matthew 25:15

Da Vinci painted one *Mona Lisa.* Beethoven composed one Fifth Symphony. And God made one version of you. He custom designed you for a one-of-a-kind assignment. Mine like a gold digger the unique-to-you nuggets from your life ...

When God gives an assignment, he also gives the skill. Study your skills, then, to reveal your assignment.

Look at you. Your uncanny ease with numbers. Your quenchless curiosity about chemistry. Others stare at blueprints and yawn; you read them and drool. "I was made to do this," you say.

Our Maker gives assignments to people, to each according to each one's unique ability. As he calls, he equips. Look back over your life. What have you consistently done well? What have you loved to do? Stand at the intersection of your affections and successes and find your uniqueness.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Exodus 29:1—30:38

### *Appointing the Priests*

29 "This is what you must do to appoint Aaron and his sons to
serve me as priests. Take one young bull and two male sheep
that have nothing wrong with them. 2Use fine wheat flour
without yeast to make bread, cakes mixed with olive oil, and
wafers brushed with olive oil. 3Put these in one basket, and
bring them along with the bull and two male sheep. 4Bring
Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Meeting Tent and
wash them with water. 5Take the clothes and dress Aaron in the
inner robe and the outer robe of the holy vest. Then put on him

the holy vest and the chest covering, and tie the holy vest on him with its skillfully woven belt. 6Put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban. 7Take the special olive oil and pour it on his head to make him a priest.

8"Then bring his sons and put the inner robes on them. 9Put the headbands on their heads, and tie cloth belts around their waists. Aaron and his descendants will be priests in Israel, according to a rule that will continue from now on. This is how you will appoint Aaron and his sons as priests.

10"Bring the bull to the front of the Meeting Tent, and Aaron and his sons must put their hands on the bull's head. 11Then kill the bull before the LORD at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. 12Use your finger to put some of the bull's blood on the corners of the altar, and then pour the blood that is left at the bottom of the altar. 13Take all the fat that covers the inner organs, as well as the best part of the liver, both kidneys, and the fat around them, and burn them on the altar. 14Take the bull's meat, skin, and intestines, and burn them outside the camp. This is an offering to take away sin.

15"Take one of the male sheep, and have Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. 16Kill it, and take its blood and sprinkle it on all four sides of the altar. 17Then cut it into pieces and wash its inner organs and its legs, putting them with its head and its other pieces. 18Burn the whole sheep on the altar; it is a burnt offering made by fire to the LORD. Its smell is pleasing to the LORD.

19"Take the other male sheep, and have Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. 20Kill it and take some of its blood. Put the blood on the bottom of the right ears of Aaron and his sons and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. Then sprinkle the rest of the blood against all four sides of the altar. 21Take some of the blood from the altar, and mix it with the special oil used in appointing priests. Sprinkle this on Aaron and his clothes and on his sons and their clothes. This will show that Aaron and his sons and their clothes are given to my service.

22"Then take the fat from the male sheep, the fat tail, and the fat that covers the inner organs. In addition, take the best part of the liver, both kidneys, and the fat around them, and the right thigh. (This is the male sheep to be used in appointing priests.)

23"Then take the basket of bread that you made without yeast, which you put before the LORD. From it take a loaf of bread, a cake made with olive oil, and a wafer. 24Put all of these in the hands of Aaron and his sons, and tell them to present them as an offering to the LORD. 25Then take them from their hands and burn them on the altar with the whole burnt offering. This is an offering made by fire to the LORD; its smell is pleasing to the LORD. 26Then take the breast of the male sheep used to

appoint Aaron as priest, and present it before the LORD as an offering. This part of the animal will be your share. 27Set aside the breast and the thigh of the sheep that were used to appoint Aaron and his sons as priests. These parts belong to them. 28They are to be the regular share which the Israelites will always give to Aaron and his sons. It is the gift the Israelites must give to the LORD from their fellowship offerings.

29"The holy clothes made for Aaron will belong to his descendants so that they can wear these clothes when they are appointed as priests. 30Aaron's son, who will become high priest after Aaron, will come to the Meeting Tent to serve in the Holy Place. He is to wear these clothes for seven days.

31"Take the male sheep used to appoint priests and boil its meat in a place that is holy. 32Then at the entrance of the Meeting Tent, Aaron and his sons must eat the meat of the sheep and the bread that is in the basket. 33They should eat these offerings that were used to remove their sins and to make them holy when they were made priests. But no one else is to eat them, because they are holy things. 34If any of the meat from that sheep or any of the bread is left the next morning, it must be burned. It must not be eaten, because it is holy.

35"Do all these things that I commanded you to do to Aaron and his sons, and spend seven days appointing them. 36Each day you are to offer a bull to remove the sins of Aaron and his sons so they will be given for service to the LORD. Make the altar ready for service to the LORD, and pour oil on it to make it holy. 37Spend seven days making the altar ready for service to God and making it holy. Then the altar will become very holy, and anything that touches it must be holy.

## *The Daily Sacrifices*

38"Every day from now on, offer on the altar two lambs that are one year old. 39Offer one lamb in the morning and the other in the evening before dark. 40In the morning, when you offer the first lamb, offer also two quarts of fine flour mixed with one quart of oil from pressed olives. Pour out a quart of wine as a drink offering. 41Offer the second lamb in the evening with the same grain offering and drink offering as you did in the morning. This is an offering made by fire to the LORD, and its smell is pleasing to him.

42"You must burn these things as an offering to the LORD every day, from now on, at the entrance of the Meeting Tent before the LORD. When you make the offering, I, the LORD, will meet you there and speak to you. 43I will meet with the people of Israel there, and that place will be holy because of my glory.

44"So I will make the Meeting Tent and the altar holy; I will also make Aaron and his sons holy so they may serve me as

priests. 45I will live with the people of Israel and be their God.
46And they will know that I am the LORD their God who led them
out of Egypt so that I could live with them. I am the LORD their
God.

## *The Altar for Burning Incense*

30 "Make an altar out of acacia wood for burning incense.
2Make it square—eighteen inches long and eighteen inches
wide—and make it thirty-six inches high. The corners that stick
out like horns must be one piece with the altar. 3Cover its top,
its sides, and its corners with pure gold, and put a gold strip all
around the altar. 4Make two gold rings beneath the gold strip
on opposite sides of the altar, and slide poles through them to
carry the altar. 5Make the poles from acacia wood and cover
them with gold. 6Put the altar of incense in front of the curtain
that is near the Ark of the Agreement, in front of the lid that
covers that Ark. There I will meet with you.

7"Aaron must burn sweet-smelling incense on the altar every
morning when he comes to take care of the oil lamps. 8He must
burn incense again in the evening when he lights the lamps, so
incense will burn before the LORD every day from now on. 9Do
not use this altar for offering any other incense, or burnt
offering, or any kind of grain offering, or drink offering. 10Once
a year Aaron must make the altar ready for service to God by
putting blood on its corners—the blood of the animal offered to
remove sins. He is to do this once a year from now on. This altar
belongs completely to the LORD's service."

## *The Tax for the Meeting Tent*

11The LORD said to Moses, 12"When you count the people of
Israel, every person must buy back his life from the LORD so that
no terrible things will happen to the people when you number
them. 13Every person who is counted must pay one-fifth of an
ounce of silver. (This is set by using one-half of the Holy Place
measure, which weighs two-fifths of an ounce.) This amount is a
gift to the LORD. 14Every person who is counted and is twenty
years old or older must give this amount to the LORD. 15A rich
person must not give more than one-fifth of an ounce, and a
poor person must not give less. You are paying this to the LORD
to buy back your lives. 16Gather from the people of Israel this
money paid to buy back their lives, and spend it on things for
the service in the Meeting Tent. This payment will remind the
LORD that the Israelites' lives have been bought back."

## *The Bronze Bowl*

17 The LORD said to Moses, 18 "Make a bronze bowl, on a
bronze stand, for washing. Put the bowl and stand between the
Meeting Tent and the altar, and put water in the bowl. 19 Aaron
and his sons must wash their hands and feet with the water
from this bowl. 20 Each time they enter the Meeting Tent they
must wash with water so they will not die. Whenever they
approach the altar to serve as priests and offer a sacrifice to the
LORD by fire, 21 they must wash their hands and their feet so they
will not die. This is a rule which Aaron and his descendants are
to keep from now on."

## *Oil for Appointing*

22 Then the LORD said to Moses, 23 "Take the finest spices:
twelve pounds of liquid myrrh, half that amount (that is, six
pounds) of sweet-smelling cinnamon, six pounds of sweet-
smelling cane, 24 and twelve pounds of cassia. Weigh all these by
the Holy Place measure. Also take four quarts of olive oil, 25 and
mix all these things like a perfume to make a holy olive oil. This
special oil must be put on people and things to make them
ready for service to God. 26 Put this oil on the Meeting Tent and
the Ark of the Agreement, 27 on the table and all its dishes, on
the lampstand and all its tools, and on the incense altar. 28 Also,
put the oil on the altar for burnt offerings and on all its tools, as
well as on the bowl and the stand under the bowl. 29 You will
prepare all these things for service to God, and they will be very
holy. Anything that touches these things must be holy.
30 "Put the oil on Aaron and his sons to give them for service
to me, that they may serve me as priests. 31 Tell the Israelites,
'This is to be my holy olive oil from now on. It is to be put on
people and things to make them ready for service to God. 32 Do
not pour it on the bodies of ordinary people, and do not make
perfume the same way you make this oil. It is holy, and you
must treat it as holy. 33 If anyone makes perfume like it or puts it
on someone who is not a priest, that person must be cut off
from his people.'"

## *Incense*

34 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take these sweet-smelling
spices: resin, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense. Be
sure that you have equal amounts of each. 35 Make incense as a
person who makes perfume would do. Add salt to it to keep it
pure and holy. 36 Beat some of the incense into a fine powder,
and put it in front of the Ark of the Agreement in the Meeting
Tent, where I will meet with you. You must use this incense

powder only for its very special purpose. 37Do not make incense for yourselves the same way you make this incense. Treat it as holy to the LORD. 38Whoever makes incense like this to use as perfume must be cut off from his people."

## Psalm 20:6–9

6Now I know the LORD helps his appointed king.
He answers him from his holy heaven
and saves him with his strong right hand.

7Some trust in chariots, others in horses,
but we trust the LORD our God.

8They are overwhelmed and defeated,
but we march forward and win.

9LORD, save the king!
Answer us when we call for help.

## Proverbs 7:6–23

6Once while I was at the window of my house
I looked out through the shutters

7and saw some foolish, young men.
I noticed one of them had no wisdom.

8He was walking down the street near the corner
on the road leading to her house.

9It was the twilight of the evening;
the darkness of the night was just beginning.

10 Then the woman approached him,
dressed like a prostitute
and planning to trick him.

11 She was loud and stubborn
and never stayed at home.

12 She was always out in the streets or in the city squares,
waiting around on the corners of the streets.

13 She grabbed him and kissed him.
Without shame she said to him,

14 “I made my fellowship offering and took some of the meat home.
Today I have kept my special promises.

15 So I have come out to meet you;
I have been looking for you and have found you.

16 I have covered my bed
with colored sheets from Egypt.

17 I have made my bed smell sweet
with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

18 Come, let’s make love until morning.
Let’s enjoy each other’s love.

19 My husband is not home;
he has gone on a long trip.

20 He took a lot of money with him
and won’t be home for weeks.”

21 By her clever words she made him give in;

by her pleasing words she led him into doing wrong.

22 All at once he followed her,
like an ox led to the butcher,
like a deer caught in a trap

23
and shot through the liver with an arrow.

Like a bird caught in a trap,
he didn't know what he did would kill him.

## Matthew 25:1–30

### *A Story About Ten Bridesmaids*

25 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten
bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to wait for the
bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The
five foolish bridesmaids took their lamps, but they did not take
more oil for the lamps to burn. 4 The wise bridesmaids took their
lamps and more oil in jars. 5 Because the bridegroom was late,
they became sleepy and went to sleep.
6 "At midnight someone cried out, 'The bridegroom is coming!
Come and meet him!' 7 Then all the bridesmaids woke up and
got their lamps ready. 8 But the foolish ones said to the wise,
'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.'
9 The wise bridesmaids answered, 'No, the oil we have might not
be enough for all of us. Go to the people who sell oil and buy
some for yourselves.'
10 "So while the five foolish bridesmaids went to buy oil, the
bridegroom came. The bridesmaids who were ready went in
with the bridegroom to the wedding feast. Then the door was
closed and locked.
11 "Later the others came back and said, 'Sir, sir, open the
door to let us in.' 12 But the bridegroom answered, 'I tell you the
truth, I don't want to know you.'
13 "So always be ready, because you don't know the day or
the hour the Son of Man will come.

### *A Story About Three Servants*

14 “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was going to
another place for a visit. Before he left, he called for his
servants and told them to take care of his things while he was
gone. 15 He gave one servant five bags of gold, another servant
two bags of gold, and a third servant one bag of gold, to each
one as much as he could handle. Then he left. 16 The servant
who got five bags went quickly to invest the money and earned
five more bags. 17 In the same way, the servant who had two
bags invested them and earned two more. 18 But the servant
who got one bag went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid
the master’s money.
19 “After a long time the master came home and asked the
servants what they did with his money. 20 The servant who was
given five bags of gold brought five more bags to the master
and said, ‘Master, you trusted me to care for five bags of gold,
so I used your five bags to earn five more.’ 21 The master
answered, ‘You did well. You are a good and loyal servant.
Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you care for
much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.’
22 “Then the servant who had been given two bags of gold
came to the master and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of
gold to care for, so I used your two bags to earn two more.’
23 The master answered, ‘You did well. You are a good and loyal
servant. Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you
care for much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.’
24 “Then the servant who had been given one bag of gold
came to the master and said, ‘Master, I knew that you were a
hard man. You harvest things you did not plant. You gather
crops where you did not sow any seed. 25 So I was afraid and
went and hid your money in the ground. Here is your bag of
gold.’ 26 The master answered, ‘You are a wicked and lazy
servant! You say you knew that I harvest things I did not plant
and that I gather crops where I did not sow any seed. 27 So you
should have put my gold in the bank. Then, when I came home,
I would have received my gold back with interest.’
28 “So the master told his other servants, ‘Take the bag of
gold from that servant and give it to the servant who has ten
bags of gold. 29 Those who have much will get more, and they
will have much more than they need. But those who do not have
much will have everything taken away from them.’ 30 Then the
master said, ‘Throw that useless servant outside, into the
darkness where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.’

# February 10

## Love for the Least

*"I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink."*

Matthew 25:35

what is the sign of the saved? Their scholarship? Their willingness to go to foreign lands? Their ability to amass an audience and preach? Their skillful pens and hope-filled volumes? Their great miracles? No.

The sign of the saved is their love for the least.

Those put on the right hand of God will be those who gave food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, warmth to the lonely, clothing to the naked, comfort to the sick, and friendship to the imprisoned.

Did you note how simple the works are? Jesus doesn't say, "I was sick and you healed me ... I was in prison and you liberated me ... I was lonely and you built a retirement home for me ..." He doesn't say, "I was thirsty and you gave me spiritual counsel."

No fanfare. No hoopla. No media coverage. Just good people doing good things.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Exodus 31:1—32:35

#### *Bezalel and Oholiab Help*

31 Then the LORD said to Moses, 2"See, I have chosen Bezalel
son of Uri from the tribe of Judah. (Uri was the son of Hur.) 3I
have filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God and have given him the
skill, ability, and knowledge to do all kinds of work. 4He is able
to design pieces to be made from gold, silver, and bronze, 5to
cut jewels and put them in metal, to carve wood, and to do all
kinds of work. 6I have also chosen Oholiab son of Ahisamach

from the tribe of Dan to work with Bezalel. I have given skills to all the craftsmen, and they will be able to make all these things I have commanded you: 7the Meeting Tent, the Ark of the Agreement, the lid that covers the Ark, and everything in the Tent. 8This includes the table and everything on it, the pure gold lampstand and everything with it, the altar of incense, 9the altar for burnt offerings and everything used with it, and the bowl and the stand under it. 10They will make the woven clothes and the holy clothes for Aaron and the clothes for his sons to wear when they serve as priests. 11They will also make the special olive oil used in appointing people and things to the service of the LORD, and the sweet-smelling incense for the Holy Place.

"These workers will make all these things just as I have commanded you."

## *The Day of Rest*

12Then the LORD said to Moses, 13"Tell the Israelites, 'You must keep the rules about my Sabbaths, because they will be a sign between you and me from now on. In this way you will know that I, the LORD, make you holy.

14"'Make the Sabbath a holy day. If anyone treats the Sabbath like any other day, that person must be put to death; anyone who works on the Sabbath day must be cut off from his people. 15There are six days for working, but the seventh day is a day of rest, a day holy for the LORD. Anyone who works during the Sabbath day must be put to death. 16The Israelites must remember the Sabbath day as an agreement between them and me that will continue from now on. 17The Sabbath day will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, because in six days I, the LORD, made the sky and the earth. On the seventh day I did not work; I rested.'"

18When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two stone tablets with the Agreement written on them, written by the finger of God.

## *The People Make a Gold Calf*

32 The people saw that a long time had passed and Moses had not come down from the mountain. So they gathered around Aaron and said, "Moses led us out of Egypt, but we don't know what has happened to him. Make us gods who will lead us."

2Aaron said to the people, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, sons, and daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." 3So all the people took their gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4He took the gold from the people and formed it with a tool and made a statue of a calf. Then the people said,

“Israel, these are your gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

5When Aaron saw all this, he built an altar before the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a special feast to honor the LORD.” 6The people got up early the next morning and offered whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. They sat down to eat and drink, and then they got up and sinned sexually.

7Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down from this mountain, because your people, the people you brought out of the land of Egypt, have ruined themselves. 8They have quickly turned away from the things I commanded them to do. They have made for themselves a calf covered with gold, and they have worshiped it and offered sacrifices to it. They have said, ‘Israel, these are your gods who brought you out of Egypt.’”

9The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen these people, and I know that they are very stubborn. 10So now do not stop me. I am so angry with them that I am going to destroy them. Then I will make you and your descendants a great nation.”

11But Moses begged the LORD his God and said, “LORD, don’t let your anger destroy your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with your great power and strength. 12Don’t let the people of Egypt say, ‘The LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt for an evil purpose. He planned to kill them in the mountains and destroy them from the earth.’ So stop being angry, and don’t destroy your people. 13Remember the men who served you—Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. You promised with an oath to them and said, ‘I will make your descendants as many as the stars in the sky. I will give your descendants all this land that I have promised them, and it will be theirs forever.’” 14So the LORD changed his mind and did not destroy the people as he had said he might.

15Then Moses went down the mountain, and in his hands he had the two stone tablets with the Agreement on them. The commands were written on both sides of each stone, front and back. 16God himself had made the tablets, and God himself had written the commands on the tablets.

17When Joshua heard the sound of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “It sounds like war down in the camp.”

18Moses answered:

“It is not a shout of victory;
it is not a cry of defeat.
It is the sound of singing that I hear.”

19When Moses came close to the camp, he saw the gold calf and the dancing, and he became very angry. He threw down the stone tablets that he was carrying and broke them at the

bottom of the mountain. 20Then he took the calf that the people had made and melted it in the fire. He ground it into powder. Then he threw the powder into the water and forced the Israelites to drink it.

21Moses said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you? Why did you cause them to do such a terrible sin?”

22Aaron answered, “Don’t be angry, master. You know that these people are always ready to do wrong. 23The people said to me, ‘Moses led us out of Egypt, but we don’t know what has happened to him. Make us gods who will lead us.’ 24So I told the people, ‘Take off your gold jewelry.’ When they gave me the gold, I threw it into the fire and out came this calf!”

25Moses saw that the people were acting wildly. Aaron had let them get out of control and become fools in front of their enemies. 26So Moses stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Let anyone who wants to follow the LORD come to me.” And all the people from the family of Levi gathered around Moses.

27Then Moses said to them, “The LORD, the God of Israel, says this: ‘Every man must put on his sword and go through the camp from one end to the other. Each man must kill his brother, his friend, and his neighbor.’” 28The people from the family of Levi obeyed Moses, and that day about three thousand of the Israelites died. 29Then Moses said, “Today you have been given for service to the LORD. You were willing to kill your own sons and brothers, and God has blessed you for this.”

30The next day Moses told the people, “You have done a terrible sin. But now I will go up to the LORD. Maybe I can do something so your sins will be removed.” 31So Moses went back to the LORD and said, “How terribly these people have sinned! They have made for themselves gods from gold. 32Now, please forgive them of this sin. If you will not, then erase my name from the book in which you have written the names of your people.”

33But the LORD told Moses, “I will erase from my book the names of the people who sin against me. 34So now, go. Lead the people where I have told you, and my angel will lead you. When the time comes to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

35So the LORD caused terrible things to happen to the people because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

## Psalm 21:1–7

### *Thanksgiving for the King*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

21 LORD, the king rejoices because of your strength;
he is so happy when you save him!

2 You gave the king what he wanted
and did not refuse what he asked for. *Selah*

3 You put good things before him
and placed a gold crown on his head.

4 He asked you for life,
and you gave it to him,
so his years go on and on.

5 He has great glory because you gave him victories;
you gave him honor and praise.

6 You always gave him blessings;
you made him glad because you were with him.

7 The king truly trusts the LORD.
Because God Most High always loves him,
he will not be overwhelmed.

## Proverbs 7:24–27

24 Now, my sons, listen to me;
pay attention to what I say.

25 Don't let yourself be tricked by such a woman;
don't go where she leads you.

[26]She has ruined many good men,
and many have died because of her.

[27]Her house is on the road to death,
the road that leads down to the grave.

## Matthew 25:31–46

### *The King Will Judge All People*

[31]"The Son of Man will come again in his great glory, with all his angels. He will be King and sit on his great throne. [32]All the nations of the world will be gathered before him, and he will separate them into two groups as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33]The Son of Man will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

[34]"Then the King will say to the people on his right, 'Come, my Father has given you his blessing. Receive the kingdom God has prepared for you since the world was made. [35]I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was alone and away from home, and you invited me into your house. [36]I was without clothes, and you gave me something to wear. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'

[37]"Then the good people will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food, or thirsty and give you something to drink? [38]When did we see you alone and away from home and invite you into our house? When did we see you without clothes and give you something to wear? [39]When did we see you sick or in prison and care for you?'

[40]"Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.'

[41]"Then the King will say to those on his left, 'Go away from me. You will be punished. Go into the fire that burns forever that was prepared for the devil and his angels. [42]I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink. [43]I was alone and away from home, and you did not invite me into your house. I was without clothes, and you gave me nothing to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you did not care for me.'

[44]"Then those people will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or alone and away from home or without

clothes or sick or in prison? When did we see these things and not help you?'

45"Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you refused to do for even the least of my people here, you refused to do for me.'

46"These people will go off to be punished forever, but the good people will go to live forever."

# February 11

## God's Greatest Blessings

*"The Son of Man will die, just as the Scriptures say."*

Matthew 26:24

God's greatest blessings often come costumed as disasters. Any doubters need to do nothing more than ascend the hill of Calvary. Jerusalem's collective opinion that Friday was this: Jesus is finished. What other conclusion made sense? The religious leaders had turned him in. Rome had refused to bail him out. His followers had tucked their tails and scattered. He was nailed to a cross and left to die, which he did. They silenced his lips, sealed his tomb, and, as any priest worth the price of a phylactery would tell you, Jesus is history. Three years of power and promises are decomposing in a borrowed grave. Search the crucifixion sky for one ray of hope, and you won't find it.

Such is the view of the disciples, the opinion of the friends, and the outlook of the enemies.

But God is not surprised. His plan is right on schedule. Even in—especially in—death, Christ is still the king, the king over his own crucifixion.

from *Next Door Savior*

### Exodus 33:1—34:35

33 Then the LORD said to Moses, "You and the people you
brought out of Egypt must leave this place. Go to the land that I
promised with an oath to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
when I said, 'I will give that land to your descendants.' 2I will
send an angel to lead you, and I will force these people out of
the land: the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites,
and Jebusites. 3Go up to a fertile land. But I will not go with
you, because I might destroy you on the way, since you are such
a stubborn people."

4When the people heard this bad news, they became very
sad, and none of them put on jewelry. 5This was because the

LORD had said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites, ‘You are a stubborn people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I would destroy you. So take off all your jewelry, and I will decide what to do with you.’” 6So the people of Israel took off their jewelry at Mount Sinai.

## *The Meeting Tent*

7Moses used to take a tent and set it up a long way outside the camp; he called it the “Meeting Tent.” Anyone who wanted to ask the LORD about something would go to the Meeting Tent outside the camp. 8Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would rise and stand at the entrances of their tents, watching him until he entered the Meeting Tent. 9When Moses went into the Tent, the pillar of cloud would always come down and stay at the entrance of the Tent while the LORD spoke with Moses. 10Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud at the entrance of the Tent, they stood and worshiped, each person at the entrance of his own tent.

11The LORD spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but Moses’ young helper, Joshua son of Nun, did not leave the Tent.

12Moses said to the LORD, “You have told me to lead these people, but you did not say whom you would send with me. You have said to me, ‘I know you very well, and I am pleased with you.’ 13If I have truly pleased you, show me your plans so that I may know you and continue to please you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

14The LORD answered, “I myself will go with you, and I will give you victory.”

15Then Moses said to him, “If you yourself don’t go with us, then don’t send us away from this place. 16If you don’t go with us, no one will know that you are pleased with me and with your people. These people and I will be no different from any other people on earth.”

17Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will do what you ask, because I know you very well, and I am pleased with you.”

## *Moses Sees God’s Glory*

18Then Moses said, “Now, please show me your glory.”

19The LORD answered, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will announce my name, the LORD, so you can hear it. I will show kindness to anyone to whom I want to show kindness, and I will show mercy to anyone to whom I want to show mercy. 20But you cannot see my face, because no one can see me and live.

21“There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

22When my glory passes that place, I will put you in a large
crack in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have
passed by. 23Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my
back. But my face must not be seen."

## *Moses Gets New Stone Tablets*

34 The LORD said to Moses, "Cut two more stone tablets like the
first two, and I will write the same words on them that were on
the first two stones which you broke. 2Be ready tomorrow
morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Stand before me
there on the top of the mountain. 3No one may come with you or
even be seen any place on the mountain. Not even the flocks or
herds may eat grass near that mountain."

4So Moses cut two stone tablets like the first ones. Then
early the next morning he went up Mount Sinai, just as the LORD
had commanded him, carrying the two stone tablets with him.
5Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with
Moses, and the LORD called out his name: the LORD.

6The LORD passed in front of Moses and said, "I am the LORD.
The LORD is a God who shows mercy, who is kind, who doesn't
become angry quickly, who has great love and faithfulness 7and
is kind to thousands of people. The LORD forgives people for evil,
for sin, and for turning against him, but he does not forget to
punish guilty people. He will punish not only the guilty people,
but also their children, their grandchildren, their great-
grandchildren, and their great-great-grandchildren."

8Then Moses quickly bowed to the ground and worshiped.
9He said, "Lord, if you are pleased with me, please go with us. I
know that these are stubborn people, but forgive our evil and
our sin. Take us as your own people."

10Then the LORD said, "I am making this agreement with you.
I will do miracles in front of all your people—things that have
never before been done for any other nation on earth—and the
people with you will see my work. I, the LORD, will do wonderful
things for you. 11Obey the things I command you today, and I
will force out the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites,
Hivites, and Jebusites ahead of you. 12Be careful that you don't
make an agreement with the people who live in the land where
you are going, because it will bring you trouble. 13Destroy their
altars, break their stone pillars, and cut down their Asherah
idols. 14Don't worship any other god, because I, the LORD, the
Jealous One, am a jealous God.

15"Be careful that you don't make an agreement with the
people who live in that land. When they worship their gods,
they will invite you to join them. Then you will eat their
sacrifices. 16If you choose some of their daughters as wives for
your sons and those daughters worship gods, they will lead your

sons to do the same thing.

17 “Do not make gods of melted metal.

18 “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you must eat bread made without yeast as I commanded you. Do this during the month I have chosen, the month of Abib, because in that month you came out of Egypt.

19 “The firstborn of every mother belongs to me, including every firstborn male animal that is born in your flocks and herds. 20 You may buy back a donkey by paying for it with a lamb, but if you don’t want to buy back a donkey, you must break its neck. You must buy back all your firstborn sons.

“No one is to come before me without a gift.

21 “You must work for six days, but on the seventh day you must rest—even during the planting season and the harvest season.

22 “Celebrate the Feast of Weeks when you gather the first grain of the wheat harvest. And celebrate the Feast of Shelters in the fall.

23 “Three times each year all your males must come before the Lord God, the God of Israel. 24 I will force out nations ahead of you and expand the borders of your land. You will go before the LORD your God three times each year, and at that time no one will try to take your land from you.

25 “Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me with anything containing yeast, and do not leave any of the sacrifice of the Feast of Passover until the next morning.

26 “Bring the best first crops that you harvest from your ground to the Tent of the LORD your God.

“You must not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

27 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, because with these words I have made an agreement with you and Israel.”

28 Moses stayed there with the LORD forty days and forty nights, and during that time he did not eat food or drink water. And Moses wrote the words of the Agreement—the Ten Commandments—on the stone tablets.

## *The Face of Moses Shines*

29 Then Moses came down from Mount Sinai, carrying the two stone tablets of the Agreement in his hands. But he did not know that his face was shining because he had talked with the LORD. 30 When Aaron and all the people of Israel saw that Moses’ face was shining, they were afraid to go near him. 31 But Moses called to them, so Aaron and all the leaders of the people returned to Moses, and he talked with them. 32 After that, all the people of Israel came near him, and he gave them all the commands that the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.

33When Moses finished speaking to the people, he put a
covering over his face. 34Anytime Moses went before the LORD to
speak with him, Moses took off the covering until he came out.
Then Moses would come out and tell the Israelites what the
LORD had commanded. 35They would see that Moses' face was
shining. So he would cover his face again until the next time he
went in to speak with the LORD.

## Psalm 21:8–13

8Your hand is against all your enemies;
those who hate you will feel your power.

9When you appear,
you will burn them as in a furnace.

In your anger you will swallow them up,
and fire will burn them up.

10You will destroy their families from the earth;
their children will not live.

11They made evil plans against you,
but their traps won't work.

12You will make them turn their backs
when you aim your arrows at them.

13Be supreme, LORD, in your power.
We sing and praise your greatness.

## Proverbs 8:1–5

## *Listen to Wisdom*

8 Wisdom calls to you like someone shouting;
understanding raises her voice.

2On the hilltops along the road
and at the crossroads, she stands calling.

3Beside the city gates,
at the entrances into the city, she calls out:

4"Listen, everyone, I'm calling out to you;
I am shouting to all people.

5You who are uneducated, seek wisdom.
You who are foolish, get understanding.

# Matthew 26:1–25

## *The Plan to Kill Jesus*

26 After Jesus finished saying all these things, he told his followers, 2"You know that the day after tomorrow is the day of the Passover Feast. On that day the Son of Man will be given to his enemies to be crucified."

3Then the leading priests and the elders had a meeting at the palace of the high priest, named Caiaphas. 4At the meeting, they planned to set a trap to arrest Jesus and kill him. 5But they said, "We must not do it during the feast, because the people might cause a riot."

## *Perfume for Jesus' Burial*

6Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. 7While Jesus was there, a woman approached him with an alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. She poured this perfume on Jesus' head while he was eating.

[8]His followers were upset when they saw the woman do this.
They asked, “Why waste that perfume? [9]It could have been sold
for a great deal of money and the money given to the poor.”
[10]Knowing what had happened, Jesus said, “Why are you
troubling this woman? She did an excellent thing for me. [11]You
will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have
me. [12]This woman poured perfume on my body to prepare me
for burial. [13]I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is
preached in all the world, what this woman has done will be
told, and people will remember her.”

## *Judas Becomes an Enemy of Jesus*

[14]Then one of the twelve apostles, Judas Iscariot, went to
talk to the leading priests. [15]He said, “What will you pay me for
giving Jesus to you?” And they gave him thirty silver coins.
[16]After that, Judas watched for the best time to turn Jesus in.

## *Jesus Eats the Passover Meal*

[17]On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the
followers came to Jesus. They said, “Where do you want us to
prepare for you to eat the Passover meal?”
[18]Jesus answered, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell
him, ‘The Teacher says: “The chosen time is near. I will have the
Passover with my followers at your house.”’” [19]The followers did
what Jesus told them to do, and they prepared the Passover
meal.
[20]In the evening Jesus was sitting at the table with his twelve
followers. [21]As they were eating, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth,
one of you will turn against me.”
[22]This made the followers very sad. Each one began to say to
Jesus, “Surely, Lord, I am not the one who will turn against you,
am I?”
[23]Jesus answered, “The man who has dipped his hand with
me into the bowl is the one who will turn against me. [24]The Son
of Man will die, just as the Scriptures say. But how terrible it
will be for the person who hands the Son of Man over to be
killed. It would be better for him if he had never been born.”
[25]Then Judas, who would give Jesus to his enemies, said to
Jesus, “Teacher, surely I am not the one, am I?”
Jesus answered, “Yes, it is you.”

# February 12

## Packed for a Purpose

*"The LORD has given them the skill to do all kinds of work."*

Exodus 35:35

You were born prepacked. God looked at your entire life, determined your assignment, and gave you the tools to do the job. Before traveling, you do something similar. You consider the demands of the journey and pack accordingly. Cold weather? Bring a jacket. Business meeting? Carry the laptop. Time with grandchildren? Better take some sneakers and pain medication.

God did the same with you. *Joe will research animals … install curiosity. Meagan will lead a private school … an extra dose of management. I need Eric to comfort the sick … include a healthy share of compassion. Denalyn will marry Max … instill a double portion of patience.*

God packed you on purpose for a purpose.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Exodus 35:1—36:38

### *Rules About the Sabbath*

35 Moses gathered all the Israelite community together and said
to them, "These are the things the LORD has commanded you to
do. 2You are to work for six days, but the seventh day will be a
holy day, a Sabbath of rest to honor the LORD. Anyone who
works on that day must be put to death. 3On the Sabbath day
you must not light a fire in any of your houses."

4Moses said to all the Israelites, "This is what the LORD has
commanded: 5From what you have, take an offering for the
LORD. Let everyone who is willing bring this offering to the LORD:
gold, silver, bronze, 6blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen,
goat hair 7and male sheepskins that are colored red. They may

also bring fine leather, acacia wood, [8]olive oil for the lamps, spices for the special olive oil used for appointing priests and for the sweet-smelling incense, [9]onyx stones, and other jewels to be put on the holy vest and chest covering of the priests.

[10]"Let all the skilled workers come and make everything the LORD commanded: [11]the Holy Tent, its outer tent and its covering, the hooks, frames, crossbars, posts, and bases; [12]the Ark of the Agreement, its poles, lid, and the curtain in front of it; [13]the table, and its poles, all the things that go with the table, and the bread that shows we are in God's presence; [14]the lampstand for the light and all the things that go with it, the lamps, and olive oil for the light; [15]the altar of incense and its poles, the special oil and the sweet-smelling incense, the curtain for the entrance of the Meeting Tent; [16]the altar of burnt offering and its bronze screen, its poles and all its tools, the bronze bowl and its base; [17]the curtains around the courtyard, their posts and bases, and the curtain at the entry to the courtyard; [18]the pegs of the Holy Tent and of the courtyard and their ropes; [19]the special clothes that the priest will wear in the Holy Place. These are the holy clothes for Aaron the priest and his sons to wear when they serve as priests."

[20]Then all the people of Israel went away from Moses. [21]Everyone who wanted to give came and brought a gift to the LORD for making the Meeting Tent, all the things in the Tent, and the special clothes. [22]All the men and women who wanted to give brought gold jewelry of all kinds—pins, earrings, rings, and bracelets. They all presented their gold to the LORD. [23]Everyone who had blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen, and anyone who had goat hair or male sheepskins colored red or fine leather brought them to the LORD. [24]Everyone who could give silver or bronze brought that as a gift to the LORD, and everyone who had acacia wood to be used in the work brought it. [25]Every skilled woman used her hands to make the blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen, and they brought what they had made. [26]All the women who were skilled and wanted to help made thread of the goat hair. [27]The leaders brought onyx stones and other jewels to put on the holy vest and chest covering for the priest. [28]They also brought spices and olive oil for the sweet-smelling incense, the special oil, and the oil to burn in the lamps. [29]All the men and women of Israel who wanted to help brought gifts to the LORD for all the work the LORD had commanded Moses and the people to do.

[30]Then Moses said to the Israelites, "Look, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri the son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah. [31]The LORD has filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God and has given him the skill, ability, and knowledge to do all kinds of work. [32]He is able to design pieces to be made of gold, silver, and bronze, [33]to cut stones and jewels and put them in metal, to

carve wood, and to do all kinds of work. 34Also, the LORD has
given Bezalel and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach from the tribe
of Dan, the ability to teach others. 35The LORD has given them
the skill to do all kinds of work. They are able to cut designs in
metal and stone. They can plan and sew designs in the fine
linen with the blue, purple, and red thread. And they are also
able to weave things.
36So Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled person will do the work
the LORD has commanded, because he gave them the wisdom
and understanding to do all the skilled work needed to build the
Holy Tent."

2Then Moses called Bezalel, Oholiab, and all the other skilled
people to whom the LORD had given skills, and they came
because they wanted to help with the work. 3They received
from Moses everything the people of Israel had brought as gifts
to build the Holy Tent. The people continued to bring gifts each
morning because they wanted to. 4So all the skilled workers left
the work they were doing on the Holy Tent, 5and they said to
Moses, "The people are bringing more than we need to do the
work the LORD commanded."

6Then Moses sent this command throughout the camp: "No
man or woman should make anything else as a gift for the Holy
Tent." So the people were kept from giving more, 7because
what they had was already more than enough to do all the work.

## *The Holy Tent*

8Then the skilled workers made the Holy Tent. They made
the ten curtains of blue, purple, and red cloth, and they sewed
designs of creatures with wings on the curtains. 9Each curtain
was the same size—forty-two feet long and six feet wide. 10Five
of the curtains were fastened together to make one set, and the
other five were fastened together to make another set. 11Then
they made loops of blue cloth along the edge of the end curtain
on the first set of five, and they did the same thing with the
other set of five. 12There were fifty loops on one curtain and
fifty loops on the other curtain, with the loops opposite each
other. 13They made fifty gold hooks to join the two curtains
together so that the Holy Tent was joined together as one piece.

14Then the workers made another tent of eleven curtains
made of goat hair, to put over the Holy Tent. 15All eleven
curtains were the same size—forty-five feet long and six feet
wide. 16The workers sewed five curtains together into one set
and six together into another set. 17They made fifty loops along
the edge of the outside curtain of one set and fifty loops along
the edge of the outside curtain of the other set. 18Then they
made fifty bronze rings to join the two sets of cloth together
and make the tent one piece. 19They made two more coverings

for the outer tent—one made of male sheepskins colored red and the other made of fine leather.

[20]Then they made upright frames of acacia wood for the Holy Tent. [21]Each frame was fifteen feet tall and twenty-seven inches wide, [22]and there were two pegs side by side on each one. Every frame of the Holy Tent was made this same way. [23]They made twenty frames for the south side of the Tent, [24]and they made forty silver bases that went under the twenty frames. There were two bases for every frame—one for each peg of each frame. [25]They also made twenty frames for the north side of the Holy Tent [26]and forty silver bases—two to go under each frame. [27]They made six frames for the rear or west end of the Holy Tent [28]and two frames for the corners at the rear of the Holy Tent. [29]These two frames were doubled at the bottom and joined at the top with a metal ring. They did this for each of these corners. [30]So there were eight frames and sixteen silver bases—two bases under each frame.

[31]Then they made crossbars of acacia wood to connect the upright frames of the Holy Tent. Five crossbars held the frames together on one side of the Tent, [32]and five held the frames together on the other side. Also, five crossbars held the frames together on the west end, at the rear of the Tent. [33]They made the middle crossbar run along the entire length of each side and rear of the Tent. It was set halfway up the frames. [34]They made gold rings on the sides of the frames to hold the crossbars, and they covered the frames and the crossbars with gold.

[35]Then they made the curtain of blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. A skilled craftsman sewed designs of creatures with wings on it. [36]They made four posts of acacia wood for it and covered them with gold. Then they made gold hooks for the posts, as well as four silver bases in which to set the posts. [37]For the entrance to the Tent, they made a curtain of blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. A person who sewed well sewed designs on it. [38]Then they made five posts and hooks for it. They covered the tops of the posts and their bands with gold, and they made five bronze bases for the posts.

## Psalm 22:1–8

### *The Prayer of a Suffering Man*

**For the director of music. To the tune of “The Doe of Dawn.” A psalm of David.**

22 My God, my God, why have you abandoned
me?

You seem far from saving me,
far away from my groans.

2My God, I call to you during the day,
but you do not answer.

I call at night;
I am not silent.

3You sit as the Holy One.
The praises of Israel are your throne.

4Our ancestors trusted you;
they trusted, and you saved them.

5They called to you for help
and were rescued.

They trusted you
and were not disappointed.

6But I am like a worm instead of a man.
People make fun of me and hate me.

7Those who look at me laugh.
They stick out their tongues and shake their heads.

8They say, “Turn to the LORD for help.
Maybe he will save you.

If he likes you,
maybe he will rescue you.”

## Proverbs 8:6–11

6 Listen, because I have important things to say,
and what I tell you is right.

7 What I say is true,
I refuse to speak evil.

8 Everything I say is honest;
nothing I say is crooked or false.

9 People with good sense know what I say is true;
and those with knowledge know my words are right.

10 Choose my teachings instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than the finest gold.

11 Wisdom is more precious than rubies.
Nothing you could want is equal to it.

## Matthew 26:26–56

### *The Lord's Supper*

26 While they were eating, Jesus took some bread and
thanked God for it and broke it. Then he gave it to his followers
and said, "Take this bread and eat it; this is my body."
27 Then Jesus took a cup and thanked God for it and gave it to
the followers. He said, "Every one of you drink this. 28 This is my
blood which is the new[n] agreement that God makes with his
people. This blood is poured out for many to forgive their sins.
29 I tell you this: I will not drink of this fruit of the vine[n] again
until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's
kingdom."
30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

## *Jesus' Followers Will Leave Him*

31 Jesus told his followers, "Tonight you will all stumble in
your faith on account of me, because it is written in the
Scriptures:

'I will kill the shepherd,
and the sheep will scatter.'

Zechariah 13:7

32 But after I rise from the dead, I will go ahead of you into
Galilee."
33 Peter said, "Everyone else may stumble in their faith
because of you, but I will not."
34 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, tonight before the rooster
crows you will say three times that you don't know me."
35 But Peter said, "I will never say that I don't know you! I
will even die with you!" And all the other followers said the
same thing.

## *Jesus Prays Alone*

36 Then Jesus went with his followers to a place called
Gethsemane. He said to them, "Sit here while I go over there
and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with
him, and he began to be very sad and troubled. 38 He said to
them, "My heart is full of sorrow, to the point of death. Stay
here and watch with me."
39 After walking a little farther away from them, Jesus fell to
the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, do not give
me this cup[n] of suffering. But do what you want, not what I
want." 40 Then Jesus went back to his followers and found them
asleep. He said to Peter, "You men could not stay awake with
me for one hour? 41 Stay awake and pray for strength against
temptation. The spirit wants to do what is right, but the body is
weak."
42 Then Jesus went away a second time and prayed, "My
Father, if it is not possible for this painful thing to be taken from
me, and if I must do it, I pray that what you want will be done."
43 Then he went back to his followers, and again he found
them asleep, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So Jesus left
them and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same
thing.
45 Then Jesus went back to his followers and said, "Are you
still sleeping and resting? The time has come for the Son of
Man to be handed over to sinful people. 46 Get up, we must go.

Look, here comes the man who has turned against me."

## *Jesus Is Arrested*

47While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve apostles, came up. With him were many people carrying swords and clubs who had been sent from the leading priests and the Jewish elders of the people. 48Judas had planned to give them a signal, saying, "The man I kiss is Jesus. Arrest him." 49At once Judas went to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Teacher!" and kissed him.

50Jesus answered, "Friend, do what you came to do."

Then the people came and grabbed Jesus and arrested him. 51When that happened, one of Jesus' followers reached for his sword and pulled it out. He struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.

52Jesus said to the man, "Put your sword back in its place. All who use swords will be killed with swords. 53Surely you know I could ask my Father, and he would give me more than twelve armies of angels. 54But it must happen this way to bring about what the Scriptures say."

55Then Jesus said to the crowd, "You came to get me with swords and clubs as if I were a criminal. Every day I sat in the Temple teaching, and you did not arrest me there. 56But all these things have happened so that it will come about as the prophets wrote." Then all of Jesus' followers left him and ran away.

# February 13

## Secure in His Grasp

*I have leaned on you since the day I was born; you have been my God since my mother gave me birth.*

Psalm 22:10

"God is strong and can help you not to fall" (Jude 24). You and I are on a great climb. The wall is high, and the stakes are higher. You took your first step the day you confessed Christ as the Son of God. He gave you his harness—the Holy Spirit. In your hands he placed a rope—his Word.

Your first steps were confident and strong, but with the journey came weariness, and with the height came fear. You lost your footing. You lost your focus. You lost your grip, and you fell. For a moment, which seemed like forever, you tumbled wildly. Out of control. Out of self-control. Disoriented. Dislodged. Falling.

But then the rope tightened, and the tumble ceased. You hung in the harness and found it to be strong. You grasped the rope and found it to be true. And though you can't see your guide, you know him. You know he is strong. You know he is able to keep you from falling.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

## Exodus 37:1—38:31

### *The Ark of the Agreement*

37 Bezalel made the Ark of acacia wood; it was forty-five inches long, twenty-seven inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. 2He covered it, both inside and out, with pure gold, and he put a gold strip around it. 3He made four gold rings for it and attached them to its four feet, with two rings on each side. 4Then he made poles of acacia wood and covered them with gold. 5He put the poles through the rings on each side of the

Ark to carry it. [6]Then he made a lid of pure gold that was forty-five inches long and twenty-seven inches wide. [7]Then Bezalel hammered gold to make two creatures with wings and attached them to each end of the lid. [8]He made one creature on one end of the lid and the other creature on the other end. He attached them to the lid so that it would be one piece. [9]The creatures' wings were spread upward, covering the lid, and the creatures faced each other across the lid.

## *The Table*

[10]Then he made the table of acacia wood; it was thirty-six inches long, eighteen inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. [11]He covered it with pure gold and put a gold strip around it. [12]He made a frame three inches high that stood up all around the edge, and he put a gold strip around it. [13]Then he made four gold rings for the table and attached them to the four corners of the table where the four legs were. [14]The rings were put close to the frame around the top of the table, because they held the poles for carrying it. [15]The poles for carrying the table were made of acacia wood and were covered with gold. [16]He made of pure gold all the things that were used on the table: the plates, bowls, cups, and jars used for pouring the drink offerings.

## *The Lampstand*

[17]Then he made the lampstand of pure gold, hammering out its base and stand. Its flower-like cups, buds, and petals were joined together in one piece with the base and stand. [18]Six branches went out from the sides of the lampstand—three on one side and three on the other. [19]Each branch had three cups shaped like almond flowers, and each cup had a bud and a petal. Each of the six branches going out from the lampstand was the same. [20]There were four more cups shaped like almond flowers on the lampstand itself, each with its buds and petals. [21]Three pairs of branches went out from the lampstand. A bud was under the place where each pair was attached to the lampstand. Each of the six branches going out from the lampstand was the same. [22]The buds, branches, and lampstand were all one piece of pure, hammered gold. [23]He made seven pure gold lamps for this lampstand, and he made pure gold wick trimmers and trays. [24]He used about seventy-five pounds of pure gold to make the lampstand and all the things that go with it.

## *The Altar for Burning Incense*

25 Then he made the altar of incense out of acacia wood. It
was square—eighteen inches long and eighteen inches wide—
and it was thirty-six inches high. Each corner that stuck out like
a horn was joined into one piece with the altar. 26 He covered
the top and all the sides and the corners with pure gold, and he
put gold trim around the altar. 27 He made two gold rings and
put them below the trim on opposite sides of the altar; these
rings held the poles for carrying it. 28 He made the poles of
acacia wood and covered them with gold.
29 Then he made the holy olive oil for appointing the priests
and the pure, sweet-smelling incense. He made them like a
person who mixes perfumes.

## *The Altar for Burnt Offerings*

38 Then he built the altar for burnt offerings out of acacia wood.
The altar was square—seven and one-half feet long and seven
and one-half feet wide—and it was four and one-half feet high.
2 He made each corner stick out like a horn so that the horns
and the altar were joined together in one piece. Then he
covered the altar with bronze. 3 He made all the tools of bronze
to use on the altar: the pots, shovels, bowls for sprinkling blood,
meat forks, and pans for carrying the fire. 4 He made a large
bronze screen to hold the burning wood for the altar and put it
inside the altar, under its rim, halfway up from the bottom. 5 He
made bronze rings to hold the poles for carrying the altar, and
he put them at the four corners of the screen. 6 Then he made
poles of acacia wood and covered them with bronze. 7 He put
the poles through the rings on both sides of the altar, to carry it.
He made the altar of boards and left the inside hollow.

## *The Bronze Bowl*

8 He made the bronze bowl for washing, and he built it on a
bronze stand. He used the bronze from mirrors that belonged to
the women who served at the entrance to the Meeting Tent.

## *The Courtyard of the Holy Tent*

9 Then he made a wall of curtains to form a courtyard around
the Holy Tent. On the south side the curtains were one hundred
fifty feet long and were made of fine linen. 10 The curtains hung
on silver hooks and bands, placed on twenty bronze posts with
twenty bronze bases. 11 On the north side the wall of curtains
was also one hundred fifty feet long, and it hung on silver hooks
and bands on twenty posts with twenty bronze bases.
12 On the west side of the courtyard, the wall of curtains was

seventy-five feet long. It was held up by silver hooks and bands on ten posts with ten bases. 13The east side was also seventy-five feet long. 14On one side of the entry there was a wall of curtains twenty-two and one-half feet long, held up by three posts and three bases. 15On the other side of the entry there was also a wall of curtains twenty-two and one-half feet long, held up by three posts and three bases. 16All the curtains around the courtyard were made of fine linen. 17The bases for the posts were made of bronze. The hooks and the bands on the posts were made of silver, and the tops of the posts were covered with silver also. All the posts in the courtyard had silver bands.

18The curtain for the entry of the courtyard was made of blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen, sewn by a person who could sew well. The curtain was thirty feet long and seven and one-half feet high, the same height as the curtains around the courtyard. 19It was held up by four posts and four bronze bases. The hooks and bands on the posts were made of silver, and the tops on the posts were covered with silver. 20All the tent pegs for the Holy Tent and for the curtains around the courtyard were made of bronze.

21This is a list of the materials used to make the Holy Tent, where the Agreement was kept. Moses ordered the Levites to make this list, and Ithamar son of Aaron was in charge of keeping it. 22Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur of the tribe of Judah, made everything the LORD commanded Moses. 23Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan helped him. He could cut designs into metal and stone; he was a designer and also skilled at sewing the blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen.

24The total amount of gold used to build the Holy Tent was presented to the LORD. It weighed over 2,000 pounds, as set by the Holy Place measure.

25The silver was given by the members of the community who were counted. It weighed 7,550 pounds, as set by the Holy Place measure. 26All the men twenty years old or older were counted. There were 603,550 men, and each man had to pay one-fifth of an ounce of silver, as set by the Holy Place measure. 27Of this silver, 7,500 pounds were used to make the one hundred bases for the Holy Tent and for the curtain—75 pounds of silver in each base. 28They used 50 pounds of silver to make the hooks for the posts and to cover the tops of the posts and to make the bands on them.

29The bronze which was presented to the LORD weighed about 5,000 pounds. 30They used the bronze to make the bases at the entrance of the Meeting Tent, to make the altar and the bronze screen, and to make all the tools for the altar. 31This bronze was also used to make bases for the wall of curtains around the courtyard and bases for curtains at the entry to the

courtyard, as well as to make the tent pegs for the Holy Tent and the curtains that surrounded the courtyard.

## Psalm 22:9–18

9 You had my mother give birth to me.
You made me trust you
while I was just a baby.

10 I have leaned on you since the day I was born;
you have been my God since my mother gave me birth.

11 So don't be far away from me.
Now trouble is near,
and there is no one to help.

12 People have surrounded me like angry bulls.
Like the strong bulls of Bashan, they are on every side.

13 Like hungry, roaring lions
they open their mouths at me.

14 My strength is gone,
like water poured out onto the ground,
and my bones are out of joint.

My heart is like wax;
it has melted inside me.

15 My strength has dried up like a clay pot,
and my tongue sticks to the top of my mouth.
You laid me in the dust of death.

16 Evil people have surrounded me;
like dogs they have trapped me.

They have bitten my arms and legs.

17 I can count all my bones;
people look and stare at me.

18 They divided my clothes among them,
and they threw lots for my clothing.

## Proverbs 8:12–21

12 “I am wisdom, and I have good judgment.
I also have knowledge and good sense.

13 If you respect the LORD, you will also hate evil.
I hate pride and bragging,
evil ways and lies.

14 I have good sense and advice,
and I have understanding and power.

15 I help kings to govern
and rulers to make fair laws.

16 Princes use me to lead,
and so do all important people who judge fairly.

17 I love those who love me,
and those who seek me find me.

18 Riches and honor are mine to give.
So are wealth and lasting success.

19 What I give is better than the finest gold,
better than the purest silver.

[20]I do what is right
and follow the path of justice.

[21]I give wealth to those who love me,
filling their houses with treasures.

## Matthew 26:57–75

### *Jesus Before the Leaders*

[57]Those people who arrested Jesus led him to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders were gathered. [58]Peter followed far behind to the courtyard of the high priest's house, and he sat down with the guards to see what would happen to Jesus.

[59]The leading priests and the whole Jewish council tried to find something false against Jesus so they could kill him. [60]Many people came and told lies about him, but the council could find no real reason to kill him. Then two people came and said, [61]"This man said, 'I can destroy the Temple of God and build it again in three days.'"

[62]Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Aren't you going to answer? Don't you have something to say about their charges against you?" [63]But Jesus said nothing.

Again the high priest said to Jesus, "I command you by the power of the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

[64]Jesus answered, "Those are your words. But I tell you, in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, the Powerful One, and coming on clouds in the sky."

[65]When the high priest heard this, he tore his clothes and said, "This man has said things that are against God! We don't need any more witnesses; you all heard him say these things against God. [66]What do you think?"

The people answered, "He should die."

[67]Then the people there spat in Jesus' face and beat him with their fists. Others slapped him. [68]They said, "Prove to us that you are a prophet, you Christ! Tell us who hit you!"

### *Peter Says He Doesn't Know Jesus*

[69]At that time, as Peter was sitting in the courtyard, a servant girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus of

Galilee.”

70But Peter said to all the people there that he was never with Jesus. He said, “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

71When he left the courtyard and was at the gate, another girl saw him. She said to the people there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

72Again, Peter said he was never with him, saying, “I swear I don’t know this man Jesus!”

73A short time later, some people standing there went to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of those who followed Jesus. The way you talk shows it.”

74Then Peter began to place a curse on himself and swear, “I don’t know the man.” At once, a rooster crowed. 75And Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: “Before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you don’t know me.” Then Peter went outside and cried painfully.

# February 14

## Two Choices

*"What should I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?"*

Matthew 27:22

Pilate is correct in his question. "What should I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?"Perhaps you, like Pilate, are curious about this one called Jesus. What do you do with a man who claims to be God, yet hates religion? What do you do with a man who calls himself the Savior, yet condemns systems? What do you do with a man who knows the place and time of his death, yet goes there anyway? …

You have two choices.

You can reject him. That is an option. You can, as have many, decide that the idea of God's becoming a carpenter is too bizarre—and walk away.

Or you can accept him. You can journey with him. You can listen for his voice amid the hundreds of voices and follow him.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## Exodus 39:1—40:38

### *Clothes for the Priests*

39 They used blue, purple, and red thread to make woven
clothes for the priests to wear when they served in the Holy
Place. They made the holy clothes for Aaron as the LORD had
commanded Moses.

2They made the holy vest of gold, and blue, purple, and red
thread, and fine linen. 3They hammered the gold into sheets
and then cut it into long, thin strips. They worked the gold into
the blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. This was done
by skilled craftsmen. 4They made the shoulder straps for the
holy vest, which were attached to the top corners of the vest
and tied together over each shoulder. 5The skillfully woven belt

was made in the same way; it was joined to the holy vest as one piece. It was made of gold, and blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen, the way the LORD commanded Moses.

6They put gold around the onyx stones and then wrote the names of the sons of Israel on these gems, as a person carves words and designs on a seal. 7Then they attached the gems on the shoulder straps of the holy vest, as reminders of the twelve sons of Israel. This was done just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

8The skilled craftsmen made the chest covering like the holy vest; it was made of gold, and blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. 9The chest covering was square—nine inches long and nine inches wide—and it was folded double to make a pocket. 10Then they put four rows of beautiful jewels on it: In the first row there was a ruby, a topaz, and a yellow quartz; 11in the second there was a turquoise, a sapphire, and an emerald; 12in the third there was a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; 13in the fourth there was a chrysolite, an onyx, and a jasper. Gold was put around these jewels to attach them to the chest covering, 14and the names of the sons of Israel were carved on these twelve jewels as a person carves a seal. Each jewel had the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

15They made chains of pure gold, twisted together like a rope, for the chest covering. 16The workers made two gold pieces and two gold rings. They put the two gold rings on the two upper corners of the chest covering. 17Then they put two gold chains in the two rings at the ends of the chest covering, 18and they fastened the other two ends of the chains to the two gold pieces. They attached these gold pieces to the two shoulder straps in the front of the holy vest. 19They made two gold rings and put them at the lower corners of the chest covering on the inside edge next to the holy vest. 20They made two more gold rings on the bottom of the shoulder straps in front of the holy vest, near the seam, just above the woven belt of the holy vest. 21They used a blue ribbon and tied the rings of the chest covering to the rings of the holy vest, connecting it to the woven belt. In this way the chest covering would not swing out from the holy vest. They did all these things the way the LORD commanded.

22Then they made the outer robe to be worn under the holy vest. It was woven only of blue cloth. 23They made a hole in the center of the outer robe, with a woven collar sewn around it so it would not tear. 24Then they made balls like pomegranates of blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen and hung them around the bottom of the outer robe. 25They also made bells of pure gold and hung these around the bottom of the outer robe between the balls. 26So around the bottom of the outer robe there was a bell and a pomegranate ball, a bell and a

pomegranate ball. The priest wore this outer robe when he served as priest, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

27They wove inner robes of fine linen for Aaron and his sons,
28and they made turbans, headbands, and underclothes of fine linen. 29Then they made the cloth belt of fine linen, and blue, purple, and red thread, and designs were sewn onto it, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

30They made a strip of pure gold, which is the holy crown, and carved these words in the gold, as one might carve on a seal: "Holy to the LORD." 31Then they tied this flat piece to the turban with a blue ribbon, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

32So all the work on the Meeting Tent was finished. The Israelites did everything just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 33Then they brought the Holy Tent to Moses: the Tent and all its furniture, hooks, frames, crossbars, posts, and bases;
34the covering made of male sheepskins colored red, the covering made of fine leather, and the curtain that covered the entrance to the Most Holy Place; 35the Ark of the Agreement, its poles and lid; 36the table, all its containers, and the bread that showed they were in God's presence; 37the pure gold lampstand with its lamps in a row, all its tools, and the olive oil for the light; 38the gold altar, the special olive oil used for appointing priests, the sweet-smelling incense, and the curtain that covered the entrance to the Tent; 39the bronze altar and its screen, its poles and all its tools, the bowl and its stand; 40the curtains for the courtyard with their posts and bases, the curtain that covered the entry to the courtyard, the cords, pegs, and all the things in the Meeting Tent. 41They brought the clothes for the priests to wear when they served in the Holy Tent—the holy clothes for Aaron the priest and the clothes for his sons, which they wore when they served as priests.

42The Israelites had done all this work just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 43Moses looked closely at all the work and saw they had done it just as the LORD had commanded. So Moses blessed them.

## *Setting Up the Holy Tent*

40 Then the LORD said to Moses: 2"On the first day of the first month, set up the Holy Tent, which is the Meeting Tent. 3Put the Ark of the Agreement in it and hang the curtain in front of the Ark. 4Bring in the table and arrange everything on the table that should be there. Then bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. 5Put the gold altar for burning incense in front of the Ark of the Agreement, and put the curtain at the entrance to the Holy Tent.

6"Put the altar of burnt offerings in front of the entrance of

the Holy Tent, the Meeting Tent. 7Put the bowl between the Meeting Tent and the altar, and put water in it. 8Set up the courtyard around the Holy Tent, and put the curtain at the entry to the courtyard.

9"Use the special olive oil and pour it on the Holy Tent and everything in it, in order to give the Tent and all that is in it for service to the LORD. They will be holy. 10Pour the special oil on the altar for burnt offerings and on all its tools. Give the altar for service to God, and it will be very holy. 11Then pour the special olive oil on the bowl and the base under it so that they will be given for service to God.

12"Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Meeting Tent, and wash them with water. 13Then put the holy clothes on Aaron. Pour the special oil on him, and give him for service to God so that he may serve me as a priest. 14Bring Aaron's sons and put the inner robes on them. 15Pour the special oil on them in the same way that you appointed their father as priest so that they may also serve me as priests. Pouring oil on them will make them a family of priests, they and their descendants from now on." 16Moses did everything that the LORD commanded him.

17So the Holy Tent was set up on the first day of the first month during the second year after they left Egypt. 18When Moses set up the Holy Tent, he put the bases in place, and he put the frames on the bases. Next he put the crossbars through the rings of the frames and set up the posts. 19After that, Moses spread the cloth over the Holy Tent and put the covering over it, just as the LORD commanded.

20Moses put the stone tablets that had the Agreement written on them into the Ark. He put the poles through the rings of the Ark and put the lid on it. 21Next he brought the Ark into the Tent and hung the curtain to cover the Ark, just as the LORD commanded him.

22Moses put the table in the Meeting Tent on the north side of the Holy Tent in front of the curtain. 23Then he put the bread on the table before the LORD, just as the LORD commanded him. 24Moses put the lampstand in the Meeting Tent on the south side of the Holy Tent across from the table. 25Then he put the lamps on the lampstand before the LORD, just as the LORD commanded him.

26Moses put the gold altar for burning incense in the Meeting Tent in front of the curtain. 27Then he burned sweet-smelling incense on it, just as the LORD commanded him. 28Then he hung the curtain at the entrance to the Holy Tent.

29He put the altar for burnt offerings at the entrance to the Holy Tent, the Meeting Tent, and offered a whole burnt offering and grain offerings on it, just as the LORD commanded him. 30Moses put the bowl between the Meeting Tent and the altar for burnt offerings, and he put water in it for washing. 31Moses,

Aaron, and Aaron's sons used this water to wash their hands and feet. 32They washed themselves every time they entered the Meeting Tent and every time they went near the altar for burnt offerings, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

33Then Moses set up the courtyard around the Holy Tent and the altar, and he put up the curtain at the entry to the courtyard. So Moses finished the work.

### *The Cloud over the Holy Tent*

34Then the cloud covered the Meeting Tent, and the glory of the LORD filled the Holy Tent. 35Moses could not enter the Meeting Tent, because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the Holy Tent.

36When the cloud rose from the Holy Tent, the Israelites would begin to travel, 37but as long as the cloud stayed on the Holy Tent, they did not travel. They stayed in that place until the cloud rose. 38So the cloud of the LORD was over the Holy Tent during the day, and there was a fire in the cloud at night. So all the Israelites could see the cloud while they traveled.

## Psalm 22:19–21

19But, LORD, don't be far away.
You are my strength; hurry to help me.

20Save me from the sword;
save my life from the dogs.

21Rescue me from the lion's mouth;
save me from the horns of the bulls.

## Proverbs 8:22–31

22"I, wisdom, was with the LORD when he began his work,
long before he made anything else.

[23]I was created in the very beginning,
even before the world began.

[24]I was born before there were oceans,
or springs overflowing with water,

[25]before the hills were there,
before the mountains were put in place.

[26]God had not made the earth or fields,
not even the first dust of the earth.

[27]I was there when God put the skies in place,
when he stretched the horizon over the oceans,

[28]when he made the clouds above
and put the deep underground springs in place.

[29]I was there when he ordered the sea
not to go beyond the borders he had set.

I was there when he laid the earth’s foundation.

[30]I was like a child by his side.

I was delighted every day,
enjoying his presence all the time,

[31]enjoying the whole world,
and delighted with all its people.

## Matthew 27:1–31

## *Jesus Is Taken to Pilate*

27 Early the next morning, all the leading priests and elders of
the people decided that Jesus should die. 2They tied him, led
him away, and turned him over to Pilate, the governor.

## *Judas Kills Himself*

3Judas, the one who had given Jesus to his enemies, saw that
they had decided to kill Jesus. Then he was very sorry for what
he had done. So he took the thirty silver coins back to the
priests and the leaders, 4saying, "I sinned; I handed over to you
an innocent man."

The leaders answered, "What is that to us? That's your
problem, not ours."

5So Judas threw the money into the Temple. Then he went off
and hanged himself.

6The leading priests picked up the silver coins in the Temple
and said, "Our law does not allow us to keep this money with
the Temple money, because it has paid for a man's death." 7So
they decided to use the coins to buy Potter's Field as a place to
bury strangers who died in Jerusalem. 8That is why that field is
still called the Field of Blood. 9So what Jeremiah the prophet
had said came true: "They took thirty silver coins. That is how
little the Israelites thought he was worth. 10They used those
thirty silver coins to buy the potter's field, as the Lord
commanded me."[n]

## *Pilate Questions Jesus*

11Jesus stood before Pilate the governor, and Pilate asked
him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Those are your words."

12When the leading priests and the elders accused Jesus, he
said nothing.

13So Pilate said to Jesus, "Don't you hear them accusing you
of all these things?"

14But Jesus said nothing in answer to Pilate, and Pilate was
very surprised at this.

## *Pilate Tries to Free Jesus*

15Every year at the time of Passover the governor would free
one prisoner whom the people chose. 16At that time there was a
man in prison, named Barabbas,[n] who was known to be very
bad. 17When the people gathered at Pilate's house, Pilate said,
"Whom do you want me to set free: Barabbas[n] or Jesus who is

called the Christ?” [18]Pilate knew that they turned Jesus in to him because they were jealous.

[19]While Pilate was sitting there on the judge’s seat, his wife sent this message to him: “Don’t do anything to that man, because he is innocent. Today I had a dream about him, and it troubled me very much.”

[20]But the leading priests and elders convinced the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be freed and for Jesus to be killed.

[21]Pilate said, “I have Barabbas and Jesus. Which do you want me to set free for you?”

The people answered, “Barabbas.”

[22]Pilate asked, “So what should I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?”

They all answered, “Crucify him!”

[23]Pilate asked, “Why? What wrong has he done?”

But they shouted louder, “Crucify him!”

[24]When Pilate saw that he could do nothing about this and that a riot was starting, he took some water and washed his hands[n] in front of the crowd. Then he said, “I am not guilty of this man’s death. You are the ones who are causing it!”

[25]All the people answered, “We and our children will be responsible for his death.”

[26]Then he set Barabbas free. But Jesus was beaten with whips and handed over to the soldiers to be crucified.

[27]The governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the governor’s palace, and they all gathered around him. [28]They took off his clothes and put a red robe on him. [29]Using thorny branches, they made a crown, put it on his head, and put a stick in his right hand. Then the soldiers bowed before Jesus and made fun of him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” [30]They spat on Jesus. Then they took his stick and began to beat him on the head. [31]After they finished, the soldiers took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

# February 15

## The Lamb of God

*At noon the whole country became dark, and the darkness lasted for three hours.*

Matthew 27:45

Of course the sky is dark; people are killing the Light of the World. The universe grieves. God said it would. "At that time I will cause the sun to go down at noon and make the earth dark on a bright day … I will make it like a time of crying for the death of an only son, and its end like the end of an awful day" (Amos 8:9–10).

The sky weeps. And a lamb bleats. Remember the time of the scream? "At about three o'clock Jesus cried out." Three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour of the temple sacrifice. Less than a mile to the east, a finely clothed priest leads a lamb to the slaughter, unaware that his work is futile. Heaven is not looking at the lamb of man but at "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

from *Next Door Savior*

## Leviticus 1:1—2:16

### *The Burnt Offering*

1 The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Meeting
Tent, saying, 2"Tell the people of Israel: 'When you bring an
offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from the
herd or flock.

3"'If the offering is a whole burnt offering from the herd, it
must be a male that has nothing wrong with it. The person must
take the animal to the entrance of the Meeting Tent so that the
LORD will accept the offering. 4He must put his hand on the
animal's head, and the LORD will accept it to remove the
person's sin so he will belong to God. 5He must kill the young

bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons, the priests, must bring its blood and sprinkle it on all sides of the altar at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. 6After that he will skin the animal and cut it into pieces. 7The priests, when they have put wood and fire on the altar, 8are to lay the head, the fat, and other pieces on the wood that is on the fire of the altar. 9The animal's inner organs and legs must be washed with water. Then the priest must burn all the animal's parts on the altar. It is a whole burnt offering, an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the LORD.

10"'If the burnt offering is a sheep or a goat from the flock, it must be a male that has nothing wrong with it. 11The person must kill the animal on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons, the priests, must sprinkle its blood on all sides of the altar. 12The person must cut the animal into pieces, and the priest must lay them, with the head and fat, on the wood that is on the fire of the altar. 13The person must wash the animal's inner organs and legs with water, and then the priest must burn all its parts on the altar. It is a whole burnt offering, an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the LORD.

14"'If the whole burnt offering for the LORD is a bird, it must be a dove or a young pigeon. 15The priest will bring it to the altar and pull off its head, which he will burn on the altar; the bird's blood must be drained out on the side of the altar. 16The priest must remove the bird's crop[n] and its contents and throw them on the east side of the altar, where the ashes are. 17Then he must tear the bird open by its wings without dividing it into two parts. He must burn the bird on the altar, on the wood which is on the fire. It is a whole burnt offering, an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the LORD.

## *The Grain Offering*

2 "'When anyone offers a grain offering to the LORD, it must be made from fine flour. The person must pour oil on it, put incense on it, 2and then take it to Aaron's sons, the priests. The priest must take a handful of the fine flour and oil and all the incense, and burn it on the altar as a memorial portion. It is an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the LORD. 3The rest of the grain offering will belong to Aaron and the priests; it is a most holy part of the offerings made by fire to the LORD.

4"'If you bring a grain offering that was baked in the oven, it must be made from fine flour. It may be loaves made without yeast and mixed with oil, or it may be wafers made without yeast that have oil poured over them. 5If your grain offering is cooked on a griddle, it must be made, without yeast, of fine flour mixed with oil. 6Crumble it and pour oil over it; it is a grain offering. 7If your grain offering is cooked in a pan, it must

be made from fine flour and oil. [8]Bring the grain offering made of these things to the LORD. Give it to the priest, and he will take it to the altar. [9]He will take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar, as an offering made by fire. Its smell is pleasing to the LORD. [10]The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and the priests. It is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.

[11]"'Every grain offering you bring to the LORD must be made without yeast, because you must not burn any yeast or honey in an offering made by fire to the LORD. [12]You may bring yeast and honey to the LORD as an offering from the first harvest, but they must not be burned on the altar as a pleasing smell. [13]You must also put salt on all your grain offerings. Salt stands for your agreement with God that will last forever; do not leave it out of your grain offering. You must add salt to all your offerings.

[14]"'If you bring a grain offering from the first harvest to the LORD, bring crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire. [15]Put oil and incense on it; it is a grain offering. [16]The priest will burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and oil, with the incense on it. It is an offering by fire to the LORD.

## Psalm 22:22–31

[22]Then I will tell my brothers and sisters about you;
I will praise you in the public meeting.

[23]Praise the LORD, all you who respect him.
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him;
fear him, all you Israelites.

[24]He does not ignore those in trouble.

He doesn't hide from them
but listens when they call out to him.

[25]LORD, I praise you in the great meeting of your people;
these worshipers will see me do what I promised.

[26]Poor people will eat until they are full;
those who look to the LORD will praise him.
May your hearts live forever!

[27]People everywhere will remember
and will turn to the LORD.

All the families of the nations
will worship him

[28]because the LORD is King,
and he rules the nations.

[29]All the powerful people on earth will eat and worship.
Everyone will bow down to him,
all who will one day die.

[30]The people in the future will serve him;
they will always be told about the Lord.

[31]They will tell that he does what is right.
People who are not yet born
will hear what God has done.

## Proverbs 8:32–36

[32]"Now, my children, listen to me,
because those who follow my ways are happy.

[33]Listen to my teaching, and you will be wise;
do not ignore it.

[34]Happy are those who listen to me,
watching at my door every day,
waiting at my open doorway.

35 Those who find me find life,
and the LORD will be pleased with them.

36 Those who do not find me hurt themselves.
Those who hate me love death."

## Matthew 27:32–56

### *Jesus Is Crucified*

32 As the soldiers were going out of the city with Jesus, they
forced a man from Cyrene, named Simon, to carry the cross for
Jesus. 33 They all came to the place called Golgotha, which
means the Place of the Skull. 34 The soldiers gave Jesus wine
mixed with gall[n] to drink. He tasted the wine but refused to
drink it. 35 When the soldiers had crucified him, they threw lots
to decide who would get his clothes.[n] 36 The soldiers sat there
and continued watching him. 37 They put a sign above Jesus'
head with a charge against him. It said: this is jesus, the king of the
jews. 38 Two robbers were crucified beside Jesus, one on the right
and the other on the left. 39 People walked by and insulted Jesus
and shook their heads, 40 saying, "You said you could destroy the
Temple and build it again in three days. So save yourself! Come
down from that cross if you are really the Son of God!"
41 The leading priests, the teachers of the law, and the Jewish
elders were also making fun of Jesus. 42 They said, "He saved
others, but he can't save himself! He says he is the king of
Israel! If he is the king, let him come down now from the cross.
Then we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God, so let God save
him now, if God really wants him. He himself said, 'I am the Son
of God.'" 44 And in the same way, the robbers who were being
crucified beside Jesus also insulted him.

### *Jesus Dies*

45 At noon the whole country became dark, and the darkness
lasted for three hours. 46 About three o'clock Jesus cried out in a
loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" This means, "My God,
my God, why have you abandoned me?"
47 Some of the people standing there who heard this said,
"He is calling Elijah."
48 Quickly one of them ran and got a sponge and filled it with
vinegar and tied it to a stick and gave it to Jesus to drink. 49 But

the others said, “Don’t bother him. We want to see if Elijah will come to save him.”

50But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and died.

51Then the curtain in the Temple[n] was torn into two pieces, from the top to the bottom. Also, the earth shook and rocks broke apart. 52The graves opened, and many of God’s people who had died were raised from the dead. 53They came out of the graves after Jesus was raised from the dead and went into the holy city, where they appeared to many people.

54When the army officer and the soldiers guarding Jesus saw this earthquake and everything else that happened, they were very frightened and said, “He really was the Son of God!”

55Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to help him were standing at a distance from the cross, watching. 56Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John were there.

# February 16

## Blessings at God's Table

*You prepare a meal for me in front of my enemies.*

Psalm 23:5

PAUSE and envision the scene in [God's] royal dining room … Driven not by our beauty but by his promise, he calls us to himself and invites us to take a permanent place at his table … We take our place next to the other sinners-made-saints and we share in God's glory.

May I share a partial list of what awaits you at his table?
You are beyond condemnation (Romans 8:1).
You are a member of his kingdom (Colossians 1:13).
You have been adopted (Romans 8:15).
You have access to God at any moment (Ephesians 2:18).
You will never be abandoned (Hebrews 13:5).
You have an imperishable inheritance (1 Peter 1:4).

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### Leviticus 3:1—4:35

### *The Fellowship Offering*

3 "'If a person's fellowship offering to the LORD is from the herd,
it may be a male or female, but it must have nothing wrong with
it. 2The person must put his hand on the animal's head and kill
it at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. Then Aaron's sons, the
priests, must sprinkle the blood on all sides of the altar. 3From
the fellowship offering he must make a sacrifice by fire to the
LORD. He must offer the fat of the animal's inner organs (both
the fat that is in them and that covers them), 4both kidneys with
the fat that is on them near the lower back muscle, and the best
part of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. 5Then
the priests will burn these parts on the altar, on the whole burnt
offering that is on the wood of the fire. It is an offering made by

fire, and its smell is pleasing to the LORD.

6"'If a person's fellowship offering to the LORD is a lamb or a goat, it may be a male or female, but it must have nothing wrong with it. 7If he offers a lamb, he must bring it before the LORD 8and put his hand on its head. Then he must kill the animal in front of the Meeting Tent, and the priests must sprinkle its blood on all sides of the altar. 9From the fellowship offering the person must make a sacrifice by fire to the LORD. He must bring the fat, the whole fat tail cut off close to the backbone, the fat of the inner organs (both the fat that is in them and that covers them), 10both kidneys with the fat that is on them, near the lower back muscle, and the best part of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. 11Then the priest will burn these parts on the altar as food; it will be an offering made by fire to the LORD.

12"'If a person's offering is a goat, he must offer it before the LORD 13and put his hand on its head. Then he must kill it in front of the Meeting Tent, and the priests must sprinkle its blood on all sides of the altar. 14From this offering the person must make a sacrifice by fire to the LORD. He must offer all the fat of the goat's inner organs (both the fat that is in them and that covers them), 15both kidneys with the fat that is on them near the lower back muscle, and the best part of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. 16The priest will burn these parts on the altar as food. It is an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the LORD. All the fat belongs to the LORD.

17"'This law will continue for people from now on, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or blood.'"

## *The Sin Offering*

4 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Tell the people of Israel this: 'When a person sins by accident and does some things the LORD has commanded not to be done, that person must do these things:

3"'If the appointed priest sins so that he brings guilt on the people, then he must offer a young bull to the LORD, one that has nothing wrong with it, as a sin offering for the sin he has done. 4He will bring the bull to the entrance of the Meeting Tent in front of the LORD, put his hand on its head, and kill it before the LORD. 5Then the appointed priest must bring some of the bull's blood into the Meeting Tent. 6The priest is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD in front of the curtain of the Most Holy Place. 7The priest must also put some of the blood on the corners of the altar of incense that stands before the LORD in the Meeting Tent. The rest of the blood he must pour out at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the Meeting Tent. 8He must remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering—the fat on

and around the inner organs, [9]both kidneys with the fat that is
on them near the lower back muscle, and the best part of the
liver which he will remove with the kidneys. [10](He must do this
in the same way the fat is removed from the bull of the
fellowship offering.) Then the priest must burn the animal parts
on the altar of burnt offering. [11]But the priest must carry off the
skin of the bull and all its meat, along with the rest of the bull—
its head, legs, intestines, and other inner organs. [12]He must
take it outside the camp to the special clean place where the
ashes are poured out. He must burn it on a wood fire on the pile
of ashes.

[13]"'If the whole nation of Israel sins accidentally without
knowing it and does something the LORD has commanded not to
be done, they are guilty. [14]When they learn about the sin they
have done, they must offer a young bull as a sin offering and
bring it before the Meeting Tent. [15]The elders of the group of
people must put their hands on the bull's head before the LORD,
and it must be killed before the LORD. [16]Then the appointed
priest must bring some of the bull's blood into the Meeting
Tent. [17]Dipping his finger in the blood, he must sprinkle it seven
times before the LORD in front of the curtain. [18]Then he must put
some of the blood on the corners of the altar that is before the
LORD in the Meeting Tent. The priest must pour out the rest of
the blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering, which is at
the entrance to the Meeting Tent. [19]He must remove all the fat
from the animal and burn it on the altar; [20]he will do the same
thing with this bull that he did with the first bull of the sin
offering. In this way the priest removes the sins of the people so
they will belong to the LORD and be forgiven. [21]Then the priest
must carry the bull outside the camp and burn it, just as he did
with the first bull. This is the sin offering for the whole
community.

[22]"'If a ruler sins by accident and does something the LORD
his God has commanded must not be done, he is guilty. [23]When
he learns about his sin, he must bring a male goat that has
nothing wrong with it as his offering. [24]The ruler must put his
hand on the goat's head and kill it in the place where they kill
the whole burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering.
[25]The priest must take some of the blood of the sin offering on
his finger and put it on the corners of the altar of burnt offering.
He must pour out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar
of burnt offering. [26]He must burn all the goat's fat on the altar
in the same way he burns the fat of the fellowship offerings. In
this way the priest removes the ruler's sin so he belongs to the
LORD, and the LORD will forgive him.

[27]"'If any person in the community sins by accident and does
something which the LORD has commanded must not be done, he
is guilty. [28]When the person learns about his sin, he must bring

a female goat that has nothing wrong with it as an offering for his sin. 29He must put his hand on the animal's head and kill it at the place of the whole burnt offering. 30Then the priest must take some of the goat's blood on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar of burnt offering. He must pour out the rest of the goat's blood at the bottom of the altar. 31Then the priest must remove all the goat's fat in the same way the fat is removed from the fellowship offerings. He must burn it on the altar as a smell pleasing to the LORD. In this way the priest will remove that person's sin so he will belong to the LORD, and the LORD will forgive him.

32"'If this person brings a lamb as his offering for sin, he must bring a female that has nothing wrong with it. 33He must put his hand on the animal's head and kill it as a sin offering in the place where the whole burnt offering is killed. 34The priest must take some of the blood from the sin offering on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar of burnt offering. He must pour out the rest of the lamb's blood at the bottom of the altar. 35Then the priest must remove all the lamb's fat in the same way that the lamb's fat is removed from the fellowship offerings. He must burn the pieces on the altar on top of the offerings made by fire for the LORD. In this way the priest will remove that person's sins so he will belong to the LORD, and the LORD will forgive him.

## Psalm 23:1–6

### *The Lord the Shepherd*

**A psalm of David.**

23 The LORD is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.

2He lets me rest in green pastures.
He leads me to calm water.

3He gives me new strength.

He leads me on paths that are right

for the good of his name.

4 Even if I walk through a very dark valley,
I will not be afraid,

because you are with me.
Your rod and your shepherd’s staff comfort me.

5 You prepare a meal for me
in front of my enemies.

You pour oil of blessing on my head;[n]
you fill my cup to overflowing.

6 Surely your goodness and love will be with me
all my life,

and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

## Proverbs 9:1–6

### *Being Wise or Foolish*

9 Wisdom has built her house;
she has made its seven columns.

2 She has prepared her food and wine;
she has set her table.

3 She has sent out her servant girls,
and she calls out from the highest place in the city.

4She says to those who are uneducated,
“Come in here, you foolish people!

5Come and eat my food
and drink the wine I have prepared.

6Stop your foolish ways, and you will live;
take the road of understanding.

## Matthew 27:57–66

### *Jesus Is Buried*

57That evening a rich man named Joseph, a follower of Jesus
from the town of Arimathea, came to Jerusalem. 58Joseph went
to Pilate and asked to have Jesus’ body. So Pilate gave orders
for the soldiers to give it to Joseph. 59Then Joseph took the body
and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. 60He put Jesus’ body in a
new tomb that he had cut out of a wall of rock, and he rolled a
very large stone to block the entrance of the tomb. Then Joseph
went away. 61Mary Magdalene and the other woman named
Mary were sitting near the tomb.

### *The Tomb of Jesus Is Guarded*

62The next day, the day after Preparation Day, the leading
priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63They said, “Sir, we
remember that while that liar was still alive he said, ‘After three
days I will rise from the dead.’ 64So give the order for the tomb
to be guarded closely till the third day. Otherwise, his followers
might come and steal the body and tell people that he has risen
from the dead. That lie would be even worse than the first one.”
65Pilate said, “Take some soldiers and go guard the tomb the
best way you know.” 66So they all went to the tomb and made it
safe from thieves by sealing the stone in the entrance and
putting soldiers there to guard it.

# February 17

## A Noble Motivation

*At dawn on the first day, Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary went to look at the tomb.*

Matthew 28:1

It isn't hope that leads [Mary and Mary Magdalene] up the mountain to the tomb. It is duty. Naked devotion. They expect nothing in return. What could Jesus give? What could a dead man offer? The two women are not climbing the mountain to receive, they are going to the tomb to give. Period.

There is no motivation more noble …

Service prompted by duty. This is the call of discipleship.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Leviticus 5:1—6:30

#### *Special Types of Accidental Sins*

5 "'If a person is ordered to tell in court what he has seen or
what he knows and he does not tell the court, he is guilty of sin.
2"'Or someone might touch something unclean, such as the
dead body of an unclean wild animal or an unclean farm animal
or an unclean crawling animal. Even if he does not know that he
touched it, he will still be unclean and guilty of sin.
3"'Someone might touch human uncleanness—anything that
makes someone unclean—and not know it. But when he learns
about it, he will be guilty.
4"'Or someone might make a promise before the LORD
without thinking. It might be a promise to do something bad or
something good; it might be about anything. Even if he forgets
about it, when he remembers, he will be guilty.
5"'When anyone is guilty of any of these things, he must tell
how he sinned. 6He must bring an offering to the LORD as a
penalty for sin; it must be a female lamb or goat from the flock.

The priest will perform the acts to remove that person's sin so he will belong to the LORD.

7"'But if the person cannot afford a lamb, he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the LORD as the penalty for his sin. One bird must be for a sin offering, and the other must be for a whole burnt offering. 8He must bring them to the priest, who will first offer the one for the sin offering. He will pull the bird's head from its neck, but he will not pull it completely off. 9He must sprinkle the blood from the sin offering on the side of the altar, and then he must pour the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar; it is a sin offering. 10Then the priest must offer the second bird as a whole burnt offering, as the law says. In this way the priest will remove the person's sin so he will belong to the LORD, and the LORD will forgive him.

11"'If the person cannot afford two doves or two pigeons, he must bring about two quarts of fine flour as an offering for sin. He must not put oil or incense on the flour, because it is a sin offering. 12He must bring the flour to the priest. The priest will take a handful of the flour as a memorial offering and burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made by fire to the LORD; it is a sin offering. 13In this way the priest will remove the person's sins so he will belong to the LORD, and the LORD will forgive him. What is left of the sin offering belongs to the priest, like the grain offering.'"

## *The Penalty Offering*

14The LORD said to Moses, 15"If a person accidentally sins and does something against the holy things of the LORD, he must bring from the flock a male sheep that has nothing wrong with it. This will be his penalty offering to the LORD. Its value in silver must be correct as set by the Holy Place measure. It is a penalty offering. 16That person must pay for the sin he did against the holy thing, adding one-fifth to its value. Then he must give it all to the priest. In this way the priest will remove the person's sin so he will belong to the LORD, by using the male sheep as the penalty offering. And the LORD will forgive the person.

17"If a person sins and does something the LORD has commanded not to be done, even if he does not know it, he is still guilty. He is responsible for his sin. 18He must bring the priest a male sheep from the flock, one that has nothing wrong with it and that is worth the correct amount. It will be a penalty offering. Though the person sinned without knowing it, with this offering the priest will remove the sin so the person will belong to the LORD, and the LORD will forgive him. 19The person is guilty of doing wrong, so he must give the penalty offering to the LORD."

6 The LORD said to Moses, 2"A person might sin against the LORD by doing one of these sins: He might lie about what happened to

something he was taking care of for someone else, or he might lie about a promise he made. He might steal something or cheat someone. 3He might find something that had been lost and then lie about it. He might make a promise before the LORD about something and not mean it, or he might do some other sin. 4If he does any of these things, he is guilty of sin. He must bring back whatever he stole or whatever he took by cheating. He must bring back the thing he took care of for someone else. He must bring back what he found and lied about 5or what he made a false promise about. He must pay the full price plus an extra one-fifth of the value of what he took. He must give the money to the true owner on the day he brings his penalty offering. 6He must bring his penalty to the priest—a male sheep from the flock, one that does not have anything wrong with it and that is worth the correct amount. It will be a penalty offering to the LORD. 7Then the priest will perform the acts to remove that person's sin so he will belong to the LORD, and the LORD will forgive him for the sins that made him guilty."

## *The Whole Burnt Offering*

8The LORD said to Moses, 9"Give this command to Aaron and the priests: 'These are the teachings about the whole burnt offering: The burnt offering must stay on the altar all night until morning, and the altar's fire must be kept burning. 10The priest must put on his linen robe and linen underclothes next to his body. Then he will remove the ashes from the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar. 11Then he must take off those clothes and put on others and carry the ashes outside the camp to a special clean place. 12But the fire must be kept burning on the altar; it must not be allowed to go out. The priest must put more firewood on the altar every morning, place the whole burnt offering on the fire, and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings. 13The fire must be kept burning on the altar all the time; it must not go out.

## *The Grain Offering*

14"'These are the teachings about the grain offering: The priests must bring it to the LORD in front of the altar. 15The priest must take a handful of fine flour, with the oil and all of the incense on it, and burn the grain offering on the altar as a memorial offering to the LORD. Its smell is pleasing to him. 16Aaron and the priests may eat what is left, but it must be eaten without yeast in a holy place. They must eat it in the courtyard of the Meeting Tent. 17It must not be cooked with yeast. I have given it as their share of the offerings made to me by fire; it is most holy, like the sin offering and the penalty

offering. 18Any male descendant of Aaron may eat it as his share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire, and this will continue from now on. Whatever touches these offerings shall become holy.'"

19The LORD said to Moses, 20"This is the offering Aaron and the priests must bring to the LORD on the day they appoint Aaron as high priest: They must bring two quarts of fine flour for a continual grain offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening. 21The fine flour must be mixed with oil and cooked on a griddle. Bring it when it is well mixed. Present the grain offering that is broken into pieces, and it will be a smell that is pleasing to the LORD. 22One of the priests appointed to take Aaron's place as high priest must make the grain offering. It is a rule forever that the grain offering must be completely burned to the LORD. 23Every grain offering made by a priest must be completely burned; it must not be eaten."

### *The Sin Offering*

24The LORD said to Moses, 25"Tell Aaron and the priests: 'These are the teachings about the sin offering: The sin offering must be killed in front of the LORD in the same place the whole burnt offering is killed; it is most holy. 26The priest who offers the sin offering must eat it in a holy place, in the courtyard of the Meeting Tent. 27Whatever touches the meat of the sin offering must be holy, and if the blood is sprinkled on any clothes, you must wash them in a holy place. 28The clay pot the meat is cooked in must be broken, or if a bronze pot is used, it must be scrubbed and rinsed with water. 29Any male in a priest's family may eat the offering; it is most holy. 30But if the blood of the sin offering is taken into the Meeting Tent and used to remove sin in the Holy Place, that sin offering must be burned with fire. It must not be eaten.

## Psalm 24:1–6

### *A Welcome for God into the Temple*

**A psalm of David.**

24 The earth belongs to the LORD, and everything in it—
the world and all its people.

[2]He built it on the waters
and set it on the rivers.

[3]Who may go up on the mountain of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy Temple?

[4]Only those with clean hands and pure hearts,
who have not worshiped idols,
who have not made promises in the name of a false god.

[5]They will receive a blessing from the LORD;
the God who saves them will declare them right.

[6]They try to follow God;
they look to the God of Jacob for help. *Selah*

## Proverbs 9:7–9

[7]"If you correct someone who makes fun of wisdom, you will be insulted.
If you correct an evil person, you will get hurt.

[8]Do not correct those who make fun of wisdom, or they will hate you.
But correct the wise, and they will love you.

[9]Teach the wise, and they will become even wiser;
teach good people, and they will learn even more.

## Matthew 28:1–20

### *Jesus Rises from the Dead*

28 The day after the Sabbath day was the first day of the week.
At dawn on the first day, Mary Magdalene and another woman
named Mary went to look at the tomb.

2At that time there was a strong earthquake. An angel of the
Lord came down from heaven, went to the tomb, and rolled the
stone away from the entrance. Then he sat on the stone. 3He
was shining as bright as lightning, and his clothes were white
as snow. 4The soldiers guarding the tomb shook with fear
because of the angel, and they became like dead men.

5The angel said to the women, “Don’t be afraid. I know that
you are looking for Jesus, who has been crucified. 6He is not
here. He has risen from the dead as he said he would. Come
and see the place where his body was. 7And go quickly and tell
his followers, ‘Jesus has risen from the dead. He is going into
Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there.’” Then the
angel said, “Now I have told you.”

8The women left the tomb quickly. They were afraid, but they
were also very happy. They ran to tell Jesus’ followers what had
happened. 9Suddenly, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings.”
The women came up to him, took hold of his feet, and
worshiped him. 10Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go
and tell my followers to go on to Galilee, and they will see me
there.”

## *The Soldiers Report to the Leaders*

11While the women went to tell Jesus’ followers, some of the
soldiers who had been guarding the tomb went into the city to
tell the leading priests everything that had happened. 12Then
the priests met with the elders and made a plan. They paid the
soldiers a large amount of money 13and said to them, “Tell the
people that Jesus’ followers came during the night and stole the
body while you were asleep. 14If the governor hears about this,
we will satisfy him and save you from trouble.” 15So the soldiers
kept the money and did as they were told. And that story is still
spread among the people even today.

## *Jesus Talks to His Followers*

16The eleven followers went to Galilee to the mountain where
Jesus had told them to go. 17On the mountain they saw Jesus
and worshiped him, but some of them did not believe it was
really Jesus. 18Then Jesus came to them and said, “All power in
heaven and on earth is given to me. 19So go and make followers
of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the
Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20Teach them to obey
everything that I have taught you, and I will be with you always,

even until the end of this age.”

# February 18

## God's Favorite Word

*Jesus said to them, "Come follow me."*

Mark 1:17

God is an inviting God. He invited Mary to birth his Son, the disciples to fish for men, the adulteress woman to start over, and Thomas to touch his wounds. God is the King who prepares the palace, sets the table, and invites his subjects to come in.

In fact, it seems his favorite word is *come.*

"*Come,* let us talk about these things. Though your sins are like scarlet, they can be as white as snow."

"Let anyone who is thirsty *come* to me and drink."

"*Come* to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest."

God is a God who invites. God is a God who calls.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## Leviticus 7:1—8:36

### *The Penalty Offering*

7 "'These are the teachings about the penalty offering, which is
most holy: 2The penalty offering must be killed where the whole
burnt offering is killed. Then the priest must sprinkle its blood
on all sides of the altar. 3He must offer all the fat from the
penalty offering—the fat tail, the fat that covers the inner
organs, 4both kidneys with the fat that is on them near the
lower back muscle, and the best part of the liver, which is to be
removed with the kidneys. 5The priest must burn all these
things on the altar as an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a
penalty offering. 6Any male in a priest's family may eat it. It is
most holy, so it must be eaten in a holy place.

7"'The penalty offering is like the sin offering in that the
teachings are the same for both. The priest who offers the

sacrifice to remove sins will get the meat for food. 8The priest who offers the burnt offering may also have the skin from it. 9Every grain offering that is baked in an oven, cooked on a griddle, or baked in a dish belongs to the priest who offers it. 10Every grain offering, either dry or mixed with oil, belongs to the priests, and all priests will share alike.

## *The Fellowship Offering*

11"'These are the teachings about the fellowship offering a person may offer to the LORD: 12If he brings the fellowship offering to show his thanks, he should also bring loaves of bread made without yeast that are mixed with oil, wafers made without yeast that have oil poured over them, and loaves of fine flour that are mixed with oil. 13He must also offer loaves of bread made with yeast along with his fellowship offering, which he gives to show thanks. 14One of each kind of offering will be for the LORD; it will be given to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the fellowship offering. 15When the fellowship offering is given to thank the LORD, the meat from it must be eaten the same day it is offered; none of it must be left until morning.

16"'If a person brings a fellowship offering just to give a gift to God or because of a special promise to him, the sacrifice should be eaten the same day he offers it. If there is any left, it may be eaten the next day. 17If any meat from this sacrifice is left on the third day, it must be burned up. 18Any meat of the fellowship offering eaten on the third day will not be accepted, nor will the sacrifice count for the person who offered it. It will become unclean, and anyone who eats the meat will be guilty of sin.

19"'People must not eat meat that touches anything unclean; they must burn this meat with fire. Anyone who is clean may eat other meat. 20But if anyone is unclean and eats the meat from the fellowship offering that belongs to the LORD, he must be cut off from his people.

21"'If anyone touches something unclean—uncleanness that comes from people, from an animal, or from some hated thing—touching it will make him unclean. If he then eats meat from the fellowship offering that belongs to the LORD, he must be cut off from his people.'"

22The LORD said to Moses, 23"Tell the people of Israel: 'You must not eat any of the fat from cattle, sheep, or goats. 24If an animal is found dead or torn by wild animals, you may use its fat for other things, but you must not eat it. 25If someone eats fat from an animal offering made by fire to the LORD, he must be cut off from his people. 26No matter where you live, you must not eat blood from any bird or animal. 27Anyone who eats blood must be cut off from his people.'"

## *The Priests' Share*

28 The LORD said to Moses, 29 "Tell the people of Israel: 'If
someone brings a fellowship offering to the LORD, he must give
part of it as his sacrifice to the LORD. 30 He must carry that part
of the gift in his own hands as an offering made by fire to the
LORD. He must bring the fat and the breast of the animal to the
priest, to be presented to the LORD as the priests' share. 31 Then
the priest must burn the fat on the altar, but the breast of the
animal will belong to Aaron and the priests. 32 You must also
give the right thigh from the fellowship offering to the priest as
a gift; 33 it will belong to the priest who offers the blood and fat
of the fellowship offering. 34 I have taken the breast and the
thigh from the fellowship offerings of the Israelites, and I have
given these parts to Aaron and the priests as their share for all
time from the Israelites.'"

35 This is the portion that belongs to Aaron and his sons from
the offerings made by fire to the LORD. They were given this
share on the day they were presented to the LORD as priests.
36 On the day the LORD appointed the priests, he commanded
Israel to give this share to them, and it is to be given to the
priests as their share from now on.

37 These are the teachings about the whole burnt offering,
the grain offering, the sin offering, the penalty offering, the
offering for the appointment of priests, and the fellowship
offering. 38 The LORD gave these teachings to Moses on Mount
Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their
offerings to the LORD in the Sinai Desert.

## *Aaron and His Sons Appointed*

8 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Bring Aaron and his sons and their
clothes, the special olive oil used in appointing people and
things to the service of the LORD, the bull of the sin offering and
the two male sheep, and the basket of bread made without
yeast. 3 Then gather the people together at the entrance to the
Meeting Tent." 4 Moses did as the LORD commanded him, and the
people met together at the entrance to the Meeting Tent.

5 Then Moses spoke to the people and said, "This is what the
LORD has commanded to be done." 6 Bringing Aaron and his sons
forward, Moses washed them with water. 7 He put the inner robe
on Aaron and tied the cloth belt around him. Then Moses put
the outer robe on him and placed the holy vest on him. He tied
the skillfully woven belt around him so that the holy vest was
tied to Aaron. 8 Then Moses put the chest covering on him and
put the Urim and the Thummim in the chest covering. 9 He also
put the turban on Aaron's head. He put the strip of gold, the
holy crown, on the front of the turban, as the LORD commanded

him to do.

10Then Moses put the special oil on the Holy Tent and
everything in it, making them holy for the LORD. 11He sprinkled
some oil on the altar seven times, sprinkling the altar and all its
tools and the large bowl and its base. In this way he made them
holy for the LORD. 12He poured some of the special oil on Aaron's
head to make Aaron holy for the LORD. 13Then Moses brought
Aaron's sons forward. He put the inner robes on them, tied
cloth belts around them, and put headbands on them, as the
LORD had commanded him.

14Then Moses brought the bull for the sin offering, and
Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. 15Moses killed
the bull, took the blood, and with his finger put some of it on all
the corners of the altar, to make it pure. Then he poured out the
rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar. In this way he made
it holy and ready for service to God. 16Moses took all the fat
from the inner organs of the bull, the best part of the liver, and
both kidneys with the fat that is on them, and he burned them
on the altar. 17But he took the bull's skin, its meat, and its
intestines and burned them in a fire outside the camp, as the
LORD had commanded him.

18Next Moses brought the male sheep of the burnt offering,
and Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. 19Then
Moses killed it and sprinkled the blood on all sides of the altar.
20He cut the male sheep into pieces and burned the head, the
pieces, and the fat. 21He washed the inner organs and legs with
water and burned the whole sheep on the altar as a burnt
offering made by fire to the LORD; its smell was pleasing to the
LORD. Moses did these things as the LORD had commanded him.

22Then Moses brought the other male sheep, the one used in
appointing Aaron and his sons as priests, and Aaron and his
sons put their hands on its head. 23Then Moses killed the sheep
and put some of its blood on the bottom of Aaron's right ear,
some on the thumb of Aaron's right hand, and some on the big
toe of his right foot. 24Then Moses brought Aaron's sons close
to the altar. He put some of the blood on the bottom of their
right ears, some on the thumbs of their right hands, and some
on the big toes of their right feet. Then he sprinkled blood on all
sides of the altar. 25He took the fat, the fat tail, all the fat on the
inner organs, the best part of the liver, both kidneys with their
fat, and the right thigh. 26From the basket of bread made
without yeast that is put before the LORD each day, Moses took a
loaf of bread, a loaf made with oil, and a wafer. He put these
pieces of bread on the fat and right thigh of the male sheep.
27All these things he put in the hands of Aaron and his sons and
presented them as an offering before the LORD. 28Then Moses
took them from their hands and burned them on the altar on top
of the burnt offering. So this was the offering for appointing

Aaron and his sons as priests. It was an offering made by fire to the LORD, and its smell was pleasing to him. 29Moses also took the breast and presented it as an offering before the LORD. It was Moses' share of the male sheep used in appointing the priests, as the LORD had commanded him.

30Moses took some of the special oil and some of the blood which was on the altar, and he sprinkled them on Aaron and Aaron's clothes and on Aaron's sons and their clothes. In this way Moses made Aaron, his clothes, his sons, and their clothes holy for the LORD.

31Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "I gave you a command, saying, 'Aaron and his sons will eat these things.' So take the meat and basket of bread from the offering for appointing priests. Boil the meat at the door of the Meeting Tent, and eat it there with the bread. 32If any of the meat or bread is left, burn it. 33The time of appointing will last seven days; you must not go outside the entrance of the Meeting Tent until that time is up. Stay there until the time of your appointing is finished. 34The LORD commanded the things that were done today to remove your sins so you will belong to him. 35You must stay at the entrance of the Meeting Tent day and night for seven days. If you don't obey the LORD's commands, you will die. The LORD has given me these commands."

36So Aaron and his sons did everything the LORD had commanded through Moses.

## Psalm 24:7–10

7Open up, you gates.
Open wide, you aged doors
and the glorious King will come in.

8Who is this glorious King?
The LORD, strong and mighty.
The LORD, the powerful warrior.

9Open up, you gates.
Open wide, you aged doors
and the glorious King will come in.

10Who is this glorious King?

The LORD All-Powerful—
he is the glorious King. *Selah*

## Proverbs 9:10–12

10 "Wisdom begins with respect for the LORD,
and understanding begins with knowing the Holy One.

11 If you live wisely, you will live a long time;
wisdom will add years to your life.

12 The wise person is rewarded by wisdom,
but whoever makes fun of wisdom will suffer for it."

## Mark 1:1–20

### *John Prepares for Jesus*

1 This is the beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the
Son of God,[n] 2 as the prophet Isaiah wrote:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way."

Malachi 3:1

3 "This is a voice of one
who calls out in the desert:

'Prepare the way for the Lord.
Make the road straight for him.'"

Isaiah 40:3

4 John was baptizing people in the desert and preaching a
baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins.
5 All the people from Judea and Jerusalem were going out to

him. They confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6John wore clothes made from camel's hair, had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. 7This is what John preached to the people: "There is one coming after me who is greater than I; I am not good enough even to kneel down and untie his sandals. 8I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

## *Jesus Is Baptized*

9At that time Jesus came from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. 10Immediately, as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven open. The Holy Spirit came down on him like a dove, 11and a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with you."

12Then the Spirit sent Jesus into the desert. 13He was in the desert forty days and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels came and took care of him.

## *Jesus Chooses Some Followers*

14After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, preaching the Good News from God. 15He said, "The right time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News!"

16When Jesus was walking by Lake Galilee, he saw Simon[n] and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the lake because they were fishermen. 17Jesus said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fish for people." 18So Simon and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed him.

19Going a little farther, Jesus saw two more brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat, mending their nets. 20Jesus immediately called them, and they left their father in the boat with the hired workers and followed Jesus.

# February 19

## God, Our Father

*LORD, remember your mercy and love that you have shown since long ago.*

Psalm 25:6

[Recently], my daughter Jenna and I spent several days in the old city of Jerusalem ... One afternoon, as we were exiting the Jaffa gate, we found ourselves behind an orthodox Jewish family —a father and his three small girls. One of the daughters, perhaps four or five years of age, fell a few steps behind and couldn't see her father. "Abba!" she called to him. He spotted her and immediately extended his hand ...

When the signal changed, he led her and her sisters through the intersection. In the middle of the street, he reached down and swung her up into his arms and continued their journey.

Isn't that what we all need? An abba who will hear when we call? Who will take our hand when we are weak? Who will guide us through the hectic intersections of life? Don't we all need an abba who will swing us up into his arms and carry us home? We all need a father.

from *The Great House of God*

### Leviticus 9:1—10:20

#### *Aaron and His Sons Offer Sacrifices*

9 On the eighth day after the time of appointing, Moses called
for Aaron and his sons and for the elders of Israel. 2He said to
Aaron, "Take a bull calf and a male sheep that have nothing
wrong with them, and offer them to the LORD. The calf will be a
sin offering, and the male sheep will be a whole burnt offering.
3Tell the people of Israel, 'Take a male goat for a sin offering
and a calf and a lamb for a whole burnt offering; each must be
one year old, and it must have nothing wrong with it. 4Also take

a bull and a male sheep for fellowship offerings, along with a grain offering mixed with oil. Offer all these things to the LORD, because the LORD will appear to you today.'"

5So all the people came to the front of the Meeting Tent, bringing the things Moses had commanded them to bring, and they stood before the LORD. 6Moses said, "You have done what the LORD commanded, so you will see the LORD's glory."

7Then Moses told Aaron, "Go to the altar and offer sin offerings and whole burnt offerings. Do this to remove your sins and the people's sins so you will belong to God. Offer the sacrifices for the people and perform the acts to remove their sins for them so they will belong to the LORD, as the LORD has commanded."

8So Aaron went to the altar and killed the bull calf as a sin offering for himself. 9Then his sons brought the blood to him, and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the corners of the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar. 10Aaron took the fat, the kidneys, and the best part of the liver from the sin offering and burned them on the altar, in the way the LORD had commanded Moses. 11The meat and skin he burned outside the camp.

12Then Aaron killed the animal for the whole burnt offering. His sons brought the blood to him, and he sprinkled it on all sides of the altar. 13As they gave him the pieces and head of the burnt offering, Aaron burned them on the altar. 14He also washed the inner organs and the legs of the burnt offering and burned them on top of the burnt offering on the altar.

15Then Aaron brought the offering that was for the people. He took the goat of the people's sin offering and killed it and offered it for the sin offering, just as he had done the first sin offering.

16Then Aaron brought the whole burnt offering and offered it in the way that the LORD had commanded. 17He also brought the grain offering to the altar. He took a handful of the grain and burned it on the altar, in addition to the morning's burnt offering.

18Aaron also killed the bull and the male sheep as the fellowship offerings for the people. His sons brought him the blood, and he sprinkled it on all sides of the altar. 19Aaron's sons also brought to Aaron the fat of the bull and the male sheep—the fat tail, the fat covering the inner organs, the kidneys, and the best part of the liver. 20Aaron's sons put them on the breasts of the bull and the sheep. Then Aaron burned these fat parts on the altar. 21He presented the breasts and the right thigh before the LORD as the priests' share of the offering, as Moses had commanded.

22Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. When he had finished offering the sin offering, the burnt

offering, and the fellowship offering, he stepped down from the altar.

23 Moses and Aaron went into the Meeting Tent. Then they
came out and blessed the people, and the LORD's glory came to
all the people. 24 Fire came out from the LORD and burned up the
burnt offering and fat on the altar. When the people saw this,
they shouted with joy and bowed facedown on the ground.

## *God Destroys Nadab and Abihu*

10 Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their pans for burning
incense, put fire in them, and added incense; but they did not
use the special fire Moses had commanded them to use in the
presence of the LORD. 2 So fire came down from the LORD and
destroyed Nadab and Abihu, and they died in front of the LORD.
3 Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD was speaking
about when he said,

'I must be respected as holy
by those who come near me;

before all the people
I must be given honor.'"

So Aaron did not say anything about the death of his sons.

4 Aaron's uncle Uzziel had two sons named Mishael and
Elzaphan. Moses said to them, "Come here and pick up your
cousins' bodies. Carry them outside the camp away from the
front of the Holy Place." 5 So Mishael and Elzaphan obeyed
Moses and carried the bodies of Nadab and Abihu, still clothed
in the special priest's inner robes, outside the camp.

6 Then Moses said to Aaron and his other sons, Eleazar and
Ithamar, "Don't show sadness by tearing your clothes or leaving
your hair uncombed. If you do, you will die, and the LORD will be
angry with all the people. All the people of Israel, your relatives,
may cry loudly about the LORD burning Nadab and Abihu, 7 but
you must not even leave the Meeting Tent. If you go out of the
entrance, you will die, because the LORD has appointed you to
his service." So Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar obeyed Moses.

8 Then the LORD said to Aaron, 9 "You and your sons must not
drink wine or beer when you go into the Meeting Tent. If you
do, you will die. This law will continue from now on. 10 You must
keep what is holy separate from what is not holy; you must keep
what is clean separate from what is unclean. 11 You must teach
the people all the laws that the LORD gave to them through
Moses."

12 Moses said to Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and

Ithamar, “Eat the part of the grain offering that is left from the sacrifices offered by fire to the LORD, but do not add yeast to it. Eat it near the altar because it is most holy. 13You must eat it in a holy place, because this part of the offerings made by fire to the LORD belongs to you and your sons. I have been commanded to tell you this.

14“Also, you and your sons and daughters may eat the breast and thigh of the fellowship offering that was presented to the LORD. You must eat them in a clean place; they are your share of the fellowship offerings given by the Israelites. 15The people must bring the fat from their animals that was part of the offering made by fire, and they must present it to the LORD along with the thigh and the breast of the fellowship offering. They will be the regular share of the offerings for you and your children, as the LORD has commanded.”

16Moses looked for the goat of the sin offering, but it had already been burned up. So he became very angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s remaining sons. He said, 17“Why didn’t you eat that goat in a holy place? It is most holy, and the LORD gave it to you to take away the guilt of the people, to remove their sins so they will belong to the LORD. 18You didn’t bring the goat’s blood inside the Holy Place. You were supposed to eat the goat in a holy place, as I commanded!”

19But Aaron said to Moses, “Today they brought their sin offering and burnt offering before the LORD, but these terrible things have still happened to me! Do you think the LORD would be any happier if I ate the sin offering today?” 20When Moses heard this, he was satisfied.

## Psalm 25:1–7

### *A Prayer for God to Guide*

**Of David.**

25 LORD, I give myself to you;

2my God, I trust you.

Do not let me be disgraced;
do not let my enemies laugh at me.

3 No one who trusts you will be disgraced,
but those who sin without excuse will be disgraced.

4 LORD, tell me your ways.
Show me how to live.

5 Guide me in your truth,
and teach me, my God, my Savior.
I trust you all day long.

6 LORD, remember your mercy and love
that you have shown since long ago.

7 Do not remember the sins
and wrong things I did when I was young.

But remember to love me always
because you are good, LORD.

## Proverbs 9:13–18

13 Foolishness is like a loud woman;
she does not have wisdom or knowledge.

14 She sits at the door of her house
at the highest place in the city.

15 She calls out to those who are passing by,
who are going along, minding their own business.

16 She says to those who are uneducated,
“Come in here, you foolish people!

17 Stolen water is sweeter,

and food eaten in secret tastes better.”

18 But these people don’t know that everyone who goes there dies,
that her guests end up deep in the grave.

## Mark 1:21–45

### *Jesus Forces Out an Evil Spirit*

21 Jesus and his followers went to Capernaum. On the Sabbath day he went to the synagogue and began to teach.
22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught like a person who had authority, not like their teachers of the law.
23 Just then, a man was there in the synagogue who had an evil spirit in him. He shouted,
24 “Jesus of Nazareth! What do you want with us? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are—God’s Holy One!”
25 Jesus commanded the evil spirit, “Be quiet! Come out of the man!”
26 The evil spirit shook the man violently, gave a loud cry, and then came out of him.
27 The people were so amazed they asked each other, “What is happening here? This man is teaching something new, and with authority. He even gives commands to evil spirits, and they obey him.”
28 And the news about Jesus spread quickly everywhere in the area of Galilee.

### *Jesus Heals Many People*

29 As soon as Jesus and his followers left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon[n] and Andrew.
30 Simon’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and the people told Jesus about her.
31 So Jesus went to her bed, took her hand, and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began serving them.
32 That evening, after the sun went down, the people brought to Jesus all who were sick and had demons in them.
33 The whole town gathered at the door.
34 Jesus healed many who had different kinds of sicknesses, and he forced many demons to leave people. But he would not allow the demons to speak, because they knew who he was.
35 Early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus woke and left the house. He went to a lonely place, where he prayed.

[36]Simon and his friends went to look for Jesus. [37]When they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you!”

[38]Jesus answered, “We should go to other towns around here so I can preach there too. That is the reason I came.” [39]So he went everywhere in Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and forcing out demons.

## *Jesus Heals a Sick Man*

[40]A man with a skin disease came to Jesus. He fell to his knees and begged Jesus, “You can heal me if you will.”

[41]Jesus felt sorry for the man, so he reached out his hand and touched him and said, “I will. Be healed!” [42]Immediately the disease left the man, and he was healed.

[43]Jesus told the man to go away at once, but he warned him strongly, [44]“Don’t tell anyone about this. But go and show yourself to the priest. And offer the gift Moses commanded for people who are made well.[n] This will show the people what I have done.” [45]The man left there, but he began to tell everyone that Jesus had healed him, and so he spread the news about Jesus. As a result, Jesus could not enter a town if people saw him. He stayed in places where nobody lived, but people came to him from everywhere.

# February 20

## A Soft Tap at the Door

*"I am the LORD your God. Keep yourselves holy for me because I am holy."*

Leviticus 11:44

I have something against the lying voices that noise our world. You've heard them. They tell you to swap your integrity for a new sale. To barter your convictions for an easy deal. To exchange your devotion for a quick thrill.

They whisper. They woo. They taunt. They tantalize. They flirt. They flatter. "Go ahead, its OK." "Don't worry, no one will know."

The world rams at your door; Jesus taps at your door. The voices scream for your allegiance; Jesus softly and tenderly requests it. The world promises flashy pleasure; Jesus promises a quiet dinner ... with God.

Which voice do you hear?

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

### Leviticus 11:1—12:8

### *Rules About What May Be Eaten*

11 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 2"Tell the Israelites this:
'These are the land animals you may eat: 3You may eat any
animal that has split hoofs completely divided and that chews
the cud.

4"'Some animals only chew the cud or only have split hoofs,
and you must not eat them. The camel chews the cud but does
not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. 5The rock badger
chews the cud but does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for
you. 6The rabbit chews the cud but does not have a split hoof; it
is unclean for you. 7Now the pig has a split hoof that is
completely divided, but it does not chew the cud; it is unclean

for you. [8]You must not eat the meat from these animals or even touch their dead bodies; they are unclean for you.

[9]"'Of the animals that live in the sea or in a river, if the animal has fins and scales, you may eat it. [10]But whatever lives in the sea or in a river and does not have fins and scales—including the things that fill the water and all other things that live in it—you should hate. [11]You must not eat any meat from them or even touch their dead bodies, because you should hate them. [12]You must hate any animal in the water that does not have fins and scales.

[13]"'Also, these are the birds you are to hate. They are hateful and should not be eaten. You must not eat eagles, vultures, black vultures, [14]kites, any kind of falcon, [15]any kind of raven, [16]horned owls, screech owls, sea gulls, any kind of hawk, [17]little owls, cormorants, great owls, [18]white owls, desert owls, ospreys, [19]storks, any kind of heron, hoopoes, or bats.

[20]"'Don't eat insects that have wings and walk on all four feet; they also are to be hated.

[21]"'But you may eat certain insects that have wings and walk on four feet. You may eat those that have legs with joints above their feet so they can jump. [22]These are the insects you may eat: all kinds of locusts, winged locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers. [23]But all other insects that have wings and walk on four feet you are to hate. [24]Those insects will make you unclean, and anyone who touches the dead body of one of these insects will become unclean until evening. [25]Anyone who picks up one of these dead insects must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.

[26]"'Some animals have split hoofs, but the hoofs are not completely divided; others do not chew the cud. They are unclean for you, and anyone who touches the dead body of one of these animals will become unclean. [27]Of all the animals that walk on four feet, the animals that walk on their paws are unclean for you. Anyone who touches the dead body of one of these animals will become unclean until evening. [28]Anyone who picks up their dead bodies must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; these animals are unclean for you.

[29]"'These crawling animals are unclean for you: moles, rats, all kinds of great lizards, [30]geckos, crocodiles, lizards, sand reptiles, and chameleons. [31]These crawling animals are unclean for you; anyone who touches their dead bodies will be unclean until evening.

[32]"'If an unclean animal dies and falls on something, that item will also become unclean. This includes anything made from wood, cloth, leather, or rough cloth, regardless of its use. Whatever the animal falls on must be washed with water and be unclean until evening; then it will become clean again. [33]If the dead, unclean animal falls into a clay bowl, anything in the bowl

will become unclean, and you must break the bowl. 34If water from the unclean clay bowl gets on any food, that food will become unclean. 35If any dead, unclean animal falls on something, it becomes unclean. If it is a clay oven or a clay baking pan, it must be broken into pieces. These things will be unclean; they are unclean for you.

36"'A spring or well that collects water will stay clean, but anyone who touches the dead body of any unclean animal will become unclean. 37If a dead, unclean animal falls on a seed to be planted, that seed is still clean. 38But if you put water on some seeds and a dead, unclean animal falls on them, they are unclean for you.

39"'Also, if an animal which you use for food dies, anyone who touches its body will be unclean until evening. 40Anyone who eats meat from this animal's dead body must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. Anyone who picks up the animal's dead body must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.

41"'Every animal that crawls on the ground is to be hated; it must not be eaten. 42You must not eat any of the animals that crawl on the ground, including those that crawl on their stomachs, that walk on all four feet, or on many feet. They are to be hated. 43Do not make yourself unclean by these animals; you must not become unclean by them. 44I am the LORD your God. Keep yourselves holy for me because I am holy. Don't make yourselves unclean with any of these crawling animals. 45I am the LORD who brought you out of Egypt to be your God; you must be holy because I am holy.

46"'These are the teachings about all of the cattle, birds, and other animals on earth, as well as the animals in the sea and those that crawl on the ground. 47These teachings help people know the difference between unclean animals and clean animals; they help people know which animals may be eaten and which ones must not be eaten.'"

## *Rules for New Mothers*

12 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Tell the people of Israel this: 'If a woman gives birth to a son, she will become unclean for seven days, as she is unclean during her monthly period. 3On the eighth day the boy must be circumcised. 4Then it will be thirty-three days before she becomes clean from her loss of blood. She must not touch anything that is holy or enter the Holy Tent until her time of cleansing is finished. 5But if she gives birth to a daughter, the mother will be unclean for two weeks, as she is unclean during her monthly period. It will be sixty-six days before she becomes clean from her loss of blood.

6"'After she has a son or daughter and her days of cleansing

are over, the new mother must bring certain sacrifices to the Meeting Tent. She must give the priest at the entrance a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or young pigeon for a sin offering. 7He will offer them before the LORD to make her clean so she will belong to the LORD again; then she will be clean from her loss of blood. These are the teachings for a woman who gives birth to a boy or girl.

8"'If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and one for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make her clean so she will belong to the LORD again, and she will be clean.'"

## Psalm 25:8–15

8The LORD is good and right;
he points sinners to the right way.

9He shows those who are humble how to do right,
and he teaches them his ways.

10All the LORD's ways are loving and true
for those who follow the demands of his agreement.

11For the sake of your name, LORD,
forgive my many sins.

12Are there those who respect the LORD?
He will point them to the best way.

13They will enjoy a good life,
and their children will inherit the land.

14The LORD tells his secrets to those who respect him;
he tells them about his agreement.

15My eyes are always looking to the LORD for help.

He will keep me from any traps.

## Proverbs 10:1–3

### *The Wise Words of Solomon*

10 These are the wise words of Solomon:
Wise children make their father happy,
but foolish children make their mother sad.

2Riches gotten by doing wrong have no value,
but right living will save you from death.

3The LORD does not let good people go hungry,
but he keeps evil people from getting what they want.

## Mark 2:1–28

### *Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man*

2 A few days later, when Jesus came back to Capernaum, the news spread that he was at home. 2Many people gathered together so that there was no room in the house, not even outside the door. And Jesus was teaching them God's message. 3Four people came, carrying a paralyzed man. 4Since they could not get to Jesus because of the crowd, they dug a hole in the roof right above where he was speaking. When they got through, they lowered the mat with the paralyzed man on it. 5When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he said to the paralyzed man, "Young man, your sins are forgiven."

6Some of the teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7"Why does this man say things like that? He is speaking as if he were God. Only God can forgive sins."

8Jesus knew immediately what these teachers of the law were thinking. So he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? 9Which is easier: to tell this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to tell him, 'Stand up. Take your mat and

walk’? [10]But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So Jesus said to the paralyzed man, [11]“I tell you, stand up, take your mat, and go home.” [12]Immediately the paralyzed man stood up, took his mat, and walked out while everyone was watching him.

The people were amazed and praised God. They said, “We have never seen anything like this!”

[13]Jesus went to the lake again. The whole crowd followed him there, and he taught them. [14]While he was walking along, he saw a man named Levi son of Alphaeus, sitting in the tax collector’s booth. Jesus said to him, “Follow me,” and he stood up and followed Jesus.

[15]Later, as Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” were eating there with Jesus and his followers. Many people like this followed Jesus. [16]When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw Jesus eating with the tax collectors and “sinners,” they asked his followers, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

[17]Jesus heard this and said to them, “It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick. I did not come to invite good people but to invite sinners.”

## *Jesus’ Followers Are Criticized*

[18]Now the followers of John[n] and the Pharisees often fasted[n] for a certain time. Some people came to Jesus and said, “Why do John’s followers and the followers of the Pharisees often fast, but your followers don’t?”

[19]Jesus answered, “The friends of the bridegroom do not fast while the bridegroom is still with them. As long as the bridegroom is with them, they cannot fast. [20]But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast.

[21]“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth over a hole in an old coat. Otherwise, the patch will shrink and pull away—the new patch will pull away from the old coat. Then the hole will be worse. [22]Also, no one ever pours new wine into old leather bags. Otherwise, the new wine will break the bags, and the wine will be ruined along with the bags. But new wine should be put into new leather bags.”

## *Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath*

[23]One Sabbath day, as Jesus was walking through some fields of grain, his followers began to pick some grain to eat. [24]The Pharisees said to Jesus, “Why are your followers doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?”

[25]Jesus answered, “Have you never read what David did

when he and those with him were hungry and needed food?
26During the time of Abiathar the high priest, David went into
God's house and ate the holy bread, which is lawful only for
priests to eat. And David also gave some of the bread to those
who were with him."

27Then Jesus said to the Pharisees, "The Sabbath day was
made to help people; they were not made to be ruled by the
Sabbath day. 28So then, the Son of Man is Lord even of the
Sabbath day."

# February 21

## God's Help Is Near

*My hope is in you.*

Psalm 25:21

"Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is the belief that God is real and that God is good … It is a choice to believe that the one who made it all hasn't left it all and that he still sends light into the shadows and responds to gestures of faith …

Faith is the belief that God will do what is right.

God says that the more hopeless your circumstances, the more likely your salvation. The greater your cares, the more genuine your prayers. The darker the room, the greater the need for light.

God's help is near and always available, but it is only given to those who seek it.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## Leviticus 13:1–59

### *Rules About Skin Diseases*

13 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 2"Someone might have on
his skin a swelling or a rash or a bright spot. If the sore looks
like a harmful skin disease, the person must be brought to
Aaron the priest or to one of Aaron's sons, the priests. 3The
priest must look at the sore on the person's skin. If the hair in
the sore has become white, and the sore seems deeper than the
person's skin, it is a harmful skin disease. When he has finished
looking at the person, the priest must announce that the person
is unclean.

4"If there is a white spot on a person's skin, but the spot
does not seem deeper than the skin, and if the hair from the

spot has not turned white, the priest must separate that person from other people for seven days. 5On the seventh day the priest must look at the person again. If he sees that the sore has not changed and it has not spread on the skin, the priest must keep the person separated for seven more days. 6On the seventh day the priest must look at the person again. If the sore has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest must announce that the person is clean. The sore is only a rash. The person must wash his clothes, and he will become clean again.

7"But if the rash spreads again after the priest has announced him clean, the person must come again to the priest. 8The priest must look at him, and if the rash has spread on the skin, the priest must announce that the person is unclean; it is a harmful skin disease.

9"If a person has a harmful skin disease, he must be brought to the priest, 10and the priest must look at him. If there is a white swelling in the skin, and the hair has become white, and the skin looks raw in the swelling, 11it is a harmful skin disease. It is one he has had for a long time. The priest must announce that the person is unclean. He will not need to separate that person from other people, because everyone already knows that the person is unclean.

12"If the skin disease spreads all over a person's body, covering his skin from his head to his feet, as far as the priest can see, the priest must look at the person's whole body. 13If the priest sees that the disease covers the whole body and has turned all of the person's skin white, he must announce that the person is clean.

14"But when the person has an open sore, he is unclean. 15When the priest sees the open sore, he must announce that the person is unclean. The open sore is not clean; it is a harmful skin disease. 16If the open sore becomes white again, the person must come to the priest. 17The priest must look at him, and if the sores have become white, the priest must announce that the person with the sores is clean. Then he will be clean.

18"Someone may have a boil on his skin that is healed. 19If in the place where the boil was, there is a white swelling or a bright red spot, this place on the skin must be shown to the priest. 20And the priest must look at it. If the spot seems deeper than the skin and the hair on it has become white, the priest must announce that the person is unclean. The spot is a harmful skin disease that has broken out from inside the boil. 21But if the priest looks at the spot and there are no white hairs in it and the spot is not deeper than the skin and it has faded, the priest must separate the person from other people for seven days. 22If the spot spreads on the skin, the priest must announce that the person is unclean; it is a disease that will spread. 23But if the bright spot does not spread or change, it is

only the scar from the old boil. Then the priest must announce that the person is clean.

24 “When a person gets a burn on his skin, if the open sore
becomes white or red, 25 the priest must look at it. If the white
spot seems deeper than the skin and the hair at that spot has
become white, it is a harmful skin disease. The disease has
broken out in the burn, and the priest must announce that the
person is unclean. It is a harmful skin disease. 26 But if the
priest looks at the spot and there is no white hair in the bright
spot, and the spot is no deeper than the skin and has faded, the
priest must separate the person from other people for seven
days. 27 On the seventh day the priest must look at him again. If
the spot has spread on the skin, the priest must announce that
the person is unclean. It is a harmful skin disease. 28 But if the
bright spot has not spread on the skin but has faded, it is the
swelling from the burn. The priest must announce that the
person is clean, because the spot is only a scar from the burn.

29 “When a man or a woman gets a sore on the scalp or on
the chin, 30 a priest must look at the sore. If it seems deeper
than the skin and the hair around it is thin and yellow, the priest
must announce that the person is unclean. It is an itch, a
harmful skin disease of the head or chin. 31 But if the priest
looks at it and it does not seem deeper than the skin and there
is no black hair in it, the priest must separate the person from
other people for seven days. 32 On the seventh day the priest
must look at the sore. If it has not spread, and there are no
yellow hairs growing in it, and the sore does not seem deeper
than the skin, 33 the person must shave himself, but he must not
shave the sore place. The priest must separate that person from
other people for seven more days. 34 On the seventh day the
priest must look at the sore. If it has not spread on the skin and
it does not seem deeper than the skin, the priest must announce
that the person is clean. So the person must wash his clothes
and become clean. 35 But if the sore spreads on the skin after
the person has become clean, 36 the priest must look at him
again. If the sore has spread on the skin, the priest doesn’t need
to look for the yellowish hair; the person is unclean. 37 But if the
priest thinks the sore has stopped spreading, and black hair is
growing in it, the sore has healed. The person is clean, and the
priest must announce that he is clean.

38 “When a man or a woman has white spots on the skin, 39 a
priest must look at them. If the spots on the skin are dull white,
the disease is only a harmless rash. That person is clean.

40 “When anyone loses hair from his head and is bald, he is
clean. 41 If he loses hair from the front of his head and has a
bald forehead, he is clean. 42 But if there is a red-white sore on
his bald head or forehead, it is a skin disease breaking out in
those places. 43 A priest must look at that person. If the swelling

of the sore on his bald head or forehead is red-white, like a skin disease that spreads, 44that person has a skin disease. He is unclean. The priest must announce that the person is unclean because of the sore on his head.

45"If a person has a skin disease that spreads, he must warn other people by shouting, 'Unclean, unclean!' His clothes must be torn at the seams, he must let his hair stay uncombed, and he must cover his mouth. 46That person will be unclean the whole time he has the disease; he is unclean. He must live alone outside the camp.

## *Rules About Mildew*

47"Clothing might have mildew on it. It might be clothing made of linen or wool 48(either woven or knitted), or of leather, or something made from leather. 49If the mildew in the clothing, leather, or woven or knitted material is green or red, it is a spreading mildew. It must be shown to the priest. 50The priest must look at the mildew, and he must put that piece of clothing in a separate place for seven days. 51On the seventh day he must look at the mildew again. If the mildew has spread on the cloth (either woven or knitted) or the leather, no matter what the leather was used for, it is a mildew that destroys; it is unclean. 52The priest must burn the clothing. It does not matter if it is woven or knitted, wool or linen, or made of leather, because the mildew is spreading. It must be burned.

53"If the priest sees that the mildew has not spread in the cloth (either knitted or woven) or leather, 54he must order the people to wash that piece of leather or cloth. Then he must separate the clothing for seven more days. 55After the piece with the mildew has been washed, the priest must look at it again. If the mildew still looks the same, the piece is unclean, even if the mildew has not spread. You must burn it in fire; it does not matter if the mildew is on one side or the other.

56"But when the priest looks at that piece of leather or cloth, the mildew might have faded after the piece has been washed. Then the priest must tear the mildew out of the piece of leather or cloth (either woven or knitted). 57But if the mildew comes back to that piece of leather or cloth (either woven or knitted), the mildew is spreading. And whatever has the mildew must be burned with fire. 58When the cloth (either woven or knitted) or the leather is washed and the mildew is gone, it must be washed again; then it will be clean.

59"These are the teachings about mildew on pieces of cloth (either woven or knitted) or leather, to decide if they are clean or unclean."

## Psalm 25:16–22

16 Turn to me and have mercy on me,
because I am lonely and hurting.

17 My troubles have grown larger;
free me from my problems.

18 Look at my suffering and troubles,
and take away all my sins.

19 Look at how many enemies I have!
See how much they hate me!

20 Protect me and save me.
I trust you, so do not let me be disgraced.

21 My hope is in you,
so may goodness and honesty guard me.

22 God, save Israel from all their troubles!

## Proverbs 10:4

4 A lazy person will end up poor,
but a hard worker will become rich.

## Mark 3:1–19

### *Jesus Heals a Man's Hand*

3 Another time when Jesus went into a synagogue, a man with a
crippled hand was there. 2Some people watched Jesus closely to
see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath day so they could
accuse him.
3Jesus said to the man with the crippled hand, “Stand up
here in the middle of everyone.”
4Then Jesus asked the people, “Which is lawful on the
Sabbath day: to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill?”
But they said nothing to answer him.
5Jesus was angry as he looked at the people, and he felt very
sad because they were stubborn. Then he said to the man,
“Hold out your hand.” The man held out his hand and it was
healed. 6Then the Pharisees left and began making plans with
the Herodians[n] about a way to kill Jesus.

## *Many People Follow Jesus*

7Jesus left with his followers for the lake, and a large crowd
from Galilee followed him. 8Also many people came from Judea,
from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from the lands across the Jordan
River, and from the area of Tyre and Sidon. When they heard
what Jesus was doing, many people came to him. 9When Jesus
saw the crowds, he told his followers to get a boat ready for him
to keep people from crowding against him. 10He had healed
many people, so all the sick were pushing toward him to touch
him. 11When evil spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him
and shouted, “You are the Son of God!” 12But Jesus strongly
warned them not to tell who he was.

## *Jesus Chooses His Twelve Apostles*

13Then Jesus went up on a mountain and called to him those
he wanted, and they came to him. 14Jesus chose twelve and
called them apostles.[n] He wanted them to be with him, and he
wanted to send them out to preach 15and to have the authority
to force demons out of people. 16These are the twelve men he
chose: Simon (Jesus named him Peter), 17James and John, the
sons of Zebedee (Jesus named them Boanerges, which means
“Sons of Thunder”), 18Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew,
Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the
Zealot, 19and Judas Iscariot, who later turned against Jesus.

# February 22

## A True Family

*"My true brother and sister and mother are those who do what God wants."*

Mark 3:35

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

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

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

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

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Leviticus 14:1–57

#### *Rules for Cleansing from Skin Diseases*

14 The LORD said to Moses, 2"These are the teachings for the time at which people who had a harmful skin disease are made clean.

"The person shall be brought to the priest, 3and the priest must go outside the camp and look at the one who had the skin disease. If the skin disease is healed, 4the priest will command that two living, clean birds, a piece of cedar wood, a piece of

red string, and a hyssop plant be brought for cleansing the person with the skin disease.

5“The priest must order one bird to be killed in a clay bowl containing fresh water. 6Then he will take the living bird, the piece of cedar wood, the red string, and the hyssop; all these he will dip into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. 7The priest will sprinkle the blood seven times on the person being cleansed from the skin disease. He must announce that the person is clean and then go to an open field and let the living bird go free.

8“The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and bathe in water. Then he will be clean and may go into the camp, though he must stay outside his tent for the first seven days. 9On the seventh day he must shave off all his hair—the hair from his head, his beard, his eyebrows, and the rest of his hair. He must wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and he will be clean.

10“On the eighth day the person who had the skin disease must take two male lambs that have nothing wrong with them and a year-old female lamb that has nothing wrong with it. He must also take six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering and two-thirds of a pint of olive oil. 11The priest who is to announce that the person is clean must bring him and his sacrifices before the LORD at the entrance of the Meeting Tent. 12The priest will take one of the male lambs and offer it with the olive oil as a penalty offering; he will present them before the LORD as an offering. 13Then he will kill the male lamb in the holy place, where the sin offering and the whole burnt offering are killed. The penalty offering is like the sin offering—it belongs to the priest and it is most holy.

14“The priest will take some of the blood of the penalty offering and put it on the bottom of the right ear of the person to be made clean. He will also put some of it on the thumb of the person’s right hand and on the big toe of the person’s right foot. 15Then the priest will take some of the oil and pour it into his own left hand. 16He will dip a finger of his right hand into the oil that is in his left hand, and with his finger he will sprinkle some of the oil seven times before the LORD. 17The priest will put some oil from his hand on the bottom of the right ear of the person to be made clean, some on the thumb of the person’s right hand, and some on the big toe of the person’s right foot. The oil will go on these places on top of the blood for the penalty offering. 18He will put the rest of the oil that is in his left hand on the head of the person to be made clean. In this way the priest will make that person clean so he can belong to the LORD again.

19“Next the priest will offer the sin offering to make that person clean so he can belong to the LORD again. After this the priest will kill the animal for the whole burnt offering, 20and he

will offer the burnt offering and grain offering on the altar. In this way he will make that person clean so he can belong to the LORD again.

21“But if the person is poor and unable to afford these offerings, he must take one male lamb for a penalty offering. It will be presented to the LORD to make him clean so he can belong to the LORD again. The person must also take two quarts of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering. He must also take two-thirds of a pint of olive oil 22and two doves or two young pigeons, which he can afford. One bird is for a sin offering and the other for a whole burnt offering. 23On the eighth day the person will bring them for his cleansing to the priest at the entrance of the Meeting Tent, before the LORD. 24The priest will take the lamb for the penalty offering and the oil, and he will present them as an offering before the LORD. 25Then he will kill the lamb of the penalty offering, take some of its blood, and put it on the bottom of the right ear of the person to be made clean. The priest will put some of this blood on the thumb of the person’s right hand and some on the big toe of the person’s right foot. 26He will also pour some of the oil into his own left hand. 27Then with a finger of his right hand, he will sprinkle some of the oil from his left hand seven times before the LORD. 28The priest will take some of the oil from his hand and put it on the bottom of the right ear of the person to be made clean. He will also put some of it on the thumb of the person’s right hand and some on the big toe of the person’s right foot. The oil will go on these places on top of the blood from the penalty offering. 29The priest must put the rest of the oil that is in his hand on the head of the person to be made clean, to make him clean so he can belong to the LORD again. 30Then the priest will offer one of the doves or young pigeons, which the person can afford. 31He must offer one of the birds for a sin offering and the other for a whole burnt offering, along with the grain offering. In this way the priest will make the person clean so he can belong to the LORD again; he will become clean.

32“These are the teachings for making a person clean after he has had a skin disease, if he cannot afford the regular sacrifices for becoming clean.”

## *Rules for Cleaning Mildew*

33The LORD also said to Moses and Aaron, 34“I am giving the land of Canaan to your people. When they enter that land, if I cause mildew to grow in someone’s house in that land, 35the owner of that house must come and tell the priest. He should say, ‘I have seen something like mildew in my house.’ 36Then the priest must order the people to empty the house before he

goes in to look at the mildew. This is so he will not have to say that everything in the house is unclean. After this, the priest will go in to look at it. 37He will look at the mildew, and if the mildew on the walls of the house is green or red and goes into the wall's surface, 38he must go out and close up the house for seven days. 39On the seventh day the priest must come back and check the house. If the mildew has spread on the walls of the house, 40the priest must order the people to tear out the stones with the mildew on them. They should throw them away, at a certain unclean place outside the city. 41Then the priest must have all the inside of the house scraped. The people must throw away the plaster they scraped off the walls, at a certain unclean place outside the city. 42Then the owner must put new stones in the walls, and he must cover the walls with new clay plaster.

43"Suppose a person has taken away the old stones and plaster and put in new stones and plaster. If mildew again appears in his house, 44the priest must come back and check the house again. If the mildew has spread in the house, it is a mildew that destroys things; the house is unclean. 45Then the owner must tear down the house, remove all its stones, plaster, and wood, and take them to the unclean place outside the city. 46Anyone who goes into that house while it is closed up will be unclean until evening. 47Anyone who eats in that house or lies down there must wash his clothes.

48"Suppose after new stones and plaster have been put in a house, the priest checks it again and the mildew has not spread. Then the priest will announce that the house is clean, because the mildew is gone.

49"Then, to make the house clean, the priest must take two birds, a piece of cedar wood, a piece of red string, and a hyssop plant. 50He will kill one bird in a clay bowl containing fresh water. 51Then he will take the bird that is still alive, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the red string, and he will dip them into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. The priest will sprinkle the blood on the house seven times. 52He will use the bird's blood, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the red string to make the house clean. 53He will then go to an open field outside the city and let the living bird go free. This is how the priest makes the house clean and ready for service to the LORD."

54These are the teachings about any kind of skin disease, 55mildew on pieces of cloth or in a house, 56swellings, rashes, or bright spots on the skin; 57they help people decide when things are unclean and when they are clean. These are the teachings about all these kinds of diseases.

## Psalm 26:1–5

### *The Prayer of an Innocent Believer*

**Of David.**

26 LORD, defend me because I have lived an innocent life.
I have trusted the LORD and never doubted.

2LORD, try me and test me;
look closely into my heart and mind.

3I see your love,
and I live by your truth.

4I do not spend time with liars,
nor do I make friends with those who hide their sin.

5I hate the company of evil people,
and I won’t sit with the wicked.

## Proverbs 10:5–7

5Those who gather crops on time are wise,
but those who sleep through the harvest are a disgrace.

6Good people will have rich blessings,
but the wicked will be overwhelmed by violence.

7Good people will be remembered as a blessing,
but evil people will soon be forgotten.

# Mark 3:20–35

## *Some People Say Jesus Has a Devil*

[20]Then Jesus went home, but again a crowd gathered. There
were so many people that Jesus and his followers could not eat.
[21]When his family heard this, they went to get him because they
thought he was out of his mind. [22]But the teachers of the law
from Jerusalem were saying, “Beelzebul is living inside him! He
uses power from the ruler of demons to force demons out of
people.”
[23]So Jesus called the people together and taught them with
stories. He said, “Satan will not force himself out of people. [24]A
kingdom that is divided cannot continue, [25]and a family that is
divided cannot continue. [26]And if Satan is against himself and
fights against his own people, he cannot continue; that is the
end of Satan. [27]No one can enter a strong person’s house and
steal his things unless he first ties up the strong person. Then
he can steal things from the house. [28]I tell you the truth, all sins
that people do and all the things people say against God can be
forgiven. [29]But anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will
never be forgiven; he is guilty of a sin that continues forever.”
[30]Jesus said this because the teachers of the law said that he
had an evil spirit inside him.

## *Jesus’ True Family*

[31]Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside,
they sent someone in to tell him to come out. [32]Many people
were sitting around Jesus, and they said to him, “Your mother
and brothers[n] are waiting for you outside.”
[33]Jesus asked, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”
[34]Then he looked at those sitting around him and said, “Here
are my mother and my brothers! [35]My true brother and sister
and mother are those who do what God wants.”

# February 23

## A Home for Your Heart

*LORD, I love the Temple where you live, where your glory is.*

Psalm 26:8

When it comes to resting your soul, there is no place like the Great House of God. "I ask only one thing from the LORD," [David] wrote, "This is what I want: Let me live in the LORD's house all my life. Let me see the LORD's beauty and look with my own eyes at his Temple" (Psalm 27:4).

If you could ask God for one thing, what would you request? David tells us what he would ask. He longs to *live* in the house of God. I emphasize the word *live,* because it deserves to be emphasized. David doesn't want to chat. He doesn't desire a cup of coffee on the back porch. He doesn't ask for a meal or to spend an evening in God's house. He wants to move in with him … forever. He's asking for his own room … permanently. He doesn't want to be stationed in God's house, he longs to retire there. He doesn't seek a temporary assignment, but rather lifelong residence.

from *The Great House of God*

### Leviticus 15:1—16:34

#### *Rules About a Person's Body*

15 The LORD also said to Moses and Aaron, 2"Say to the people of
Israel: 'When a fluid comes from a person's body, the fluid is
unclean. 3It doesn't matter if the fluid flows freely or if it is
blocked from flowing; the fluid will make him unclean. This is
the way the fluid makes him unclean:
4"'If the person who discharges the body fluid lies on a bed,
that bed becomes unclean, and everything he sits on becomes
unclean. 5Anyone who touches his bed must wash his clothes
and bathe in water, and the person will be unclean until

evening. 6Whoever sits on something that the person who
discharges the fluid sat on must wash his clothes and bathe in
water; he will be unclean until evening. 7Anyone who touches
the person who discharges the body fluid must wash his clothes
and bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening.

8"'If the person who discharges the body fluid spits on
someone who is clean, that person must wash his clothes and
bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening. 9Everything on
which the person who is unclean sits when riding will become
unclean. 10Anyone who touches something that was under him
will be unclean until evening. And anyone who carries these
things must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be
unclean until evening.

11"'If the person who discharges a body fluid has not washed
his hands in water and touches another person, that person
must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be unclean
until evening.

12"'If a person who discharges a body fluid touches a clay
bowl, that bowl must be broken. If he touches a wooden bowl,
that bowl must be washed in water.

13"'When a person who discharges a body fluid is made
clean, he must count seven days for himself for his cleansing.
He must wash his clothes and bathe his body in fresh water, and
he will be clean. 14On the eighth day he must take two doves or
two young pigeons before the LORD at the entrance of the
Meeting Tent. He will give the two birds to the priest. 15The
priest will offer the birds, one for a sin offering and the other
for a burnt offering. And the priest will make that person clean
so he can belong to the LORD again.

16"'If semen[n] goes out from a man, he must bathe in water;
he will be unclean until evening. 17If the fluid gets on any
clothing or leather, it must be washed with water; it will be
unclean until evening.

18"'If a man has sexual relations with a woman and semen
comes out, both people must bathe in water; they will be
unclean until evening.

## *Rules About a Woman's Body*

19"'When a woman has her monthly period, she is unclean
for seven days; anyone who touches her will be unclean until
evening. 20Anything she lies on during this time will be unclean,
and everything she sits on during this time will be unclean.
21Anyone who touches her bed must wash his clothes and bathe
in water; that person will be unclean until evening. 22Anyone
who touches something she has sat on must wash his clothes
and bathe in water; that person will be unclean until evening.
23It does not matter if the person touched the woman's bed or

something she sat on; he will be unclean until evening.

24"'If a man has sexual relations with a woman and her monthly period touches him, he will be unclean for seven days; every bed he lies on will be unclean.

25"'If a woman has a loss of blood for many days and it is not during her regular monthly period, or if she continues to have a loss of blood after her regular period, she will be unclean, as she is during her monthly period. She will be unclean for as long as she continues to bleed. 26Any bed she lies on during all the time of her bleeding will be like her bed during her regular monthly period. Everything she sits on will be unclean, as during her regular monthly period.

27"'Whoever touches those things will be unclean and must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening. 28When the woman becomes clean from her bleeding, she must wait seven days, and after this she will be clean. 29Then on the eighth day she must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance of the Meeting Tent. 30The priest must offer one bird for a sin offering and the other for a whole burnt offering. In this way the priest will make her clean so she can belong to the LORD again.

31"'So you must warn the people of Israel to stay separated from things that make them unclean. If you don't warn the people, they might make my Holy Tent unclean, and then they would have to die!'"

32These are the teachings for the person who discharges a body fluid and for the man who becomes unclean from semen[n] coming out of his body. 33These are the teachings for the woman who becomes unclean from her monthly period, for a man or woman who has a discharge, and for a man who becomes unclean by having sexual relations with a woman who is unclean.

## *The Day of Cleansing*

16 Now two of Aaron's sons had died while offering incense to the LORD, and after that time the LORD spoke to Moses. 2The LORD said to him, "Tell your brother Aaron that there are times when he cannot go behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place where the Ark is. If he goes in when I appear in a cloud over the lid on the Ark, he will die.

3"This is how Aaron may enter the Most Holy Place: Before he enters, he must offer a bull for a sin offering and a male sheep for a whole burnt offering. 4He must put on the holy linen inner robe, with the linen underclothes next to his body. His belt will be the cloth belt, and he will wear the linen turban. These are holy clothes, so he must bathe his body in water before he puts them on.

5 “Aaron must take from the people of Israel two male goats
for a sin offering and one male sheep for a burnt offering. 6 Then
he will offer the bull for the sin offering for himself to remove
sins from him and his family so they will belong to the LORD.
7 “Next Aaron will take the two goats and bring them before
the LORD at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. 8 He will throw
lots for the two goats—one will be for the LORD and the other for
the goat that removes sin. 9 Then Aaron will take the goat that
was chosen for the LORD by throwing the lot, and he will offer it
as a sin offering. 10 The other goat, which was chosen by lot to
remove the sin, must be brought alive before the LORD. The
priest will use it to perform the acts that remove Israel’s sin so
they will belong to the LORD. Then this goat will be sent out into
the desert as a goat that removes sin.
11 “Then Aaron will offer the bull as a sin offering for himself,
to remove the sins from him and his family so they will belong
to the LORD; he will kill the bull for the sin offering for himself.
12 Then he must take a pan full of burning coals from the altar
before the LORD and two handfuls of sweet incense that has
been ground into powder. He must bring it into the room behind
the curtain. 13 He must put the incense on the fire before the
LORD so that the cloud of incense will cover the lid on the Ark.
Then when Aaron comes in, he will not die. 14 Also, he must take
some of the blood from the bull and sprinkle it with his finger
on the front of the lid; with his finger he will sprinkle the blood
seven times in front of the lid.
15 “Then Aaron must kill the goat of the sin offering for the
people and bring its blood into the room behind the curtain. He
must do with the goat’s blood as he did with the bull’s blood,
sprinkling it on the lid and in front of the lid. 16 Because the
people of Israel have been unclean, Aaron will perform the acts
to make the Most Holy Place ready for service to the LORD. Then
it will be clean from the sins and crimes of the Israelites. He
must also do this for the Meeting Tent, because it stays in the
middle of unclean people. 17 When Aaron makes the Most Holy
Place ready for service to the LORD, no one is allowed in the
Meeting Tent until he comes out. So Aaron will perform the acts
to remove sins from himself, his family, and all the people of
Israel, so they will belong to the LORD. 18 Afterward he will go
out to the altar that is before the LORD and will make it ready for
service to the LORD. Aaron will take some of the bull’s blood and
some of the goat’s blood and put it on the corners of the altar
on all sides. 19 Then, with his finger, he will sprinkle some of the
blood on the altar seven times to make the altar holy for the
LORD and clean from all the sins of the Israelites.
20 “When Aaron has finished making the Most Holy Place, the
Meeting Tent, and the altar ready for service to the LORD, he will
offer the living goat. 21 He will put both his hands on the head of
the living goat, and he will confess over it all the sins and

crimes of Israel. In this way Aaron will put the people's sins on the goat's head. Then he will send the goat away into the desert, and a man who has been appointed will lead the goat away. 22So the goat will carry on itself all the people's sins to a lonely place in the desert. The man who leads the goat will let it loose there.

23"Then Aaron will enter the Meeting Tent and take off the linen clothes he had put on before he went into the Most Holy Place; he must leave these clothes there. 24He will bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his regular clothes. Then he will come out and offer the whole burnt offering for himself and for the people, to remove sins from himself and the people so they will belong to the LORD. 25Then he will burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.

26"The person who led the goat, the goat to remove sins, into the desert must wash his clothes and bathe his body in water. After that, he may come back into the camp.

27"The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make it ready for service to the LORD, must be taken outside the camp; the animals' skins, bodies, and intestines will be burned in the fire. 28Then the one who burns them must wash his clothes and bathe his body in water. After that, he may come back into the camp.

29"This law will always continue for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month, you must deny yourself and you must not do any work. The travelers or foreigners living with you must not work either. 30It is on this day that the priests will make you clean so you will belong to the LORD again. All your sins will be removed. 31This is a very important day of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. This law will continue forever.

32"The priest appointed to take his father's place, on whom the oil was poured, will perform the acts for making things ready for service to the LORD. He must put on the holy linen clothes 33and make the Most Holy Place, the Meeting Tent, and the altar ready for service to the LORD. He must also remove the sins of the priests and all the people of Israel so they will belong to the LORD. 34That law for removing the sins of the Israelites so they will belong to the LORD will continue forever. You will do these things once a year."

So they did the things the LORD had commanded Moses.

## Psalm 26:6–12

6 I wash my hands to show I am innocent,
and I come to your altar, LORD.

7 I raise my voice in praise
and tell of all the miracles you have done.

8 LORD, I love the Temple where you live,
where your glory is.

9 Do not kill me with those sinners
or take my life with those murderers.

10 Evil is in their hands,
and they do wrong for money.

11 But I have lived an innocent life,
so save me and have mercy on me.

12 I stand in a safe place.
LORD, I praise you in the great meeting.

## Proverbs 10:8

8 The wise do what they are told,
but a talkative fool will be ruined.

## Mark 4:1–20

### *A Story About Planting Seed*

4 Again Jesus began teaching by the lake. A great crowd gathered around him, so he sat down in a boat near the shore. All the people stayed on the shore close to the water. 2 Jesus

taught them many things, using stories. He said, [3]"Listen! A farmer went out to plant his seed. [4]While he was planting, some seed fell by the road, and the birds came and ate it up. [5]Some seed fell on rocky ground where there wasn't much dirt. That seed grew very fast, because the ground was not deep. [6]But when the sun rose, the plants dried up because they did not have deep roots. [7]Some other seed fell among thorny weeds, which grew and choked the good plants. So those plants did not produce a crop. [8]Some other seed fell on good ground and began to grow. It got taller and produced a crop. Some plants made thirty times more, some made sixty times more, and some made a hundred times more."

[9]Then Jesus said, "Let those with ears use them and listen!"

## *Jesus Tells Why He Used Stories*

[10]Later, when Jesus was alone, the twelve apostles and others around him asked him about the stories.

[11]Jesus said, "You can know the secret about the kingdom of God. But to other people I tell everything by using stories [12]so that:

'They will look and look, but they will not learn.
They will listen and listen, but they will not understand.

If they did learn and understand,
they would come back to me and be forgiven.'"

Isaiah 6:9–10

## *Jesus Explains the Seed Story*

[13]Then Jesus said to his followers, "Don't you understand this story? If you don't, how will you understand any story? [14]The farmer is like a person who plants God's message in people. [15]Sometimes the teaching falls on the road. This is like the people who hear the teaching of God, but Satan quickly comes and takes away the teaching that was planted in them. [16]Others are like the seed planted on rocky ground. They hear the teaching and quickly accept it with joy. [17]But since they don't allow the teaching to go deep into their lives, they keep it only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the teaching they accepted, they quickly give up. [18]Others are like the seed planted among the thorny weeds. They hear the teaching, [19]but the worries of this life, the temptation of wealth, and many other evil desires keep the teaching from growing

and producing fruit[n] in their lives. [20]Others are like the seed planted in the good ground. They hear the teaching and accept it. Then they grow and produce fruit—sometimes thirty times more, sometimes sixty times more, and sometimes a hundred times more.”

# February 24

## A Next Door Savior

*"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

Mark 4:41

He was, at once, man and God. There he was, the single most significant person who ever lived. Forget MVP; he is the entire league. The head of the parade? Hardly. No one else shares the street. Who comes close? Humanity's best and brightest fade like dime-store rubies next to him.

Dismiss him? We can't.

Resist him? Equally difficult. Don't we need a God-man Savior? A just-God Jesus could make us but not understand us. A just-man Jesus could love us but never save us. But a God-man Jesus? Near enough to touch. Strong enough to trust. A next door Savior.

A Savior found by millions to be irresistible.

from *Next Door Savior*

## Leviticus 17:1—18:30

### *Offering Sacrifices*

17 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Speak to Aaron, his sons, and all
the people of Israel. Tell them: 'This is what the LORD has
commanded. 3If an Israelite kills an ox, a lamb, or a goat either
inside the camp or outside it, 4when he should have brought the
animal to the entrance of the Meeting Tent as a gift to the LORD
in front of the LORD's Holy Tent, he is guilty of killing. He has
killed, and he must be cut off from the people. 5This rule is so
people will bring their sacrifices, which they have been
sacrificing in the open fields, to the LORD. They must bring those
animals to the LORD at the entrance of the Meeting Tent; they
must bring them to the priest and offer them as fellowship
offerings. 6Then the priest will sprinkle the blood from those

animals on the LORD's altar near the entrance of the Meeting Tent. And he will burn the fat from those animals on the altar, as a smell pleasing to the LORD. 7They must not offer any more sacrifices to their goat idols, which they have chased like prostitutes. These rules will continue for people from now on.'

8"Tell the people this: 'If any citizen of Israel or foreigner living with you offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, 9that person must take his sacrifice to the entrance of the Meeting Tent to offer it to the LORD. If he does not do this, he must be cut off from the people.

10"'I will be against any citizen of Israel or foreigner living with you who eats blood. I will cut off that person from the people. 11This is because the life of the body is in the blood, and I have given you rules for pouring that blood on the altar to remove your sins so you will belong to the LORD. It is the blood that removes the sins, because it is life. 12So I tell the people of Israel this: "None of you may eat blood, and no foreigner living among you may eat blood."

13"'If any citizen of Israel or foreigner living among you catches a wild animal or bird that can be eaten, that person must pour the blood on the ground and cover it with dirt. 14If blood is still in the meat, the animal's life is still in it. So I give this command to the people of Israel: "Don't eat meat that still has blood in it, because the animal's life is in its blood. Anyone who eats blood must be cut off."

15"'If a person, either a citizen or a foreigner, eats an animal that died by itself or was killed by another animal, he must wash his clothes and bathe in water. He will be unclean until evening; then he will be clean. 16If he does not wash his clothes and bathe his body, he will be guilty of sin.'"

## *Rules About Sexual Relations*

18 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Tell the people of Israel: 'I am the LORD your God. 3In the past you lived in Egypt, but you must not do what was done in that country. And you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their customs. 4You must obey my rules and follow them. I am the LORD your God. 5Obey my laws and rules; a person who obeys them will live because of them. I am the LORD.

6"'You must never have sexual relations with your close relatives. I am the LORD.

7"'You must not shame your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have sexual relations with her. 8You must not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would shame your father.

9"'You must not have sexual relations with your sister, either the daughter of your father or your mother. It doesn't matter if

she was born in your house or somewhere else.
10"'You must not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; that would bring shame on you.
11"'If your father and his wife have a daughter, she is your sister. You must not have sexual relations with her.
12"'You must not have sexual relations with your father's sister; she is your father's close relative. 13You must not have sexual relations with your mother's sister; she is your mother's close relative. 14You must not have sexual relations with the wife of your father's brother, because this would shame him. She is your aunt.
15"'You must not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife. Do not have sexual relations with her.
16"'You must not have sexual relations with your brother's wife. That would shame your brother.
17"'You must not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. And do not have sexual relations with this woman's granddaughter, either the daughter of her son or her daughter; they are her close relatives. It is evil to do this.
18"'While your wife is still living, you must not take her sister as another wife. Do not have sexual relations with her.
19"'You must not go near a woman to have sexual relations with her during her monthly period, when she is unclean.
20"'You must not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and make yourself unclean with her.
21"'You must not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, because this would show that you do not respect your God. I am the LORD.
22"'You must not have sexual relations with a man as you would a woman. That is a hateful sin.
23"'You must not have sexual relations with an animal and make yourself unclean with it. Also a woman must not have sexual relations with an animal; it is not natural.
24"'Don't make yourself unclean by any of these wrong things. I am forcing nations out of their countries because they did these sins, and I am giving their land to you. 25The land has become unclean, and I punished it for its sins, so the land is throwing out those people who live there.
26"'You must obey my laws and rules, and you must not do any of these hateful sins. These rules are for the citizens of Israel and for the people who live with you. 27The people who lived in the land before you did all these hateful things and made the land unclean. 28If you do these things, you will also make the land unclean, and it will throw you out as it threw out the nations before you. 29Anyone who does these hateful sins must be cut off from the people. 30Keep my command not to do

these hateful sins that were done by the people who lived in the land before you. Don’t make yourself unclean by doing them. I am the LORD your God.’”

## Psalm 27:1–3

### *A Song of Trust in God*

**Of David.**

27 The LORD is my light and the one who saves
me.
So why should I fear anyone?

The LORD protects my life.
So why should I be afraid?

2Evil people may try to destroy my body.
My enemies and those who hate me attack me,

but they are overwhelmed and defeated.

3If an army surrounds me,
I will not be afraid.

If war breaks out,
I will trust the LORD.

## Proverbs 10:9

9The honest person will live in safety,
but the dishonest will be caught.

# Mark 4:21–41

## *Use What You Have*

21 Then Jesus said to them, “Do you hide a lamp under a bowl
or under a bed? No! You put the lamp on a lampstand.
22 Everything that is hidden will be made clear and every secret
thing will be made known. 23 Let those with ears use them and
listen!
24 “Think carefully about what you hear. The way you give to
others is the way God will give to you, but God will give you
even more. 25 Those who have understanding will be given more.
But those who do not have understanding, even what they have
will be taken away from them.”

## *Jesus Uses a Story About Seed*

26 Then Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is like someone who
plants seed in the ground. 27 Night and day, whether the person
is asleep or awake, the seed still grows, but the person does not
know how it grows. 28 By itself the earth produces grain. First
the plant grows, then the head, and then all the grain in the
head. 29 When the grain is ready, the farmer cuts it, because this
is the harvest time.”

## *A Story About Mustard Seed*

30 Then Jesus said, “How can I show you what the kingdom of
God is like? What story can I use to explain it? 31 The kingdom of
God is like a mustard seed, the smallest seed you plant in the
ground. 32 But when planted, this seed grows and becomes the
largest of all garden plants. It produces large branches, and the
wild birds can make nests in its shade.”
33 Jesus used many stories like these to teach the crowd
God’s message—as much as they could understand. 34 He always
used stories to teach them. But when he and his followers were
alone, Jesus explained everything to them.

## *Jesus Calms a Storm*

35 That evening, Jesus said to his followers, “Let’s go across
the lake.” 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him in the boat
just as he was. There were also other boats with them. 37 A very
strong wind came up on the lake. The waves came over the

sides and into the boat so that it was already full of water.
38 Jesus was at the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a
cushion. His followers woke him and said, “Teacher, don’t you
care that we are drowning!”
39 Jesus stood up and commanded the wind and said to the
waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind stopped, and it became
completely calm.
40 Jesus said to his followers, “Why are you afraid? Do you
still have no faith?”
41 The followers were very afraid and asked each other, “Who
is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

# February 25

## When Hopes Don't Happen

*During danger he will keep me safe in his shelter. He will hide me in his Holy Tent.*

Psalm 27:5

What do we do with our disappointments? We could do what Miss Haversham did. Remember her in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*? Jilted by her fiancé just prior to the wedding, ... she closed all the blinds in the house, stopped every clock, left the wedding cake on the table to gather cobwebs, and wore her wedding dress until it hung in yellow decay around her shrunken form. Her wounded heart consumed her life.

We can follow the same course.

Or we can follow the example of the apostle Paul. His goal was to be a missionary in Spain, ... however, God sent him to prison. Sitting in a Roman jail, Paul could have made the same choice as Miss Haversham, but he didn't. Instead he said, "As long as I'm here, I might as well write a few letters." Hence your Bible has the Letters to Philemon, the Philippians, the Colossians, and the Ephesians.

from *Traveling Light*

### Leviticus 19:1—20:27

#### *Other Laws*

19 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Tell all the people of Israel: 'I am
the LORD your God. You must be holy because I am holy.

3"'You must respect your mother and father, and you must
keep my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.

4"'Do not worship idols or make statues or gods for
yourselves. I am the LORD your God.

5"'When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the LORD, offer
it in such a way that will be accepted. 6You may eat it the same

day you offer it or on the next day. But if any is left on the third day, you must burn it up. 7If any of it is eaten on the third day, it is unclean, and it will not be accepted. 8Anyone who eats it then will be guilty of sin, because he did not respect the holy things that belong to the LORD. He must be cut off from the people.

9"'When you harvest your crops on your land, do not harvest all the way to the corners of your fields. If grain falls onto the ground, don't gather it up. 10Don't pick all the grapes in your vineyards, and don't pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. You must leave those things for poor people and for people traveling through your country. I am the LORD your God.

11"'You must not steal. You must not cheat people, and you must not lie to each other. 12You must not make a false promise by my name, or you will show that you don't respect your God. I am the LORD.

13"'You must not cheat your neighbor or rob him. You must not keep a hired worker's salary all night until morning. 14You must not curse a deaf person or put something in front of a blind person to make him fall. But you must respect your God. I am the LORD.

15"'Be fair in your judging. You must not show special favor to poor people or great people, but be fair when you judge your neighbor. 16You must not spread false stories against other people, and you must not do anything that would put your neighbor's life in danger. I am the LORD.

17"'You must not hate your fellow citizen in your heart. If your neighbor does something wrong, tell him about it, or you will be partly to blame. 18Forget about the wrong things people do to you, and do not try to get even. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. I am the LORD.

19"'Obey my laws. You must not mate two different kinds of cattle or sow your field with two different kinds of seed. You must not wear clothing made from two different kinds of material mixed together.

20"'If a man has sexual relations with a slave girl of another man, but this slave girl has not been bought or given her freedom, there must be punishment. But they are not to be put to death, because the woman was not free. 21The man must bring a male sheep as his penalty offering to the LORD at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. 22The priest will offer the sheep as a penalty offering before the LORD for the man's sin, to remove the sins of the man so he will belong to the LORD. Then he will be forgiven for his sin.

23"'In the future, when you enter your country, you will plant many kinds of trees for food. After planting a tree, wait three years before using its fruit. 24In the fourth year the fruit from the tree will be the LORD's, a holy offering of praise to him. 25Then in the fifth year, you may eat the fruit from the tree. The

tree will then produce more fruit for you. I am the LORD your God.

26"'You must not eat anything with the blood in it.

"'You must not try to tell the future by signs or black magic.

27"'You must not cut the hair on the sides of your heads or cut the edges of your beard. 28You must not cut your body to show sadness for someone who died or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.

29"'Do not dishonor your daughter by making her become a prostitute. If you do this, the country will be filled with all kinds of sin.

30"'Obey the laws about Sabbaths, and respect my Most Holy Place. I am the LORD.

31"'Do not go to mediums or fortune-tellers for advice, or you will become unclean. I am the LORD your God.

32"'Show respect to old people; stand up in their presence. Show respect also to your God. I am the LORD.

33"'Do not mistreat foreigners living in your country, 34but treat them just as you treat your own citizens. Love foreigners as you love yourselves, because you were foreigners one time in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

35"'Do not cheat when you measure the length or weight or amount of something. 36Your weights and balances should weigh correctly, with your weighing baskets the right size and your jars holding the right amount of liquid. I am the LORD your God. I brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37"'Remember all my laws and rules, and obey them. I am the LORD.'"

## *Warnings About Various Sins*

20 The LORD said to Moses, 2"You must also tell the people of Israel these things: 'If a person in your country gives one of his children to Molech, that person must be killed. It doesn't matter if he is a citizen or a foreigner living in Israel; you must throw stones at him and kill him. 3I will be against him and cut him off from his people, because he gave his children to Molech. He showed that he did not respect my holy name, and he made my Holy Place unclean. 4The people of the community might ignore that person and not kill the one who gave his children to Molech. 5But I will be against him and his family, and I will cut him off from his people. I will do this to anyone who follows him in being unfaithful to me by worshiping Molech.

6"'I will be against anyone who goes to mediums and fortune-tellers for advice, because that person is being unfaithful to me. So I will cut him off from his people.

7"'Be my holy people. Be holy because I am the LORD your God. 8Remember and obey my laws. I am the LORD, and I have

made you holy.

9"'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death. He has cursed his father or mother, so he has brought his own death on himself.

## *Punishments for Sexual Sins*

10"'If a man has sexual relations with his neighbor's wife, both the man and the woman are guilty of adultery and must be put to death. 11If a man has sexual relations with his father's wife, he has shamed his father, and both the man and his father's wife must be put to death. They have brought it on themselves.

12"'If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is not natural. They have brought their own deaths on themselves.

13"'If a man has sexual relations with another man as a man does with a woman, these two men have done a hateful sin. They must be put to death. They have brought it on themselves.

14"'If a man has sexual relations with both a woman and her mother, this is evil. The people must burn that man and the two women in fire so that your people will not be evil.

15"'If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death. You must also kill the animal. 16If a woman approaches an animal and has sexual relations with it, you must kill the woman and the animal. They must be put to death. They have brought it on themselves.

17"'It is shameful for a brother to marry his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and to have sexual relations with her. In front of everyone they must both be cut off from their people. The man has shamed his sister, and he is guilty of sin.

18"'If a man has sexual relations with a woman during her monthly period, both the woman and the man must be cut off from their people. They sinned because they showed the source of her blood.

19"'Do not have sexual relations with your mother's sister or your father's sister, because that would shame a close relative. Both of you are guilty of this sin.

20"'If a man has sexual relations with his uncle's wife, he has shamed his uncle. That man and his uncle's wife will die without children; they are guilty of sin.

21"'It is unclean for a man to marry his brother's wife. That man has shamed his brother, and they will have no children.

22"'Remember all my laws and rules, and obey them. I am leading you to your own land, and if you obey my laws and rules, that land will not throw you out. 23I am forcing out ahead of you the people who live there. Because they did all these

sins, I have hated them. Do not live the way those people lived.
24"'I have told you that you will get their land, which I will give to you as your very own; it is a fertile land. I am the LORD your God, and I have set you apart from other people and made you my own. 25So you must treat clean animals and birds differently from unclean animals and birds. Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these unclean birds or animals or things that crawl on the ground, which I have made unclean for you. 26So you must be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from other people to be my own.
27"'A man or woman who is a medium or a fortune-teller must be put to death. You must stone them to death; they have brought it on themselves.'"

## Psalm 27:4–6

4I ask only one thing from the LORD.
This is what I want:

Let me live in the LORD's house
all my life.

Let me see the LORD's beauty
and look with my own eyes at his Temple.

5During danger he will keep me safe in his shelter.
He will hide me in his Holy Tent,
or he will keep me safe on a high mountain.

6My head is higher than my enemies around me.

I will offer joyful sacrifices in his Holy Tent.
I will sing and praise the LORD.

## Proverbs 10:10–12

10 A wink may get you into trouble,
and foolish talk will lead to your ruin.

11 The words of a good person give life, like a fountain of water,
but the words of the wicked contain nothing but violence.

12 Hatred stirs up trouble,
but love forgives all wrongs.

## Mark 5:1–20

### *A Man with Demons Inside Him*

5 Jesus and his followers went to the other side of the lake to the area of the Gerasene[n] people. 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, instantly a man with an evil spirit came to him from the burial caves. 3 This man lived in the caves, and no one could tie him up, not even with a chain. 4 Many times people had used chains to tie the man's hands and feet, but he always broke them off. No one was strong enough to control him. 5 Day and night he would wander around the burial caves and on the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones. 6 While Jesus was still far away, the man saw him, ran to him, and fell down before him.

7 The man shouted in a loud voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I command you in God's name not to torture me!" 8 He said this because Jesus was saying to him, "You evil spirit, come out of the man."

9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

He answered, "My name is Legion,[n] because we are many spirits." 10 He begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of that area.

11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on a hill near there. 12 The demons begged Jesus, "Send us into the pigs; let us go into them." 13 So Jesus allowed them to do this. The evil spirits left the man and went into the pigs. Then the herd of pigs—about two thousand of them—rushed down the hill into the lake and were drowned.

14 The herdsmen ran away and went to the town and to the countryside, telling everyone about this. So people went out to see what had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw the man

who used to have the many evil spirits, sitting, clothed, and in his right mind. And they were frightened. [16]The people who saw this told the others what had happened to the man who had the demons living in him, and they told about the pigs. [17]Then the people began to beg Jesus to leave their area.

[18]As Jesus was getting back into the boat, the man who was freed from the demons begged to go with him.

[19]But Jesus would not let him. He said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.” [20]So the man left and began to tell the people in the Ten Towns[n] about what Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed.

# February 26

## A Hunch and a Hope

*"You are made well because you believed. Go in peace; be healed of your disease."*

Mark 5:34

Maybe all you have [is] a crazy hunch and a high hope. You have nothing to give. But you are hurting. And all you have to offer him is your hurt. Maybe that has kept you from coming to God. Oh, you've taken a step or two in his direction. But then you saw the other people around him. They seemed so clean, so neat, so trim and fit in their faith. And when you saw them, they blocked your view of him. So you stepped back.

If that describes you, note carefully … one person [whom Christ] commended … for having faith. It wasn't a wealthy giver. It wasn't a loyal follower. It wasn't an acclaimed teacher. It was a shame-struck, penniless outcast—[a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years]—who clutched onto her hunch that he could and her hope that he would.

Which, by the way, isn't a bad definition of faith. *A conviction that he can and a hope that he will.*

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Leviticus 21:1—22:33

### *How Priests Must Behave*

21 The LORD said to Moses, "Tell these things to Aaron's sons, the priests: 'A priest must not make himself unclean by touching a dead person. 2But if the dead person was one of his close relatives, he may touch him. The priest may make himself unclean if the dead person is his mother or father, son or daughter, brother or 3unmarried sister who is close to him because she has no husband. The priest may make himself unclean for her if she dies. 4But a priest must not make himself

unclean if the dead person was only related to him by marriage.
5"'Priests must not shave their heads, or shave off the edges
of their beards, or cut their bodies. 6They must be holy to their
God and show respect for God's name, because they present the
offerings made by fire to the LORD, which is the food of their
God. So they must be holy.
7"'A priest must not marry an unclean prostitute or a
divorced woman, because he is holy to his God. 8Treat him as
holy, because he offers up the food of your God. Think of him as
holy; I am the LORD who makes you holy, and I am holy.
9"'If a priest's daughter makes herself unclean by becoming
a prostitute, she shames her father. She must be burned with
fire.
10"'The high priest, who was chosen from among his
brothers, had the special olive oil poured on his head. He was
also appointed to wear the priestly clothes. So he must not
show his sadness by letting his hair go uncombed or tearing his
clothes. 11He must not go into a house where there is a dead
body. He must not make himself unclean, even if it is for his own
father or mother. 12The high priest must not go out of the Holy
Place, because if he does and becomes unclean, he will make
God's Holy Place unclean. The special oil used in appointing
priests was poured on his head to separate him from the rest of
the people. I am the LORD.
13"'The high priest must marry a woman who is a virgin.
14He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a
prostitute. He must marry a virgin from his own people 15so the
people will respect his children as his own. I am the LORD. I have
set the high priest apart for his special job.'"
16The LORD said to Moses, 17"Tell Aaron: 'If any of your
descendants have something wrong with them, they must never
come near to offer the special food of their God. 18Anyone who
has something wrong with him must not come near: blind men,
crippled men, men with damaged faces, deformed men, 19men
with a crippled foot or hand, 20hunchbacks, dwarfs, men who
have something wrong with their eyes, men who have an itching
disease or a skin disease, or men who have damaged sex
glands.
21"'If one of Aaron's descendants has something wrong with
him, he cannot come near to make the offerings made by fire to
the LORD. He has something wrong with him; he cannot offer the
food of his God. 22He may eat the most holy food and also the
holy food. 23But he may not go through the curtain into the
Most Holy Place, and he may not go near the altar, because he
has something wrong with him. He must not make my Holy
Place unfit. I am the LORD who makes these places holy.'"
24So Moses told these things to Aaron, Aaron's sons, and all
the people of Israel.

22 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Tell Aaron and his sons: 'The
people of Israel will give offerings to me. These offerings are
holy, and they are mine, so you must respect them to show that
you respect my holy name. I am the LORD.' 3Say to them: 'If any
one of your descendants from now on is unclean and comes
near the offerings that the Israelites made holy for me, that
person must be cut off from appearing before me. I am the
LORD.

4"'If one of Aaron's descendants has a harmful skin disease,
or if he discharges a body fluid, he cannot eat the holy offerings
until he becomes clean. He could also become unclean from
touching a dead body, from his own semen,n 5from touching any
unclean crawling animal, or from touching an unclean person
(no matter what made the person unclean). 6Anyone who
touches those things will become unclean until evening. That
person must not eat the holy offerings unless he washes with
water. 7He will be clean only after the sun goes down. Then he
may eat the holy offerings; the offerings are his food.

8"'If a priest finds an animal that died by itself or that was
killed by some other animal, he must not eat it. If he does, he
will become unclean. I am the LORD.

9"'If the priests keep all the rules I have given, they will not
become guilty; if they are careful, they will not die. I am the
LORD who has made them holy. 10Only people in a priest's family
may eat the holy offering. A visitor staying with the priest or a
hired worker must not eat it. 11But if the priest buys a slave
with his own money, that slave may eat the holy offerings;
slaves who were born in his house may also eat his food. 12If a
priest's daughter marries a person who is not a priest, she must
not eat any of the holy offerings. 13But if the priest's daughter
becomes widowed or divorced, with no children to support her,
and if she goes back to her father's house where she lived as a
child, she may eat some of her father's food. But only people
from a priest's family may eat this food.

14"'If someone eats some of the holy offering by mistake, that
person must pay back the priest for that holy food, adding
another one-fifth of the price of that food.

15"'When the Israelites give their holy offerings to the LORD,
the priest must not treat these holy things as though they were
not holy. 16The priests must not allow those who are not priests
to eat the holy offerings. If they do, they cause the ones who eat
the holy offerings to become guilty, and they will have to pay for
it. I am the LORD, who makes them holy.'"

17The LORD said to Moses, 18"Tell Aaron and his sons and all
the people of Israel: 'A citizen of Israel or a foreigner living in
Israel might want to bring a whole burnt offering, either for
some special promise he has made or for a special gift he wants
to give to the LORD. 19If he does, he must bring a male animal
that has nothing wrong with it—a bull, a sheep, or a goat—so it

might be accepted for him. 20He must not bring an animal that has something wrong with it, or it will not be accepted for him.

21"'If someone brings a fellowship offering to the LORD, either as payment for a special promise the person has made or as a special gift the person wants to give the LORD, it might be from the herd or from the flock. But it must be healthy, with nothing wrong with it, so that it will be accepted. 22You must not offer to the LORD any animal that is blind, that has broken bones or is crippled, that has running sores or any sort of skin disease. You must not offer any animals like these on the altar as an offering by fire to the LORD.

23"'If an ox or lamb is smaller than normal or is not perfectly formed, you may give it as a special gift to the LORD; it will be accepted. But it will not be accepted as payment for a special promise you have made.

24"'If an animal has bruised, crushed, torn, or cut sex glands, you must not offer it to the LORD. You must not do this in your own land, 25and you must not take such animals from foreigners as sacrifices to the LORD. Because the animals have been hurt in some way and have something wrong with them, they will not be accepted for you.'"

26The LORD said to Moses, 27"When an ox, a sheep, or a goat is born, it must stay seven days with its mother. But from the eighth day on, this animal will be accepted as a sacrifice by fire to the LORD. 28But you must not kill the animal and its mother on the same day, either an ox or a sheep.

29"If you want to offer some special offering of thanks to the LORD, you must do it in a way that pleases him. 30You must eat the whole animal that same day and not leave any of the meat for the next morning. I am the LORD.

31"Remember my commands and obey them; I am the LORD. 32Show respect for my holy name. You Israelites must remember that I am holy; I am the LORD, who has made you holy. 33I brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD."

## Psalm 27:7–14

7LORD, hear me when I call;
have mercy and answer me.

8My heart said of you, "Go, worship him."
So I come to worship you, LORD.

9 Do not turn away from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have helped me.

Do not push me away or leave me alone,
God, my Savior.

10 If my father and mother leave me,
the LORD will take me in.

11 LORD, teach me your ways,
and guide me to do what is right
because I have enemies.

12 Do not hand me over to my enemies,
because they tell lies about me
and say they will hurt me.

13 I truly believe
I will live to see the LORD's goodness.

14 Wait for the LORD's help.
Be strong and brave,
and wait for the LORD's help.

## Proverbs 10:13–16

13 Wise people speak with understanding,
but people without wisdom should be punished.

14 The wise don't tell everything they know,
but the foolish talk too much and are ruined.

15 Having lots of money protects the rich,
but having no money destroys the poor.

16 Good people are rewarded with life,
but evil people are paid with punishment.

## Mark 5:21–43

### *Jesus Gives Life to a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman*

21 When Jesus went in the boat back to the other side of the
lake, a large crowd gathered around him there. 22 A leader of
the synagogue, named Jairus, came there, saw Jesus, and fell at
his feet. 23 He begged Jesus, saying again and again, "My
daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so
she will be healed and will live." 24 So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed Jesus and pushed very close around
him. 25 Among them was a woman who had been bleeding for
twelve years. 26 She had suffered very much from many doctors
and had spent all the money she had, but instead of improving,
she was getting worse. 27 When the woman heard about Jesus,
she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his coat.
28 She thought, "If I can just touch his clothes, I will be healed."
29 Instantly her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that
she was healed from her disease.

30 At once Jesus felt power go out from him. So he turned
around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

31 His followers said, "Look at how many people are pushing
against you! And you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

32 But Jesus continued looking around to see who had
touched him. 33 The woman, knowing that she was healed, came
and fell at Jesus' feet. Shaking with fear, she told him the whole
truth. 34 Jesus said to her, "Dear woman, you are made well
because you believed. Go in peace; be healed of your disease."

35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the
house of the synagogue leader. They said, "Your daughter is
dead. There is no need to bother the teacher anymore."

36 But Jesus paid no attention to what they said. He told the
synagogue leader, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

37 Jesus let only Peter, James, and John the brother of James
go with him. 38 When they came to the house of the synagogue
leader, Jesus found many people there making lots of noise and
crying loudly. 39 Jesus entered the house and said to them, "Why
are you crying and making so much noise? The child is not
dead, only asleep." 40 But they laughed at him. So, after
throwing them out of the house, Jesus took the child's father

and mother and his three followers into the room where the child was. [41]Taking hold of the girl's hand, he said to her, "Talitha, koum!" (This means, "Young girl, I tell you to stand up!") [42]At once the girl stood right up and began walking. (She was twelve years old.) Everyone was completely amazed. [43]Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell people about this. Then he told them to give the girl something to eat.

# February 27

## Open Your Heart

*LORD, my Rock, I call out to you for help.*

Psalm 28:1

How did Jesus endure the terror of the crucifixion? He went first to the Father with his fears. He modeled the words of Psalm 56:3: "When I am afraid, I will trust you." Do the same with yours. Don't avoid life's Gardens of Gethsemane. Enter them. Just don't enter them alone. And while there, be honest. Pounding the ground is permitted. Tears are allowed. And if you sweat blood, you won't be the first. Do what Jesus did; open your heart.

And be specific. Jesus was. "Take away this cup," he prayed (Luke 22:42). Give God the number of the flight. Tell him the length of the speech. Share the details of the job transfer. He has plenty of time. He also has plenty of compassion.

He doesn't think your fears are foolish or silly. He won't tell you to "buck up" or "get tough." He's been where you are. He knows how you feel.

And he knows what you need.

from *Traveling Light*

### Leviticus 23:1—24:23

#### *Special Holidays*

23 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Tell the people of Israel: 'You will announce the LORD's appointed feasts as holy meetings. These are my special feasts.

#### *The Sabbath*

3"'There are six days for you to work, but the seventh day will be a special day of rest. It is a day for a holy meeting; you

must not do any work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your homes.

## *The Passover and Unleavened Bread*

4"'These are the LORD's appointed feasts, the holy meetings,
which you will announce at the times set for them. 5The LORD's
Passover is on the fourteenth day of the first month, beginning
at twilight. 6The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the
fifteenth day of the same month. You will eat bread made
without yeast for seven days. 7On the first day of this feast you
will have a holy meeting, and you must not do any work. 8For
seven days you will bring an offering made by fire to the LORD.
There will be a holy meeting on the seventh day, and on that day
you must not do any regular work.'"

## *The First of the Harvest*

9The LORD said to Moses, 10"Tell the people of Israel: 'You will
enter the land I will give you and gather its harvest. At that time
you must bring the first bundle of grain from your harvest to
the priest. 11The priest will present the bundle before the LORD,
and it will be accepted for you; he will present the bundle on
the day after the Sabbath.

12"'On the day when you present the bundle of grain, offer a
male lamb, one year old, that has nothing wrong with it, as a
burnt offering to the LORD. 13You must also offer a grain offering
—four quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil as an offering
made by fire to the LORD; its smell will be pleasing to him. You
must also offer a quart of wine as a drink offering. 14Until the
day you bring your offering to your God, do not eat any new
grain, roasted grain, or bread made from new grain. This law
will always continue for people from now on, wherever you live.

## *The Feast of Weeks*

15"'Count seven full weeks from the morning after the
Sabbath. (This is the Sabbath that you bring the bundle of grain
to present as an offering.) 16On the fiftieth day, the first day
after the seventh week, you will bring a new grain offering to
the LORD. 17On that day bring two loaves of bread from your
homes to be presented as an offering. Use yeast and four quarts
of flour to make those loaves of bread; they will be your gift to
the LORD from the first wheat of your harvest.

18"'Offer with the bread one young bull, two male sheep, and
seven male lambs that are one year old and have nothing wrong
with them. Offer them with their grain offerings and drink
offerings, as a burnt offering to the LORD. They will be an

offering made by fire, and the smell will be pleasing to the LORD.
19You must also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two
male, one-year-old lambs as a fellowship offering.
20"'The priest will present the two lambs as an offering
before the LORD, along with the bread from the first wheat of the
harvest. They are holy to the LORD, and they will belong to the
priest. 21On that same day you will call a holy meeting; you
must not do any work that day. This law will continue for you
from now on, wherever you live.
22"'When you harvest your crops on your land, do not harvest
all the way to the corners of your field. If grain falls onto the
ground, don't gather it up. Leave it for poor people and
foreigners in your country. I am the LORD your God.'"

## *The Feast of Trumpets*

23Again the LORD said to Moses, 24"Tell the people of Israel:
'On the first day of the seventh month you must have a special
day of rest, a holy meeting, when you blow the trumpet for a
special time of remembering. 25Do not do any work, and bring
an offering made by fire to the LORD.'"

## *The Day of Cleansing*

26The LORD said to Moses, 27"The Day of Cleansing will be on
the tenth day of the seventh month. There will be a holy
meeting, and you will deny yourselves and bring an offering
made by fire to the LORD. 28Do not do any work on that day,
because it is the Day of Cleansing. On that day the priests will
go before the LORD and perform the acts to make you clean from
sin so you will belong to the LORD.
29"Anyone who refuses to give up food on this day must be
cut off from the people. 30If anyone works on this day, I will
destroy that person from among the people. 31You must not do
any work at all; this law will continue for people from now on
wherever you live. 32It will be a special day of rest for you, and
you must deny yourselves. You will start this special day of rest
on the evening after the ninth day of the month, and it will
continue from that evening until the next evening."

## *The Feast of Shelters*

33Again the LORD said to Moses, 34"Tell the people of Israel:
'On the fifteenth day of the seventh month is the Feast of
Shelters. This feast to the LORD will continue for seven days.
35There will be a holy meeting on the first day; do not do any
work. 36You will bring an offering made by fire to the LORD each

day for seven days. On the eighth day you will have another holy meeting, and you will bring an offering made by fire to the LORD. This will be a holy meeting; do not do any work.

37(“‘These are the LORD’s special feasts, when there will be holy meetings and when you bring offerings made by fire to the LORD. You will bring whole burnt offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices, and drink offerings—each at the right time. 38These offerings are in addition to those for the LORD’s Sabbath days, in addition to offerings you give as payment for special promises, and in addition to special offerings you want to give to the LORD.)

39“‘So on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered in the crops of the land, celebrate the LORD’s festival for seven days. You must rest on the first day and the eighth day. 40On the first day you will take good fruit from the fruit trees, as well as branches from palm trees, poplars, and other leafy trees. You will celebrate before the LORD your God for seven days. 41Celebrate this festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This law will continue from now on; you will celebrate it in the seventh month. 42Live in shelters for seven days. All the people born in Israel must live in shelters 43so that all your descendants will know I made Israel live in shelters during the time I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.’”

44So Moses told the people of Israel about all of the LORD’s appointed feast days.

## *The Lampstand and the Holy Bread*

24 The LORD said to Moses, 2“Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from crushed olives. That oil is for the lamps so that these lamps may never go out. 3Aaron will keep the lamps burning in the Meeting Tent from evening until morning before the LORD; this is in front of the curtain of the Ark of the Agreement. This law will continue from now on. 4Aaron must always keep the lamps burning on the lampstands of pure gold before the LORD.

5“Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread with it, using four quarts of flour for each loaf. 6Put them in two rows on the golden table before the LORD, six loaves in each row. 7Put pure incense on each row as the memorial portion to take the place of the bread. It is an offering made by fire to the LORD. 8Every Sabbath day Aaron will put the bread in order before the LORD, as an agreement with the people of Israel that will continue forever. 9That bread will belong to Aaron and his sons. They will eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of the offerings made by fire to the LORD. That bread is their share forever.”

## *The Man Who Cursed God*

10 Now there was a son of an Israelite woman and an
Egyptian father who was walking among the Israelites. A fight
broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite. 11 The son
of the Israelite woman began cursing and speaking against the
LORD, so the people took him to Moses. (The mother's name was
Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri from the family of Dan.) 12 The
people held him as a prisoner while they waited for the LORD's
command to be made clear to them.

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, 14 "Take the one who spoke
against me outside the camp. Then all the people who heard
him must put their hands on his head, and all the people must
throw stones at him and kill him. 15 Tell the people of Israel this:
'If anyone curses his God, he is guilty of sin. 16 Anyone who
speaks against the LORD must be put to death; all the people
must kill him by throwing stones at him. Foreigners must be
punished just like the people born in Israel; if they speak
against the LORD, they must be put to death.

17 "'Whoever kills another person must be put to death.
18 Whoever kills an animal that belongs to another person must
give that person another animal to take its place. 19 And
whoever causes an injury to a neighbor must receive the same
kind of injury in return: 20 Broken bone for broken bone, eye for
eye, tooth for tooth. Anyone who injures another person must
be injured in the same way in return. 21 Whoever kills another
person's animal must give that person another animal to take
its place. But whoever kills another person must be put to
death.

22 "'The law will be the same for the foreigner as for those
from your own country. I am the LORD your God.'"

23 Then Moses spoke to the people of Israel, and they took
the person who had cursed outside the camp and killed him by
throwing stones at him. So the people of Israel did as the LORD
had commanded Moses.

# Psalm 28:1–5

## *A Prayer in Troubled Times*

**Of David.**

28 LORD, my Rock, I call out to you for help.

Do not be deaf to me.
If you are silent,
I will be like those in the grave.

2 Hear the sound of my prayer,
when I cry out to you for help.

I raise my hands
toward your Most Holy Place.

3 Don't drag me away with the wicked,
with those who do evil.

They say "Peace" to their neighbors,
but evil is in their hearts.

4 Pay them back for what they have done,
for their evil deeds.

Pay them back for what they have done;
give them their reward.

5 They don't understand what the LORD has done
or what he has made.

So he will knock them down
and not lift them up.

## Proverbs 10:17–18

17 Whoever accepts correction is on the way to life,
but whoever ignores correction will lead others away from life.

18 Whoever hides hate is a liar.
Whoever tells lies is a fool.

## Mark 6:1–29

### *Jesus Goes to His Hometown*

6 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, and his followers
went with him. 2 On the Sabbath day he taught in the
synagogue. Many people heard him and were amazed, saying,
"Where did this man get these teachings? What is this wisdom
that has been given to him? And where did he get the power to
do miracles? 3 He is just the carpenter, the son of Mary and the
brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters are
here with us." So the people were upset with Jesus.

4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is honored everywhere
except in his hometown and with his own people and in his own
home." 5 So Jesus was not able to work any miracles there
except to heal a few sick people by putting his hands on them.
6 He was amazed at how many people had no faith.

Then Jesus went to other villages in that area and taught.
7 He called his twelve followers together and got ready to send
them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.
8 This is what Jesus commanded them: "Take nothing for your
trip except a walking stick. Take no bread, no bag, and no
money in your pockets. 9 Wear sandals, but take only the clothes
you are wearing. 10 When you enter a house, stay there until you
leave that town. 11 If the people in a certain place refuse to
welcome you or listen to you, leave that place. Shake its dust off
your feet[n] as a warning to them."[n]

12 So the followers went out and preached that people should
change their hearts and lives. 13 They forced many demons out
and put olive oil on many sick people and healed them.

### *How John the Baptist Was Killed*

14 King Herod heard about Jesus, because he was now well
known. Some people said,[n] "He is John the Baptist, who has
risen from the dead. That is why he can work these miracles."

15 Others said, "He is Elijah."[n]

Other people said, "Jesus is a prophet, like the prophets who
lived long ago."

16 When Herod heard this, he said, "I killed John by cutting
off his head. Now he has risen from the dead!"

17 Herod himself had ordered his soldiers to arrest John and
put him in prison in order to please his wife, Herodias. She had
been the wife of Philip, Herod's brother, but then Herod had
married her. 18 John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for
you to be married to your brother's wife." 19 So Herodias hated
John and wanted to kill him. But she couldn't, 20 because Herod
was afraid of John and protected him. He knew John was a good
and holy man. Also, though John's preaching always bothered
him, he enjoyed listening to John.

21 Then the perfect time came for Herodias to cause John's
death. On Herod's birthday, he gave a dinner party for the most
important government leaders, the commanders of his army,
and the most important people in Galilee. 22 When the daughter
of Herodias[n] came in and danced, she pleased Herod and the
people eating with him.

So King Herod said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you
want, and I will give it to you." 23 He promised her, "Anything
you ask for I will give to you—up to half of my kingdom."

24 The girl went to her mother and asked, "What should I ask
for?"

Her mother answered, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist."

25 At once the girl went back to the king and said to him, "I
want the head of John the Baptist right now on a platter."

26 Although the king was very sad, he had made a promise,
and his dinner guests had heard it. So he did not want to refuse
what she asked. 27 Immediately the king sent a soldier to bring
John's head. The soldier went and cut off John's head in the
prison 28 and brought it back on a platter. He gave it to the girl,
and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When John's followers
heard this, they came and got John's body and put it in a tomb.

# February 28

## The Compassionate Christ

*When he arrived, he saw a great crowd waiting. He felt sorry for them … So he began to teach them many things.*

Mark 6:34

When Jesus lands on the shore of Bethsaida, he leaves the Sea of Galilee and steps into a sea of humanity. Keep in mind, he has crossed the sea to get away from the crowds. He needs to grieve. He longs to relax with his followers. He needs anything but another crowd of thousands to teach and heal.

But his love for people overcomes his need for rest …

Many of those he healed would never say "thank you," but he healed them anyway. Most would be more concerned with being healthy than being holy, but he healed them anyway. Some of those who asked for bread today would cry for his blood a few months later, but he healed them anyway … He had compassion on them.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## Leviticus 25:1–55

### *The Time of Rest for the Land*

25 The LORD said to Moses at Mount Sinai, 2 "Tell the people of
Israel this: 'When you enter the land I will give you, let it have a
special time of rest, to honor the LORD. 3 You may plant seed in
your field for six years, and you may trim your vineyards for six
years and bring in their fruits. 4 But during the seventh year, you
must let the land rest. This will be a special time to honor the
LORD. You must not plant seed in your field or trim your
vineyards. 5 You must not cut the crops that grow by themselves
after harvest, or gather the grapes from your vines that are not
trimmed. The land will have a year of rest.

6 "'You may eat whatever the land produces during that year

of rest. It will be food for your men and women servants, for your hired workers, and for the foreigners living in your country. 7It will also be food for your cattle and the wild animals of your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

## *The Year of Jubilee*

8"'Count off seven groups of seven years, or forty-nine years. During that time there will be seven years of rest for the land. 9On the Day of Cleansing, you must blow the horn of a male sheep; this will be on the tenth day of the seventh month. You must blow the horn through the whole country. 10Make the fiftieth year a special year, and announce freedom for all the people living in your country. This time will be called Jubilee.[n] You will each go back to your own property, each to your own family and family group. 11The fiftieth year will be a special time for you to celebrate. Don't plant seeds, or harvest the crops that grow by themselves, or gather grapes from the vines that are not trimmed. 12That year is Jubilee; it will be a holy time for you. You may eat only the crops that come from the field. 13In the year of Jubilee you each must go back to your own property.

14"'If you sell your land to your neighbor, or if you buy land from your neighbor, don't cheat each other. 15If you want to buy your neighbor's land, count the number of years since the last Jubilee, and use that number to decide the right price. If your neighbor sells the land to you, count the number of years left for harvesting crops, and use that number to decide the right price. 16If there are many years, the price will be high. But if there are only a few years, lower the price, because your neighbor is really selling only a few crops to you. 17You must not cheat each other, but you must respect your God. I am the LORD your God.

18"'Remember my laws and rules, and obey them so that you will live safely in the land. 19The land will give good crops to you, and you will eat as much as you want and live safely in the land.

20"'But you might ask, "If we don't plant seeds or gather crops, what will we eat the seventh year?" 21I will send you such a great blessing during the sixth year that the land will produce enough crops for three years. 22When you plant in the eighth year, you will still be eating from the old crop; you will eat the old crop until the harvest of the ninth year.

## *Property Laws*

23"'The land really belongs to me, so you can't sell it for all time. You are only foreigners and travelers living for a while on

my land. 24People might sell their land, but it must always be possible for the family to get its land back. 25If a person in your country becomes very poor and sells some land, then close relatives must come and buy it back. 26If there is not a close relative to buy the land back, but if the person makes enough money to be able to buy it back, 27the years must be counted since the land was sold. That number must be used to decide how much the first owner should pay back the one who bought it. Then the land will belong to the first owner again. 28But if there is not enough money to buy it back, the one who bought it will keep it until the year of Jubilee. During that celebration, the land will go back to the first owner's family.

29"'If someone sells a home in a walled city, for a full year after it is sold, the person has the right to buy it back. 30But if the owner does not buy back the house before a full year is over, it will belong to the one who bought it and to his future sons. The house will not go back to the first owner at Jubilee. 31But houses in small towns without walls are like open country; they can be bought back, and they must be returned to their first owner at Jubilee.

32"'The Levites may always buy back their houses in the cities that belong to them. 33If someone buys a house from a Levite, that house in the Levites' city will again belong to the Levites in the Jubilee. This is because houses in Levite cities belong to the people of Levi; the Israelites gave these cities to them. 34Also the fields and pastures around the Levites' cities cannot be sold, because those fields belong to the Levites forever.

## *Rules for Slave Owners*

35"'If anyone from your country becomes too poor to support himself, help him to live among you as you would a stranger or foreigner. 36Do not charge him any interest on money you loan to him, but respect your God; let the poor live among you. 37Don't lend him money for interest, and don't try to make a profit from the food he buys. 38I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give the land of Canaan to you and to become your God.

39"'If anyone from your country becomes very poor and sells himself as a slave to you, you must not make him work like a slave. 40He will be like a hired worker and a visitor with you until the year of Jubilee. 41Then he may leave you, take his children, and go back to his family and the land of his ancestors. 42This is because the Israelites are my servants, and I brought them out of slavery in Egypt. They must not become slaves again. 43You must not rule this person cruelly, but you must respect your God.

44"'Your men and women slaves must come from other
nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. 45Also you
may buy as slaves children from the families of foreigners living
in your land. These child slaves will belong to you, 46and you
may even pass them on to your children after you die; you can
make them slaves forever. But you must not rule cruelly over
your own people, the Israelites.
47"'Suppose a foreigner or visitor among you becomes rich.
If someone in your country becomes so poor that he has to sell
himself as a slave to the foreigner living among you or to a
member of the foreigner's family, 48the poor person has the
right to be bought back and become free. One of his relatives
may buy him back: 49His uncle, his uncle's son, or any one of his
close relatives may buy him back. Or, if he gets enough money,
he may pay the money to free himself.
50"'He and the one who bought him must count the time
from when he sold himself up to the next year of Jubilee. Use
that number to decide the price, because the person really only
hired himself out for a certain number of years. 51If there are
still many years before the year of Jubilee, the person must pay
back a large part of the price. 52If there are only a few years left
until Jubilee, the person must pay a small part of the first price.
53But he will live like a hired person with the foreigner every
year; don't let the foreigner rule cruelly over him.
54"'Even if no one buys him back, at the year of Jubilee, he
and his children will become free. 55This is because the people
of Israel are servants to me. They are my servants, whom I
brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

## Psalm 28:6–9

6Praise the LORD,
because he heard my prayer for help.

7The LORD is my strength and shield.
I trust him, and he helps me.

I am very happy,
and I praise him with my song.

[8]The LORD is powerful;
he gives victory to his chosen one.

[9]Save your people
and bless those who are your own.
Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

## Proverbs 10:19–21

[19]If you talk a lot, you are sure to sin;
if you are wise, you will keep quiet.

[20]The words of a good person are like pure silver,
but an evil person's thoughts are worth very little.

[21]Good people's words will help many others,
but fools will die because they don't have wisdom.

## Mark 6:30–56

### *More than Five Thousand Fed*

[30]The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him about all the things they had done and taught. [31]Crowds of people were coming and going so that Jesus and his followers did not even have time to eat. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves, and we will go to a lonely place to get some rest."

[32]So they went in a boat by themselves to a lonely place. [33]But many people saw them leave and recognized them. So from all the towns they ran to the place where Jesus was going, and they got there before him. [34]When he arrived, he saw a great crowd waiting. He felt sorry for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things.

[35]When it was late in the day, his followers came to him and said, "No one lives in this place, and it is already very late. [36]Send the people away so they can go to the countryside and

towns around here to buy themselves something to eat.”

[37]But Jesus answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “We would all have to work a month to earn enough money to buy that much bread!”

[38]Jesus asked them, “How many loaves of bread do you have? Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five loaves and two fish.”

[39]Then Jesus told his followers to have the people sit in groups on the green grass. [40]So they sat in groups of fifty or a hundred. [41]Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and, looking up to heaven, he thanked God for the food. He divided the bread and gave it to his followers for them to give to the people. Then he divided the two fish among them all. [42]All the people ate and were satisfied. [43]The followers filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. [44]There were five thousand men who ate.

## *Jesus Walks on the Water*

[45]Immediately Jesus told his followers to get into the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida across the lake. He stayed there to send the people home. [46]After sending them away, he went into the hills to pray.

[47]That night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and Jesus was alone on the land. [48]He saw his followers struggling hard to row the boat, because the wind was blowing against them. Between three and six o’clock in the morning, Jesus came to them, walking on the water, and he wanted to walk past the boat. [49]But when they saw him walking on the water, they thought he was a ghost and cried out. [50]They all saw him and were afraid. But quickly Jesus spoke to them and said, “Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.” [51]Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind became calm. The followers were greatly amazed. [52]They did not understand about the miracle of the five loaves, because their minds were closed.

[53]When they had crossed the lake, they came to shore at Gennesaret and tied the boat there. [54]When they got out of the boat, people immediately recognized Jesus. [55]They ran everywhere in that area and began to bring sick people on mats wherever they heard he was. [56]And everywhere he went—into towns, cities, or countryside—the people brought the sick to the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch just the edge of his coat, and all who touched it were healed.

# March 1

## Lifting Heart and Hands

*Praise the LORD for the glory of his name; worship the LORD because he is holy.*

Psalm 29:2

The whole purpose of coming before the King is to praise him, to live in recognition of his splendor. Praise—lifting up our heart and hands, exulting with our voices, singing his praises—is the occupation of those who dwell in the kingdom.

Praise is the highest occupation of any being. What happens when we praise the Father? We reestablish the proper chain of command; we recognize that the King is on the throne and that he has saved his people.

from *Walking with the Savior*

### Leviticus 26:1—27:34

### *Rewards for Obeying God*

26 “‘Don’t make idols for yourselves or set up statues or
memorials. Don’t put stone statues in your land to bow down to,
because I am the LORD your God.
2“‘Remember my Sabbaths, and respect my Holy Place. I am
the LORD.
3“‘If you remember my laws and commands and obey them,
4I will give you rains at the right season; the land will produce
crops, and the trees of the field will produce their fruit. 5Your
threshing will continue until the grape harvest, and your grape
harvest will continue until it is time to plant. Then you will have
plenty to eat and live safely in your land. 6I will give peace to
your country; you will lie down in peace, and no one will make
you afraid. I will keep harmful animals out of your country, and
armies will not pass through it.
7“‘You will chase your enemies and defeat them, killing them

with your sword. [8]Five of you will chase a hundred men; a hundred of you will chase ten thousand men. You will defeat your enemies and kill them with your sword.

[9]"'Then I will show kindness to you and let you have many children; I will keep my agreement with you. [10]You will have enough crops to last for more than a year. When you harvest the new crops, you will have to throw out the old ones to make room for them. [11]Also I will place my Holy Tent among you, and I will not turn away from you. [12]I will walk with you and be your God, and you will be my people. [13]I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. I broke the heavy weights that were on your shoulders and let you walk proudly again.

## *Punishment for Not Obeying God*

[14]"'But if you do not obey me and keep all my commands, [15]and if you turn away from my rules and hate my laws, refusing to obey all my commands, you have broken our agreement. [16]As a result, I will do this to you: I will cause terrible things to happen to you. I will cause you to have disease and fever that will destroy your eyes and slowly kill you. You will not have success when you plant your seed, and your enemy will eat your crops. [17]I will be against you, and your enemies will defeat you. These people who hate you will rule over you, and you will run away even when no one is chasing you.

[18]"'If after all this you still do not obey me, I will punish you seven times more for your sins. [19]I will break your great pride, and I will make the sky like iron and the earth like bronze.[n] [20]You will work hard, but it will not help. Your land will not grow any crops, and your trees will not give their fruit.

[21]"'If you still turn against me and refuse to obey me, I will beat you seven times harder. The more you sin, the more you will be punished. [22]I will send wild animals to attack you, and they will take your children away from you and destroy your cattle. They will make you so few in number the roads will be empty.

[23]"'If you don't learn your lesson after all these things, and if you still turn against me, [24]I will also turn against you. I will punish you seven more times for your sins. [25]You broke my agreement, and I will punish you. I will bring armies against you, and if you go into your cities for safety, I will cause diseases to spread among you so that your enemy will defeat you. [26]There will be very little bread to eat; ten women will be able to cook all your bread in one oven. They will measure each piece of bread, and you will eat, but you will still be hungry.

[27]"'If you still refuse to listen to me and still turn against me,

28I will show my great anger; I will punish you seven more
times for your sins. 29You will eat the bodies of your sons and
daughters. 30I will destroy your places where gods are
worshiped and cut down your incense altars. I will pile your
dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols. I will hate you.
31I will destroy your cities and make your holy places empty,
and I will not smell the pleasing smell of your offerings. 32I will
make the land empty so that your enemies who come to live in it
will be shocked at it. 33I will scatter you among the nations, and
I will pull out my sword and destroy you. Your land will become
empty, your cities a waste. 34When you are taken to your
enemy's country, your land will finally get its rest. It will enjoy
its time of rest all the time it lies empty. 35During the time the
land is empty, it will have the rest you should have given it
while you lived in it.

36"'Those of you who are left alive will lose their courage in
the land of their enemies. They will be frightened by the sound
of a leaf being blown by the wind. They will run as if someone
were chasing them with a sword, and they will fall even when
no one is chasing them. 37They will fall over each other, as if
someone were chasing them with a sword, even though no one
is chasing them. You will not be strong enough to stand up
against your enemies. 38You will die among other nations and
disappear in your enemies' countries. 39So those who are left
alive will rot away in their enemies' countries because of their
sins. They will also rot away because of their ancestors' sins.

## *There Is Always Hope*

40"'But maybe the people will confess their sins and the sins
of their ancestors; maybe they will admit they turned against
me and sinned against me, 41which made me turn against them
and send them into the land of their enemies. If these
disobedient people are sorry for what they did and accept
punishment for their sin, 42I will remember my agreement with
Jacob, my agreement with Isaac, and my agreement with
Abraham, and I will remember the land. 43The land will be left
empty by its people, and it will enjoy its time of rest as it lies
bare without them. Then those who are left alive will accept the
punishment for their sins. They will learn that they were
punished because they hated my laws and refused to obey my
rules. 44But even though this is true, I will not turn away from
them when they are in the land of their enemies. I will not hate
them so much that I completely destroy them and break my
agreement with them, because I am the LORD their God. 45For
their good I will remember the agreement with their ancestors,
whom I brought out of the land of Egypt so I could become their
God; the other nations saw these things. I am the LORD.'"

46These are the laws, rules, and teachings the LORD made between himself and the Israelites through Moses at Mount Sinai.

## *Promises Are Important*

27 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Speak to the people of Israel and tell them: 'If someone makes a special promise to give a person as a servant to the LORD by paying a price that is the same value as that person, 3the price for a man twenty to sixty years old is about one and one-fourth pounds of silver. (You must use the measure as set by the Holy Place.) 4The price for a woman twenty to sixty years old is about twelve ounces of silver. 5The price for a man five to twenty years old is about eight ounces of silver; for a woman it is about four ounces of silver. 6The price for a baby boy one month to five years old is about two ounces of silver; for a baby girl the price is about one and one-half ounces of silver. 7The price for a man sixty years old or older is about six ounces of silver; for a woman it is about four ounces of silver.

8"'If anyone is too poor to pay the price, bring him to the priest, and the priest will set the price. The priest will decide how much money the person making the vow can afford to pay.

## *Gifts to the LORD*

9"'Some animals may be used as sacrifices to the LORD. If someone promises to bring one of these to the LORD, it will become holy. 10That person must not try to put another animal in its place or exchange it, a good animal for a bad one, or a bad animal for a good one. If this happens, both animals will become holy.

11"'Unclean animals cannot be offered as sacrifices to the LORD, and if someone brings one of them to the LORD, that animal must be brought to the priest. 12The priest will decide a price for the animal, according to whether it is good or bad; as the priest decides, that is the price for the animal. 13If the person wants to buy back the animal, an additional one-fifth must be added to the price.

## *Value of a House*

14"'If a person gives a house as holy to the LORD, the priest must decide its value, according to whether the house is good or bad; as the priest decides, that is the price for the house. 15But if the person who gives the house wants to buy it back, an additional one-fifth must be added to the price. Then the house

will belong to that person again.

## *Value of Land*

16"'If a person gives some family property to the LORD, the
value of the fields will depend on how much seed is needed to
plant them. It will cost about one and one-fourth pounds of
silver for each six bushels of barley seed needed. 17If the person
gives a field at the year of Jubilee, its value will stay at what the
priest has decided. 18But if the person gives the field after the
Jubilee, the priest must decide the exact price by counting the
number of years to the next year of Jubilee. Then he will
subtract that number from its value. 19If the person who gave
the field wants to buy it back, one-fifth must be added to that
price, and the field will belong to the first owner again.
20"'If the person does not buy back the field, or if it is sold to
someone else, the first person cannot ever buy it back. 21When
the land is released at the year of Jubilee, it will become holy to
the LORD, like land specially given to him. It will become the
property of the priests.
22"'If someone gives to the LORD a field he has bought, which
is not a part of his family land, 23the priest must count the years
to the next Jubilee. He must decide the price for the land, and
the price must be paid on that day. Then that land will be holy
to the LORD. 24At the year of Jubilee, the land will go back to its
first owner, to the family who sold the land.
25"'You must use the measure as set by the Holy Place in
paying these prices; it weighs two-fifths of an ounce.

## *Value of Animals*

26"'If an animal is the first one born to its parent, it already
belongs to the LORD, so people may not give it again. If it is a
cow or a sheep, it is the LORD's. 27If the animal is unclean, the
person must buy it back for the price set by the priest, and the
person must add one-fifth to that price. If it is not bought back,
the priest must sell it for the price he had decided.
28"'There is a special kind of gift that people set apart to give
to the LORD; it may be a person, animal, or field from the family
property. That gift cannot be bought back or sold. Every special
kind of gift is most holy to the LORD.
29"'If anyone is given for the purpose of being destroyed, he
cannot be bought back; he must be put to death.
30"'One-tenth of all crops belongs to the LORD, including the
crops from fields and the fruit from trees. That one-tenth is holy
to the LORD. 31If a person wants to get back that tenth, one-fifth
must be added to its price.
32"'The priest will take every tenth animal from a person's

herd or flock, and it will be holy to the LORD. 33The owner should not pick out the good animals from the bad or exchange one animal for another. If that happens, both animals will become holy; they cannot be bought back.'"

34These are the commands the LORD gave to Moses at Mount Sinai for the people of Israel.

## Psalm 29:1–9

### *God in the Thunderstorm*

**A psalm of David.**

29 Praise the LORD, you angels;
praise the LORD's glory and power.

2Praise the LORD for the glory of his name;
worship the LORD because he is holy.

3The LORD's voice is heard over the sea.
The glorious God thunders;
the LORD thunders over the ocean.

4The LORD's voice is powerful;
the LORD's voice is majestic.

5The LORD's voice breaks the trees;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

6He makes the land of Lebanon dance like a calf
and Mount Hermon jump like a baby bull.

7The LORD's voice makes the lightning flash.
8The LORD's voice shakes the desert;
the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

9 The LORD's voice shakes the oaks
and strips the leaves off the trees.

In his Temple everyone says, "Glory to God!"

## Proverbs 10:22–25

22 The LORD's blessing brings wealth,
and no sorrow comes with it.

23 A foolish person enjoys doing wrong,
but a person with understanding enjoys doing what is wise.

24 Evil people will get what they fear most,
but good people will get what they want most.

25 A storm will blow the evil person away,
but a good person will always be safe.

## Mark 7:1–23

### *Obey God's Law*

7 When some Pharisees and some teachers of the law came from Jerusalem, they gathered around Jesus. 2 They saw that some of Jesus' followers ate food with hands that were not clean, that is, they hadn't washed them. 3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews never eat before washing their hands in the way required by their unwritten laws. 4 And when they buy something in the market, they never eat it until they wash themselves in a special way. They also follow many other unwritten laws, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, and pots.[n])

5 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law said to Jesus, "Why don't your followers obey the unwritten laws which have

been handed down to us? Why do your followers eat their food with hands that are not clean?”

6Jesus answered, “Isaiah was right when he spoke about you hypocrites. He wrote,

‘These people show honor to me with words,
but their hearts are far from me.

7Their worship of me is worthless.
The things they teach are nothing but human rules.’

Isaiah 29:13

8You have stopped following the commands of God, and you follow only human teachings.”[n]

9Then Jesus said to them, “You cleverly ignore the commands of God so you can follow your own teachings. 10Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’[n] and ‘Anyone who says cruel things to his father or mother must be put to death.’[n] 11But you say a person can tell his father or mother, ‘I have something I could use to help you, but it is Corban—a gift to God.’ 12You no longer let that person use that money for his father or his mother. 13By your own rules, which you teach people, you are rejecting what God said. And you do many things like that.”

14After Jesus called the crowd to him again, he said, “Every person should listen to me and understand what I am saying. 15There is nothing people put into their bodies that makes them unclean. People are made unclean by the things that come out of them. [16Let those with ears use them and listen.]”[n]

17When Jesus left the people and went into the house, his followers asked him about this story. 18Jesus said, “Do you still not understand? Surely you know that nothing that enters someone from the outside can make that person unclean. 19It does not go into the mind, but into the stomach. Then it goes out of the body.” (When Jesus said this, he meant that no longer was any food unclean for people to eat.)

20And Jesus said, “The things that come out of people are the things that make them unclean. 21All these evil things begin inside people, in the mind: evil thoughts, sexual sins, stealing, murder, adultery, 22greed, evil actions, lying, doing sinful things, jealousy, speaking evil of others, pride, and foolish living. 23All these evil things come from inside and make people unclean.”

# March 2

## Peace Through Prayer

*The LORD blesses his people with peace.*

Psalm 29:11

"God's peace … will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). The worrisome heart pays a high price for doing so. *Worry* comes from the Greek word that means "to divide the mind." Anxiety splits us right down the middle, creating a double-minded thinker. Rather than take away tomorrow's trouble, worry voids today's strength. Perception is divided, distorting your vision. Strength is divided, wasting your energy. Who can afford to lose power?

But how can we stop doing so? Paul offers a two-pronged answer: God's part and our part. Our part includes prayer and gratitude. "Do not worry about anything, but *pray* and ask God for everything you need, always giving *thanks*" (Philippians 4:6, emphasis mine).

God's part? "And God's peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

from *Come Thirsty*

## Numbers 1:1—2:34

### *The People of Israel Are Counted*

1 The LORD spoke to Moses in the Meeting Tent in the Desert of
Sinai. This was on the first day of the second month in the
second year after the Israelites left Egypt. He said to Moses:
2 "You and Aaron must count all the people of Israel by families
and family groups, listing the name of each man. 3 You and
Aaron must count every man twenty years old or older who will
serve in the army of Israel, and list them by their divisions.
4 One man from each tribe, the leader of his family, will help

you. [5]These are the names of the men who will help you:

from the tribe of Reuben—Elizur son of Shedeur;

[6]from the tribe of Simeon—Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai;

[7]from the tribe of Judah—Nahshon son of Amminadab;

[8]from the tribe of Issachar—Nethanel son of Zuar;

[9]from the tribe of Zebulun—Eliab son of Helon;

[10]from the tribe of Ephraim son of Joseph—Elishama son of Ammihud;

from the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph—Gamaliel son of Pedahzur;

[11]from the tribe of Benjamin—Abidan son of Gideoni;

[12]from the tribe of Dan—Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai;

[13]from the tribe of Asher—Pagiel son of Ocran;

[14]from the tribe of Gad—Eliasaph son of Deuel;

[15]from the tribe of Naphtali—Ahira son of Enan."

[16]These were the men chosen from the people to be leaders of their tribes, the heads of Israel's family groups.

[17]Moses and Aaron took these men who had been picked [18]and called all the people of Israel together on the first day of the second month. Then the people were listed by their families and family groups, and all the men who were twenty years old or older were listed by name. [19]Moses did exactly what the LORD

had commanded and listed the people while they were in the Desert of Sinai.

[20]The tribe of Reuben, the first son born to Israel, was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [21]The tribe of Reuben totaled 46,500 men.

[22]The tribe of Simeon was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [23]The tribe of Simeon totaled 59,300 men.

[24]The tribe of Gad was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [25]The tribe of Gad totaled 45,650 men.

[26]The tribe of Judah was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [27]The tribe of Judah totaled 74,600 men.

[28]The tribe of Issachar was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [29]The tribe of Issachar totaled 54,400 men.

[30]The tribe of Zebulun was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [31]The tribe of Zebulun totaled 57,400 men.

[32]The tribe of Ephraim, a son of Joseph, was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [33]The tribe of Ephraim totaled 40,500 men.

[34]The tribe of Manasseh, also a son of Joseph, was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [35]The tribe of Manasseh totaled 32,200 men.

[36]The tribe of Benjamin was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [37]The tribe of Benjamin totaled 35,400 men.

[38]The tribe of Dan was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [39]The tribe of Dan totaled 62,700 men.

[40]The tribe of Asher was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. [41]The tribe of Asher totaled 41,500 men.

[42]The tribe of Naphtali was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were

listed by name with their families and family groups. 43The tribe of Naphtali totaled 53,400 men.

44Moses, Aaron, and the twelve leaders of Israel, one from each of the families, counted these men. 45Every man of Israel twenty years old or older who was able to serve in the army was counted and listed with his family. 46The total number of men was 603,550.

47The families from the tribe of Levi were not listed with the others, because 48the LORD had told Moses: 49"Do not count the tribe of Levi or include them with the other Israelites. 50Instead put the Levites in charge of the Holy Tent of the Agreement and everything that is with it. They must carry the Holy Tent and everything in it, and they must take care of it and make their camp around it. 51Any time the Holy Tent is moved, the Levites must take it down, and any time it is set up, the Levites must do it. Anyone else who goes near the Holy Tent will be put to death. 52The Israelites will make their camps in separate divisions, each family near its flag. 53But the Levites must make their camp around the Holy Tent of the Agreement so that I will not be angry with the Israelites. The Levites will take care of the Holy Tent of the Agreement."

54So the Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded Moses.

## *The Camp Arrangement*

2 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: 2"The Israelites should make their camps around the Meeting Tent, but they should not camp too close to it. They should camp under their family flag and banners."

3The camp of Judah will be on the east side, where the sun rises, and they will camp by divisions there under their flag. The leader of the people of Judah is Nahshon son of Amminadab. 4There are 74,600 men in his division.

5Next to them the tribe of Issachar will camp. The leader of the people of Issachar is Nethanel son of Zuar. 6There are 54,400 men in his division.

7Next is the tribe of Zebulun. The leader of the people of Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon. 8There are 57,400 men in his division.

9There are a total of 186,400 men in the camps of Judah and its neighbors, in all their divisions. They will be the first to march out of camp.

10The divisions of the camp of Reuben will be on the south side, where they will camp under their flag. The leader of the people of Reuben is Elizur son of Shedeur. 11There are 46,500 men in his division.

12Next to them the tribe of Simeon will camp. The leader of

the people of Simeon is Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. 13There are 59,300 men in his division.

14Next is the tribe of Gad. The leader of the people of Gad is Eliasaph son of Deuel. 15There are 45,650 men in his division.

16There are a total of 151,450 men in the camps of Reuben and its neighbors, in all their divisions. They will be the second group to march out of camp.

17When the Levites march out with the Meeting Tent, they will be in the middle of the other camps. The tribes will march out in the same order as they camp, each in its place under its flag.

18The divisions of the camp of Ephraim will be on the west side, where they will camp under their flag. The leader of the people of Ephraim is Elishama son of Ammihud. 19There are 40,500 men in his division.

20Next to them the tribe of Manasseh will camp. The leader of the people of Manasseh is Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. 21There are 32,200 men in his division.

22Next is the tribe of Benjamin. The leader of the people of Benjamin is Abidan son of Gideoni. 23There are 35,400 men in his division.

24There are a total of 108,100 men in the camps of Ephraim and its neighbors, in all their divisions. They will be the third group to march out of camp.

25The divisions of the camp of Dan will be on the north side, where they will camp under their flag. The leader of the people of Dan is Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. 26There are 62,700 men in his division.

27Next to them the tribe of Asher will camp. The leader of the people of Asher is Pagiel son of Ocran. 28There are 41,500 men in his division.

29Next is the tribe of Naphtali. The leader of the people of Naphtali is Ahira son of Enan. 30There are 53,400 men in his division.

31There are 157,600 men in the camps of Dan and its neighbors. They will be the last to march out of camp, and they will travel under their own flag.

32These are the Israelites who were counted by families. The total number of Israelites in the camps, counted by divisions, is 603,550. 33Moses obeyed the LORD and did not count the Levites among the other people of Israel.

34So the Israelites obeyed everything the LORD commanded Moses. They camped under their flags and marched out by families and family groups.

## Psalm 29:10–11

10 The LORD controls the flood.
The LORD will be King forever.

11 The LORD gives strength to his people;
the LORD blesses his people with peace.

## Proverbs 10:26–29

26 A lazy person affects the one he works for
like vinegar on the teeth or smoke in the eyes.

27 Whoever respects the LORD will have a long life,
but the life of an evil person will be cut short.

28 A good person can look forward to happiness,
but an evil person can expect nothing.

29 The LORD will protect good people
but will ruin those who do evil.

## Mark 7:24–37

### *Jesus Helps a Non-Jewish Woman*

24 Jesus left that place and went to the area around Tyre.[n]
When he went into a house, he did not want anyone to know he
was there, but he could not stay hidden. 25 A woman whose
daughter had an evil spirit in her heard that he was there. So
she quickly came to Jesus and fell at his feet. 26 She was Greek,
born in Phoenicia, in Syria. She begged Jesus to force the
demon out of her daughter.
27 Jesus told the woman, “It is not right to take the children’s
bread and give it to the dogs. First let the children eat all they

want.”

[28]But she answered, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table can eat the children’s crumbs.”

[29]Then Jesus said, “Because of your answer, you may go. The demon has left your daughter.”

[30]The woman went home and found her daughter lying in bed; the demon was gone.

## *Jesus Heals a Deaf Man*

[31]Then Jesus left the area around Tyre and went through Sidon to Lake Galilee, to the area of the Ten Towns.[n] [32]While he was there, some people brought a man to him who was deaf and could not talk plainly. The people begged Jesus to put his hand on the man to heal him.

[33]Jesus led the man away from the crowd, by himself. He put his fingers in the man’s ears and then spit and touched the man’s tongue. [34]Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to the man, “Ephphatha!” (This means, “Be opened.”) [35]Instantly the man was able to hear and to use his tongue so that he spoke clearly.

[36]Jesus commanded the people not to tell anyone about what happened. But the more he commanded them, the more they told about it. [37]They were completely amazed and said, “Jesus does everything well. He makes the deaf hear! And those who can’t talk he makes able to speak.”

# March 3

## An Amazing Destiny

*I will praise you, LORD, because you rescued me.*

Psalm 30:1

In God's book, man is heading somewhere. He has an amazing destiny. We are being prepared to walk down the church aisle and become the bride of Jesus. We are going to live with him. Share the throne with him. Reign with him. We count. We are valuable. And what's more, our worth is built in! Our value is inborn.

You see, if there was anything that Jesus wanted everyone to understand it was this:

A person is worth something simply because he is a person. That is why he treated people like he did. Think about it. The girl caught making undercover thunder with someone she shouldn't—he forgave her. The untouchable leper who asked for cleansing—he touched him. And the blind welfare case that cluttered the roadside—he honored him. And the worn-out old windbag addicted to self-pity near the pool of Siloam—he healed him!

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Numbers 3:1—4:49

#### *Aaron's Family, the Priests*

3 This is the family history of Aaron and Moses at the time the LORD talked to Moses on Mount Sinai.

2Aaron had four sons: Nadab, the oldest, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 3These were the names of Aaron's sons, who were appointed to serve as priests. 4But Nadab and Abihu died in the presence of the LORD when they offered the wrong kind of fire before the LORD in the Desert of Sinai. They had no sons. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests during the lifetime of

their father Aaron.

5The LORD said to Moses, 6"Bring the tribe of Levi and
present them to Aaron the priest to help him. 7They will help
him and all the Israelites at the Meeting Tent, doing the work in
the Holy Tent. 8The Levites must take care of everything in the
Meeting Tent and serve the people of Israel by doing the work
in the Holy Tent. 9Give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; of all
the Israelites, the Levites are given completely to him.
10Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests, but anyone
else who comes near the holy things must be put to death."

11The LORD also said to Moses, 12"I am choosing the Levites
from all the Israelites to take the place of all the firstborn
children of Israel. The Levites will be mine, 13because the
firstborn are mine. When you were in Egypt, I killed all the
firstborn children of the Egyptians and took all the firstborn of
Israel to be mine, both animals and children. They are mine. I
am the LORD."

14The LORD again said to Moses in the Desert of Sinai,
15"Count the Levites by families and family groups. Count every
male one month old or older." 16So Moses obeyed the LORD and
counted them all.

17Levi had three sons, whose names were Gershon, Kohath,
and Merari.

18The Gershonite family groups were Libni and Shimei.

19The Kohathite family groups were Amram, Izhar, Hebron,
and Uzziel.

20The Merarite family groups were Mahli and Mushi.

These were the family groups of the Levites.

21The family groups of Libni and Shimei belonged to
Gershon; they were the Gershonite family groups. 22The
number that was counted was 7,500 males one month old or
older. 23The Gershonite family groups camped on the west side,
behind the Holy Tent. 24The leader of the families of Gershon
was Eliasaph son of Lael. 25In the Meeting Tent the Gershonites
were in charge of the Holy Tent, its covering, the curtain at the
entrance to the Meeting Tent, 26the curtains in the courtyard,
the curtain at the entry to the courtyard around the Holy Tent
and the altar, the ropes, and all the work connected with these
items.

27The family groups of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel
belonged to Kohath; they were the Kohathite family groups.
28They had 8,600 males one month old or older, and they were
responsible for taking care of the Holy Place. 29The Kohathite
family groups camped south of the Holy Tent. 30The leader of
the Kohathite families was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. 31They were
responsible for the Ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the
tools of the Holy Place which they were to use, the curtain, and
all the work connected with these items. 32The main leader of

the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, who was in charge of all those responsible for the Holy Place.

33The family groups of Mahli and Mushi belonged to Merari;
they were the Merarite family groups. 34The number that was
counted was 6,200 males one month old or older. 35The leader
of the Merari families was Zuriel son of Abihail, and they were
to camp north of the Holy Tent. 36The Merarites were
responsible for the frames of the Holy Tent, the braces, the
posts, the bases, and all the work connected with these items.
37They were also responsible for the posts in the courtyard
around the Holy Tent and their bases, tent pegs, and ropes.

38Moses, Aaron, and his sons camped east of the Holy Tent,
toward the sunrise, in front of the Meeting Tent. They were
responsible for the Holy Place for the Israelites. Anyone else
who came near the Holy Place was to be put to death.

39Moses and Aaron counted the Levite men by their families,
as the LORD commanded, and there were 22,000 males one
month old or older.

## *Levites Take the Place of the Firstborn Sons*

40The LORD said to Moses, "Count all the firstborn sons in
Israel one month old or older, and list their names. 41Take the
Levites for me instead of the firstborn sons of Israel; take the
animals of the Levites instead of the firstborn animals from the
rest of Israel. I am the LORD."

42So Moses did what the LORD commanded and counted all
the firstborn sons of the Israelites. 43When he listed all the
firstborn sons one month old or older, there were 22,273 names.

44The LORD also said to Moses, 45"Take the Levites instead of
all the firstborn sons of the Israelites, and take the animals of
the Levites instead of the animals of the other people. The
Levites are mine. I am the LORD. 46Since there are 273 more
firstborn sons than Levites, 47collect two ounces of silver for
each of the 273 sons. Use the measure as set by the Holy Place,
which is two-fifths of an ounce. 48Give the silver to Aaron and
his sons as the payment for the 273 Israelites."

49So Moses collected the money for the people the Levites
could not replace. 50From the firstborn of the Israelites, he
collected thirty-five pounds of silver, using the measure set by
the Holy Place. 51Moses obeyed the command of the LORD and
gave the silver to Aaron and his sons.

## *The Jobs of the Kohath Family*

4 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 2"Count the Kohathites
among the Levites by family groups and families. 3Count the

men from thirty to fifty years old, all who come to serve in the Meeting Tent.

4"The Kohathites are responsible for the most holy things in the Meeting Tent. 5When the Israelites are ready to move, Aaron and his sons must go into the Holy Tent, take down the curtain, and cover the Ark of the Agreement with it. 6Over this they must put a covering made from fine leather, then spread the solid blue cloth over that, and put the poles in place.

7"Then they must spread a blue cloth over the table for the bread that shows a person is in God's presence. They must put the plates, pans, bowls, and the jars for drink offerings on the table; they must leave the bread that is always there on the table. 8Then they must put a red cloth over all of these things, cover everything with fine leather, and put the poles in place.

9"With a blue cloth they must cover the lampstand, its lamps, its wick trimmers, its trays, and all the jars for the oil used in the lamps. 10Then they must wrap everything in fine leather and put all these things on a frame for carrying them.

11"They must spread a blue cloth over the gold altar, cover it with fine leather, and put the poles in place.

12"They must gather all the things used for serving in the Holy Place and wrap them in a blue cloth. Then they must cover that with fine leather and put these things on a frame for carrying them.

13"They must clean the ashes off the bronze altar and spread a purple cloth over it. 14They must gather all the things used for serving at the altar—the pans for carrying the fire, the meat forks, the shovels, and the bowls—and put them on the bronze altar. Then they must spread a covering of fine leather over it and put the poles in place.

15"When the Israelites are ready to move, and when Aaron and his sons have covered the holy furniture and all the holy things, the Kohathites may go in and carry them away. In this way they won't touch the holy things and die. It is the Kohathites' job to carry the things that are in the Meeting Tent.

16"Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, will be responsible for the Holy Tent and for everything in it, for all the holy things it has: the oil for the lamp, the sweet-smelling incense, the continual grain offering, and the oil used to appoint priests and things to the LORD's service."

17The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 18"Don't let the Kohathites be cut off from the Levites. 19Do this for the Kohathites so that they may go near the Most Holy Place and not die: Aaron and his sons must go in and show each Kohathite what to do and what to carry. 20The Kohathites must not enter and look at the holy things, even for a second, or they will die."

## *The Jobs of the Gershon Family*

21The LORD said to Moses, 22"Count the Gershonites by
families and family groups. 23Count the men from thirty to fifty
years old, all who have a job to do in the Meeting Tent.
24"This is what the Gershonite family groups must do and
what they must carry. 25They must carry the curtains of the
Holy Tent, the Meeting Tent, its covering, and its outer covering
made from fine leather. They must also carry the curtains for
the entrance to the Meeting Tent, 26the curtains of the
courtyard that go around the Holy Tent and the altar, the
curtain for the entry to the courtyard, the ropes, and all the
things used with the curtains. They must do everything
connected with these things. 27Aaron and his sons are in charge
of what the Gershonites do or carry; you tell them what they are
responsible for carrying. 28This is the work of the Gershonite
family group at the Meeting Tent. Ithamar son of Aaron, the
priest, will direct their work.

## *The Jobs of the Merari Family*

29"Count the Merarite families and family groups. 30Count
the men from thirty to fifty years old, all who work at the
Meeting Tent. 31It is their job to carry the following as they
serve in the Meeting Tent: the frames of the Holy Tent, the
crossbars, the posts, and bases, 32in addition to the posts that
go around the courtyard, their bases, tent pegs, ropes, and
everything that is used with the poles around the courtyard. Tell
each man exactly what to carry. 33This is the work the Merarite
family group will do for the Meeting Tent. Ithamar son of Aaron,
the priest, will direct their work."

## *The Levite Families*

34Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel counted the
Kohathites by families and family groups, 35the men from thirty
to fifty years old who were to work at the Meeting Tent. 36There
were 2,750 men in the family groups. 37This was the total of the
Kohath family groups who worked at the Meeting Tent, whom
Moses and Aaron counted as the LORD had commanded Moses.
38Also, the Gershonites were counted by families and family
groups, 39the men from thirty to fifty years old who were given
work at the Meeting Tent. 40The families and family groups had
2,630 men. 41This was the total of the Gershon family groups
who worked at the Meeting Tent, whom Moses and Aaron
counted as the LORD had commanded.
42Also, the men in the families and family groups of the
Merari family were counted, 43the men from thirty to fifty years

old who were to work at the Meeting Tent. 44The family groups had 3,200 men. 45This was the total of the Merari family groups, whom Moses and Aaron counted as the LORD had commanded Moses.

46So Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel counted all the Levites by families and family groups. 47They counted the men from thirty to fifty who were given work at the Meeting Tent and who carried the Tent. 48The total number of these men was 8,580. 49Each man was counted as the LORD had commanded Moses; each man was given his work and told what to carry as the LORD had commanded Moses.

## Psalm 30:1–7

### *Thanksgiving for Escaping Death*

**A psalm of David. A song for giving the Temple to the LORD.**

30 I will praise you, LORD,
because you rescued me.
You did not let my enemies laugh at me.

2LORD, my God, I prayed to you,
and you healed me.

3You lifted me out of the grave;
you spared me from going down to the place of the dead.

4Sing praises to the LORD, you who belong to him;
praise his holy name.

5His anger lasts only a moment,
but his kindness lasts for a lifetime.

Crying may last for a night,
but joy comes in the morning.

6When I felt safe, I said,
“I will never fear.”

7LORD, in your kindness you made my mountain safe.
But when you turned away, I was frightened.

## Proverbs 10:30–32

30Good people will always be safe,
but evil people will not remain in the land.

31A good person says wise things,
but a liar’s tongue will be stopped.

32Good people know the right thing to say,
but evil people only tell lies.

## Mark 8:1–21

### *More than Four Thousand People Fed*

8 Another time there was a great crowd with Jesus that had nothing to eat. So Jesus called his followers and said, 2“I feel sorry for these people, because they have already been with me for three days, and they have nothing to eat. 3If I send them home hungry, they will faint on the way. Some of them live a long way from here.”

4Jesus’ followers answered, “How can we get enough bread to feed all these people? We are far away from any town.”

5Jesus asked, “How many loaves of bread do you have?”

They answered, “Seven.”

6Jesus told the people to sit on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, gave thanks to God, and divided the bread. He gave the pieces to his followers to give to the people, and they did so. 7The followers also had a few small fish. After Jesus gave thanks for the fish, he told his followers to give them to the people also. 8All the people ate and were satisfied. Then his

followers filled seven baskets with the leftover pieces of food.
9 There were about four thousand people who ate. After they
had eaten, Jesus sent them home. 10 Then right away he got into
a boat with his followers and went to the area of Dalmanutha.

## *The Leaders Ask for a Miracle*

11 The Pharisees came to Jesus and began to ask him
questions. Hoping to trap him, they asked Jesus for a miracle
from God. 12 Jesus sighed deeply and said, “Why do you people
ask for a miracle as a sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be
given to you.” 13 Then Jesus left the Pharisees and went in the
boat to the other side of the lake.

## *Guard Against Wrong Teachings*

14 His followers had only one loaf of bread with them in the
boat; they had forgotten to bring more. 15 Jesus warned them,
“Be careful! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast
of Herod.”

16 His followers discussed the meaning of this, saying, “He
said this because we have no bread.”

17 Knowing what they were talking about, Jesus asked them,
“Why are you talking about not having bread? Do you still not
see or understand? Are your minds closed? 18 You have eyes, but
you don’t really see. You have ears, but you don’t really listen.
Remember when 19 I divided five loaves of bread for the five
thousand? How many baskets did you fill with leftover pieces of
food?”

They answered, “Twelve.”

20 “And when I divided seven loaves of bread for the four
thousand, how many baskets did you fill with leftover pieces of
food?”

They answered, “Seven.”

21 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand yet?”

# March 4

## A Personal Query

*Then Jesus asked, "But who do you say I am?"*

Mark 8:29

Jesus turns [to his disciples] and asks them the question. *The* question. "But who do you say I am?" He doesn't ask, "What do you think about what I've done?" He asks, "Who do you say that I am?" ...

He doesn't ask, "Who do your friends think I am? ... Who do your parents think I am? ... Who do your peers think I am?" He poses instead a starkly personal query, "Who do *you* think I am?" ...

You have been asked some important questions in your life:

Will you marry me?

Would you be interested in a transfer?

What would you think if I told you I was pregnant?

You've been asked some important questions. But the grandest of them is an anthill compared to the Everest found in the eighth chapter of Mark.

*Who do you say that I am?*

from *The Inspirational Study Bible*

## Numbers 5:1—6:27

### *Rules About Cleanliness*

5 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Command the Israelites to send
away from camp anyone with a harmful skin disease. Send away
anyone who gives off body fluid or who has become unclean by
touching a dead body. 3Send both men and women outside the
camp so that they won't spread the disease there, where I am
living among you." 4So Israel obeyed the LORD's command and
sent those people outside the camp. They did just as the LORD
had told Moses.

## *Paying for Doing Wrong*

5 The LORD said to Moses, 6 "Tell the Israelites: 'When a man
or woman does something wrong to another person, that is
really sinning against the LORD. That person is guilty 7 and must
admit the wrong that has been done. The person must fully pay
for the wrong that has been done, adding one-fifth to it, and
giving it to the person who was wronged. 8 But if that person is
dead and does not have any close relatives to receive the
payment, the one who did wrong owes the LORD and must pay
the priest. In addition, the priest must sacrifice a male sheep to
remove the wrong so that the person will belong to the LORD.
9 When an Israelite brings a holy gift, it should be given to the
priest. 10 No one has to give these holy gifts, but if someone
does give them, they belong to the priest.'"

## *Suspicious Husbands*

11 Then the LORD said to Moses, 12 "Tell the Israelites: 'A man's
wife might be unfaithful to him 13 and have sexual relations with
another man. Her sin might be kept hidden from her husband
so that he does not know about the wrong she did. Perhaps no
one saw it, and she wasn't caught. 14 But if her husband has
feelings of jealousy and suspects she has sinned—whether she
has or not—15 he should take her to the priest. The husband
must also take an offering for her of two quarts of barley flour.
He must not pour oil or incense on it, because this is a grain
offering for jealousy, an offering of remembrance. It is to find
out if she is guilty.

16 "'The priest will bring in the woman and make her stand
before the LORD. 17 He will take some holy water in a clay jar,
and he will put some dirt from the floor of the Holy Tent into the
water. 18 The priest will make the woman stand before the LORD,
and he will loosen her hair. He will hand her the offering of
remembrance, the grain offering for jealousy; he will hold the
bitter water that brings a curse. 19 The priest will make her take
an oath and ask her, "Has another man had sexual relations
with you? Have you been unfaithful to your husband? If you
haven't, this bitter water that brings a curse won't hurt you.
20 But if you have been unfaithful to your husband and have had
sexual relations with a man besides him"— 21 the priest will then
put on her the curse that the oath will bring—"the LORD will
make the people curse and reject you. He will make your
stomach get big, and he will make your body unable to give
birth to another baby. 22 This water that brings a curse will go
inside you and make your body unable to give birth to another
baby."

"'The woman must say, "I agree."

23 “‘The priest should write these curses on a scroll, wash the
words off into the bitter water, 24 and make the woman drink the
bitter water that brings a curse. If she is guilty, the water will
make her sick. 25 Then the priest will take the grain offering for
jealousy from her. He will present it before the LORD and bring it
to the altar. 26 He will take a handful of the grain, which is a
memorial offering, and burn it on the altar. After that he will
make the woman drink the water 27 to see if she is not pure and
if she has sinned against her husband. When it goes into her, if
her stomach gets big and she is not able to have another baby,
her people will reject her. 28 But if the woman has not sinned,
she is pure. She is not guilty, and she will be able to have
babies.

29 “‘So this is the teaching about jealousy. This is what to do
when a woman does wrong and is unfaithful while she is
married to her husband. 30 It also should be done if the man gets
jealous because he suspects his wife. The priest will have her
stand before the LORD, and he will do all these things, just as the
teaching commands. 31 In this way the husband can be proven
correct, and the woman will suffer if she has done wrong.’”

## *Rules for the Nazirites*

6 The LORD said to Moses, 2 “Tell the Israelites: ‘If men or women
want to promise to belong to the LORD in a special way, they will
be called Nazirites. 3 During this time, they must not drink wine
or beer, or vinegar made from wine or beer. They must not even
drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. 4 While they are
Nazirites, they must not eat anything that comes from the
grapevine, even the seeds or the skin.

5 “‘During the time they have promised to belong to the LORD,
they must not cut their hair. They must be holy until this special
time is over. They must let their hair grow long. 6 During their
special time of belonging to the LORD, Nazirites must not go
near a dead body. 7 Even if their own father, mother, brother, or
sister dies, they must not touch them, or they will become
unclean. They must still keep their promise to belong to God in
a special way. 8 While they are Nazirites, they belong to the LORD
in a special way.

9 “‘If they are next to someone who dies suddenly, their hair,
which was part of their promise, has been made unclean. So
they must shave their head seven days later to be clean. 10 Then
on the eighth day, they must bring two doves or two young
pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. 11 The
priest will offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt
offering. This removes sin so they will belong to the LORD. (They
had sinned because they were near a dead body.) That same day
they will again promise to let their hair grow 12 and give

themselves to the LORD for another special time. They must bring a male lamb a year old as a penalty offering. The days of the special time before don't count, because they became unclean during their first special time.

13"'This is the teaching for the Nazirites. When the promised time is over, they must go to the entrance of the Meeting Tent 14and give their offerings to the LORD. They must offer a year-old male lamb that has nothing wrong with it, as a burnt offering, a year-old female lamb that has nothing wrong with it, as a sin offering, and a male sheep that has nothing wrong with it, for a fellowship offering. 15They must also bring the grain offerings and drink offerings that go with them. And they must bring a basket of bread made without yeast, loaves made with fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers made without yeast spread with oil.

16"'The priest will give these offerings to the LORD and make the sin offering and the burnt offering. 17Then he will kill the male sheep as a fellowship offering to the LORD; along with it, he will present the basket of bread made without yeast, the grain offering, and the drink offering.

18"'The Nazirites must go to the entrance of the Meeting Tent and shave off their hair that they grew for their promise. The hair will be put in the fire that is under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering.

19"'After the Nazirites cut off their hair, the priest will give them a boiled shoulder from the male sheep. From the basket he will also give a loaf and a wafer, both made without yeast. 20Then the priest will present them to the LORD. They are holy and belong to the priest. Also, he is to present the breast and the thigh from the male sheep. After that, the Nazirites may drink wine.

21"'This is the teaching for the Nazirites who make a promise. Everyone who makes the Nazirite promise must give all of these gifts to the LORD. If they promised to do more, they must keep their promise, according to the teaching of the Nazirites.'"

## *The Priests' Blessings*

22The LORD said to Moses, 23"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you should bless the Israelites. Say to them:

24"May the LORD bless you and keep you.
25May the LORD show you his kindness
and have mercy on you.

26May the LORD watch over you

and give you peace.”’

27“So Aaron and his sons will bless the Israelites with my name, and I will bless them.”

## Psalm 30:8–12

8I called to you, LORD,
and asked you to have mercy on me.

9I said, “What good will it do if I die
or if I go down to the grave?

Dust cannot praise you;
it cannot speak about your truth.

10LORD, hear me and have mercy on me.
LORD, help me.”

11You changed my sorrow into dancing.
You took away my clothes of sadness,
and clothed me in happiness.

12I will sing to you and not be silent.
LORD, my God, I will praise you forever.

## Proverbs 11:1–3

11 The LORD hates dishonest scales,
but he is pleased with honest weights.

2Pride leads only to shame;
it is wise to be humble.

3 Good people will be guided by honesty;
dishonesty will destroy those who are not trustworthy.

## Mark 8:22—9:1

### *Jesus Heals a Blind Man*

22 Jesus and his followers came to Bethsaida. There some
people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch
the man. 23 So Jesus took the blind man's hand and led him out
of the village. Then he spit on the man's eyes and put his hands
on the man and asked, "Can you see now?"
24 The man looked up and said, "Yes, I see people, but they
look like trees walking around."
25 Again Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then the man
opened his eyes wide and they were healed, and he was able to
see everything clearly. 26 Jesus told him to go home, saying,
"Don't go into the town."[n]

### *Peter Says Jesus Is the Christ*

27 Jesus and his followers went to the towns around Caesarea
Philippi. While they were traveling, Jesus asked them, "Who do
people say I am?"
28 They answered, "Some say you are John the Baptist. Others
say you are Elijah,[n] and others say you are one of the prophets."
29 Then Jesus asked, "But who do you say I am?"
Peter answered, "You are the Christ."
30 Jesus warned his followers not to tell anyone who he was.
31 Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must
suffer many things and that he would be rejected by the Jewish
elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He told
them that the Son of Man must be killed and then rise from the
dead after three days. 32 Jesus told them plainly what would
happen. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to tell him not
to talk like that. 33 But Jesus turned and looked at his followers.
Then he told Peter not to talk that way. He said, "Go away from
me, Satan![n] You don't care about the things of God, but only
about things people think are important."
34 Then Jesus called the crowd to him, along with his
followers. He said, "If people want to follow me, they must give
up the things they want. They must be willing even to give up
their lives to follow me. 35 Those who want to save their lives
will give up true life. But those who give up their lives for me

and for the Good News will have true life. [36]It is worthless to have the whole world if they lose their souls. [37]They could never pay enough to buy back their souls. [38]The people who live now are living in a sinful and evil time. If people are ashamed of me and my teaching, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes with his Father's glory and with the holy angels."
[9] Then Jesus said to the people, "I tell you the truth, some people standing here will see the kingdom of God come with power before they die."

# March 5

## The Right Direction

*For the good of your name, lead me and guide me.*

Psalm 31:3

YOUR Shepherd knows that you were not made for this place. He knows you are not equipped for this place. So he has come to guide you out. He has come to restore your soul. He is the perfect one to do so.

He has the right vision. He reminds you that "you are like foreigners and strangers in this world" (1 Peter 2:11). And he urges you to lift your eyes from the jungle around you to the heaven above you.

He also has the right direction. He made the boldest claim in the history of man when he declared, "I am the way" (John 14:6). People wondered if the claim was accurate. He answered their questions by cutting a path through the underbrush of sin and death … and escaping alive. He's the only One who ever did. And he is the only One who can help you and I do the same.

from *Traveling Light*

### Numbers 7:1—8:26

#### *The Holy Tent*

7 When Moses finished setting up the Holy Tent, he gave it for
service to the LORD by pouring olive oil on the Tent and on
everything used in it. He also poured oil on the altar and all its
tools to prepare them for service to the LORD. 2Then the leaders
of Israel made offerings. These were the heads of the families,
the leaders of each tribe who counted the people. 3They
brought to the LORD six covered carts and twelve oxen—each
leader giving an ox, and every two leaders giving a cart. They
brought these to the Holy Tent.

4The LORD said to Moses, 5"Accept these gifts from the

leaders and use them in the work of the Meeting Tent. Give them to the Levites as they need them."

[6]So Moses accepted the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites. [7]He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, which they needed for their work. [8]Then Moses gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, which they needed for their work. Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest, directed the work of all of them. [9]Moses did not give any oxen or carts to the Kohathites, because their job was to carry the holy things on their shoulders.

[10]When the oil was poured on the altar, the leaders brought their offerings to it to give it to the LORD's service; they presented them in front of the altar. [11]The LORD told Moses, "Each day one leader must bring his gift to make the altar ready for service to me."

[12–83]Each of the twelve leaders brought these gifts. Each leader brought one silver plate that weighed about three and one-fourth pounds, and one silver bowl that weighed about one and three-fourths pounds. These weights were set by the Holy Place measure. The bowl and the plate were filled with fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering. Each leader also brought a large gold dish that weighed about four ounces and was filled with incense.

In addition, each of the leaders brought one young bull, one male sheep, and one male lamb a year old for a burnt offering; one male goat for a sin offering; and two oxen, five male sheep, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old for a fellowship offering.

On the first day Nahshon son of Amminadab brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Judah.

On the second day Nethanel son of Zuar brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Issachar.

On the third day Eliab son of Helon brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Zebulun.

On the fourth day Elizur son of Shedeur brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Reuben.

On the fifth day Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Simeon.

On the sixth day Eliasaph son of Deuel brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Gad.

On the seventh day Elishama son of Ammihud brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Ephraim.

On the eighth day Gamaliel son of Pedahzur brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Manasseh.

On the ninth day Abidan son of Gideoni brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Benjamin.

On the tenth day Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Dan.

On the eleventh day Pagiel son of Ocran brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Asher.

On the twelfth day Ahira son of Enan brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Naphtali.

84So these were the gifts from the Israelite leaders when oil was poured on the altar and it was given for service to the LORD: twelve silver plates, twelve silver bowls, and twelve gold dishes. 85Each silver plate weighed about three and one-fourth pounds, and each bowl weighed about one and three-fourths pounds. All the silver plates and silver bowls together weighed about sixty pounds according to a weight set by the Holy Place measure. 86The twelve gold dishes filled with incense weighed four ounces each, according to the weight set by the Holy Place measure. Together the gold dishes weighed about three pounds. 87The total number of animals for the burnt offering was twelve bulls, twelve male sheep, and twelve male lambs a year old. There was also a grain offering, and there were twelve male goats for a sin offering. 88The total number of animals for the fellowship offering was twenty-four bulls, sixty male sheep, sixty male goats, and sixty male lambs a year old. All these offerings were for giving the altar to the service of the LORD after the oil had been poured on it.

89When Moses went into the Meeting Tent to speak with the LORD, he heard the LORD speaking to him. The voice was coming from between the two gold creatures with wings that were above the lid of the Ark of the Agreement. In this way the LORD spoke with him.

## *The Lampstand*

8 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Speak to Aaron and tell him, 'Put the seven lamps where they can light the area in front of the lampstand.'"

3Aaron did this, putting the lamps so they lighted the area in front of the lampstand; he obeyed the command the LORD gave Moses. 4The lampstand was made from hammered gold, from its base to the flowers. It was made exactly the way the LORD had showed Moses.

## *The Levites Are Given to God*

5The LORD said to Moses, 6"Take the Levites away from the other Israelites and make them clean. 7This is what you should do to make them clean: Sprinkle the cleansing water on them, and have them shave their bodies and wash their clothes so they will be clean. 8They must take a young bull and the grain offering of flour mixed with oil that goes with it. Then take a second young bull for a sin offering. 9Bring the Levites to the front of the Meeting Tent, and gather all the Israelites around. 10When you bring the Levites before the LORD, the Israelites

should put their hands on them.[n] 11Aaron will present the Levites before the LORD as an offering presented from the Israelites. Then the Levites will be ready to do the work of the LORD.

12"The Levites will put their hands on the bulls' heads—one bull will be a sin offering to the LORD, and the other will be a burnt offering, to remove the sins of the Levites so they will belong to the LORD. 13Make the Levites stand in front of Aaron and his sons and present the Levites as an offering to the LORD. 14In this way you must set apart the Levites from the other Israelites; the Levites will be mine.

15"Make the Levites pure, and present them as an offering so that they may come to work at the Meeting Tent. 16They will be given completely to me from the Israelites; I have taken them for myself instead of the firstborn of every Israelite woman. 17All the firstborn in Israel—people or animals—are mine. When I killed all the firstborn in Egypt, I set the firstborn in Israel aside for myself. 18But I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn in Israel. 19From all the Israelites I have given the Levites to Aaron and his sons so that they may serve the Israelites at the Meeting Tent. They will help remove the Israelites' sins so they will belong to the LORD and so that no disaster will strike the Israelites when they approach the Holy Place."

20So Moses, Aaron, and all the Israelites obeyed and did with the Levites what the LORD commanded Moses. 21The Levites made themselves clean and washed their clothes. Then Aaron presented them as an offering to the LORD. He also removed their sins so they would be pure. 22After that, the Levites came to the Meeting Tent to work, and Aaron and his sons told them what to do. They did with the Levites what the LORD commanded Moses.

23The LORD said to Moses, 24"This command is for the Levites. Everyone twenty-five years old or older must come to the Meeting Tent, because they all have jobs to do there. 25At the age of fifty, they must retire from their jobs and not work again. 26They may help their fellow Levites with their work at the Meeting Tent, but they must not do the work themselves. This is the way you are to give the Levites their jobs."

## Psalm 31:1–5

### *A Prayer of Faith in Troubled Times*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

31 LORD, I trust in you;
let me never be disgraced.
Save me because you do what is right.

2Listen to me
and save me quickly.

Be my rock of protection,
a strong city to save me.

3You are my rock and my protection.
For the good of your name, lead me and guide me.

4Set me free from the trap they set for me,
because you are my protection.

5I give you my life.
Save me, LORD, God of truth.

## Proverbs 11:4–6

4Riches will not help when it’s time to die,
but right living will save you from death.

5The goodness of the innocent makes life easier,
but the wicked will be destroyed by their wickedness.

6Doing right brings freedom to honest people,
but those who are not trustworthy will be caught by their own desires.

## Mark 9:2–29

## *Jesus Talks with Moses and Elijah*

2 Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a
high mountain by themselves. While they watched, Jesus'
appearance was changed. 3 His clothes became shining white,
whiter than any person could make them. 4 Then Elijah and
Moses[n] appeared to them, talking with Jesus.
5 Peter said to Jesus, "Teacher, it is good that we are here. Let
us make three tents—one for you, one for Moses, and one for
Elijah." 6 Peter did not know what to say, because he and the
others were so frightened.
7 Then a cloud came and covered them, and a voice came
from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to
him!"
8 Suddenly Peter, James, and John looked around, but they
saw only Jesus there alone with them.
9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded
them not to tell anyone about what they had seen until the Son
of Man had risen from the dead.
10 So the followers obeyed Jesus, but they discussed what he
meant about rising from the dead.
11 Then they asked Jesus, "Why do the teachers of the law say
that Elijah must come first?"
12 Jesus answered, "They are right to say that Elijah must
come first and make everything the way it should be. But why
does the Scripture say that the Son of Man will suffer much and
that people will treat him as if he were nothing? 13 I tell you that
Elijah has already come. And people did to him whatever they
wanted to do, just as the Scriptures said it would happen."

## *Jesus Heals a Sick Boy*

14 When Jesus, Peter, James, and John came back to the other
followers, they saw a great crowd around them and the
teachers of the law arguing with them. 15 But as soon as the
crowd saw Jesus, the people were surprised and ran to welcome
him.
16 Jesus asked, "What are you arguing about?"
17 A man answered, "Teacher, I brought my son to you. He
has an evil spirit in him that stops him from talking. 18 When the
spirit attacks him, it throws him on the ground. Then my son
foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes very stiff. I
asked your followers to force the evil spirit out, but they
couldn't."
19 Jesus answered, "You people have no faith. How long must

I stay with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

20So the followers brought him to Jesus. As soon as the evil spirit saw Jesus, it made the boy lose control of himself, and he fell down and rolled on the ground, foaming at the mouth.

21Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has this been happening?"

The father answered, "Since he was very young. 22The spirit often throws him into a fire or into water to kill him. If you can do anything for him, please have pity on us and help us."

23Jesus said to the father, "You said, 'If you can!' All things are possible for the one who believes."

24Immediately the father cried out, "I do believe! Help me to believe more!"

25When Jesus saw that a crowd was quickly gathering, he ordered the evil spirit, saying, "You spirit that makes people unable to hear or speak, I command you to come out of this boy and never enter him again!"

26The evil spirit screamed and caused the boy to fall on the ground again. Then the spirit came out. The boy looked as if he were dead, and many people said, "He is dead!" 27But Jesus took hold of the boy's hand and helped him to stand up.

28When Jesus went into the house, his followers began asking him privately, "Why couldn't we force that evil spirit out?"

29Jesus answered, "That kind of spirit can only be forced out by prayer."[n]

# March 6

## Because of His Gift

*"The Son of Man will be handed over to people, and they will kill him. After three days, he will rise from the dead."*

Mark 9:31

Trace the path of this Savior, the God who swapped heavenly royalty for earthly poverty. His bed became, at best, a borrowed pallet—and usually the hard earth. He was dependent on handouts for his income. He was sometimes so hungry he would eat raw grain or pick fruit off a tree. He knew what it meant to have no home. He was ridiculed. His neighbors tried to lynch him. Some called him a lunatic. His family tried to confine him to their house. His friends weren't always faithful to him.

He was accused of a crime he never committed. Witnesses were hired to lie. The jury was rigged. A judge swayed by politics handed down the death penalty.

They killed him.

And why? Because of the gift that only he could give.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Numbers 9:1—10:36

#### *The Passover Is Celebrated*

9 The LORD spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first
month of the second year after the Israelites left Egypt. He said,
2 "Tell the Israelites to celebrate the Passover at the appointed
time. 3 That appointed time is the fourteenth day of this month
at twilight; they must obey all the rules about it."

4 So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover, 5 and
they did; it was in the Desert of Sinai at twilight on the
fourteenth day of the first month. The Israelites did everything
just as the LORD commanded Moses.

6 But some of the people could not celebrate the Passover on

that day because they were unclean from touching a dead body. So they went to Moses and Aaron that day and [7]said to Moses, “We are unclean because of touching a dead body. But why should we be kept from offering gifts to the LORD at this appointed time? Why can’t we join the other Israelites?”

[8]Moses said to them, “Wait, and I will find out what the LORD says about you.”

[9]Then the LORD said to Moses, [10]“Tell the Israelites this: ‘If you or your descendants become unclean because of a dead body, or if you are away on a trip during the Passover, you must still celebrate the LORD’s Passover. [11]But celebrate it at twilight on the fourteenth day of the second month. Eat the lamb with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. [12]Don’t leave any of it until the next morning or break any of its bones. When you celebrate the Passover, follow all the rules. [13]Anyone who is clean and is not away on a trip but does not eat the Passover must be cut off from the people. That person did not give an offering to the LORD at the appointed time and must be punished for the sin.

[14]“‘Foreigners among you may celebrate the LORD’s Passover, but they must follow all the rules. You must have the same rules for foreigners as you have for yourselves.’”

## *The Cloud Above the Tent*

[15]On the day the Holy Tent, the Tent of the Agreement, was set up, a cloud covered it. From dusk until dawn the cloud above the Tent looked like fire. [16]The cloud stayed above the Tent, and at night it looked like fire. [17]When the cloud moved from its place over the Tent, the Israelites moved, and wherever the cloud stopped, the Israelites camped. [18]So the Israelites moved at the LORD’s command, and they camped at his command. While the cloud stayed over the Tent, they remained camped. [19]Sometimes the cloud stayed over the Tent for a long time, but the Israelites obeyed the LORD and did not move. [20]Sometimes the cloud was over it only a few days. At the LORD’s command the people camped, and at his command they moved. [21]Sometimes the cloud stayed only from dusk until dawn; when the cloud lifted the next morning, the people moved. When the cloud lifted, day or night, the people moved. [22]The cloud might stay over the Tent for two days, a month, or a year. As long as it stayed, the people camped, but when it lifted, they moved. [23]At the LORD’s command the people camped, and at his command they moved. They obeyed the LORD’s order that he commanded through Moses.

## *The Silver Trumpets*

10 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Make two trumpets of hammered
silver, and use them to call the people together and to march
out of camp. 3When both trumpets are blown, the people should
gather before you at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. 4If you
blow only one trumpet, the leaders, the heads of the family
groups of Israel, should meet before you. 5When you loudly
blow the trumpets, the tribes camping on the east should move.
6When you loudly blow them again, the tribes camping on the
south should move; the loud sound will tell them to move.
7When you want to gather the people, blow the trumpets, but
don't blow them as loudly.

8"Aaron's sons, the priests, should blow the trumpets. This is
a law for you and your descendants from now on. 9When you
are fighting an enemy who attacks you in your own land, blow
the trumpets loudly. The LORD your God will take notice of you
and will save you from your enemies. 10Also blow your trumpets
at happy times and during your feasts and at New Moon
festivals. Blow them over your burnt offerings and fellowship
offerings, because they will help you remember your God. I am
the LORD your God."

## *The Israelites Move Camp*

11The cloud lifted from the Tent of the Agreement on the
twentieth day of the second month of the second year. 12So the
Israelites moved from the Desert of Sinai and continued until
the cloud stopped in the Desert of Paran. 13This was their first
time to move, and they did it as the LORD had commanded
Moses.

14The divisions from the camp of Judah moved first under
their flag. Nahshon son of Amminadab was the commander.
15Nethanel son of Zuar was over the division of the tribe of
Issachar. 16Eliab son of Helon was over the division of the tribe
of Zebulun. 17Then the Holy Tent was taken down, and the
Gershonites and Merarites, who carried it, moved next.

18Then came the divisions from the camp of Reuben under
their flag, and Elizur son of Shedeur was the commander.
19Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai was over the division of the tribe
of Simeon. 20Eliasaph son of Deuel was over the division of the
tribe of Gad. 21Then came the Kohathites, who carried the holy
things; the Holy Tent was to be set up before they arrived.

22Next came the divisions from the camp of Ephraim under
their flag, and Elishama son of Ammihud was the commander.
23Gamaliel son of Pedahzur was over the division of the tribe of
Manasseh, 24and Abidan son of Gideoni was over the division of
the tribe of Benjamin.

25The last ones were the rear guard for all the tribes. These

were the divisions from the camp of Dan under their flag, and Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai was the commander. 26Pagiel son of Ocran was over the division of the tribe of Asher; 27Ahira son of Enan was over the division of the tribe of Naphtali. 28This was the order the Israelite divisions marched in when they moved.

29Hobab was the son of Reuel the Midianite,[n] who was Moses' father-in-law. Moses said to Hobab, "We are moving to the land the LORD promised to give us. Come with us and we will be good to you, because the LORD has promised good things to Israel."

30But Hobab answered, "No, I will not go. I will go back to my own land where I was born."

31But Moses said, "Please don't leave us. You know where we can camp in the desert, and you can be our guide. 32Come with us. We will share with you all the good things the LORD gives us." 33So they left the mountain of the LORD and traveled for three days. The Ark of the LORD's Agreement went in front of the people for those three days, as they looked for a place to camp. 34The LORD's cloud was over them during the day when they left their camp.

35When the Ark left the camp, Moses said,

"Rise up, LORD!
Scatter your enemies:
make those who hate you run from you."

36And when the Ark was set down, Moses said,

"Return, LORD,
to the thousands of people of Israel."

## Psalm 31:6–13

6I hate those who worship false gods.
I trust only in the LORD.

7I will be glad and rejoice in your love,
because you saw my suffering;
you knew my troubles.

[8]You have not handed me over to my enemies
but have set me in a safe place.

[9]LORD, have mercy, because I am in misery.
My eyes are weak from so much crying,
and my whole being is tired from grief.

[10]My life is ending in sadness,
and my years are spent in crying.

My troubles are using up my strength,
and my bones are getting weaker.

[11]Because of all my troubles, my enemies hate me,
and even my neighbors look down on me.

When my friends see me,
they are afraid and run.

[12]I am like a piece of a broken pot.
I am forgotten as if I were dead.

[13]I have heard many insults.
Terror is all around me.

They make plans against me
and want to kill me.

## Proverbs 11:7–11

[7]When the wicked die, hope dies with them;
their hope in riches will come to nothing.

[8]The good person is saved from trouble;

it comes to the wicked instead.

9 With words an evil person can destroy a neighbor,
but a good person will escape by being resourceful.

10 When good people succeed, the city is happy.
When evil people die, there are shouts of joy.

11 Good people bless and build up their city,
but the wicked can destroy it with their words.

## Mark 9:30–50

### *Jesus Talks About His Death*

30 Then Jesus and his followers left that place and went through Galilee. He didn't want anyone to know where he was, 31 because he was teaching his followers. He said to them, "The Son of Man will be handed over to people, and they will kill him. After three days, he will rise from the dead." 32 But the followers did not understand what Jesus meant, and they were afraid to ask him.

### *Who Is the Greatest?*

33 Jesus and his followers went to Capernaum. When they went into a house there, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But the followers did not answer, because their argument on the road was about which one of them was the greatest.

35 Jesus sat down and called the twelve apostles to him. He said, "Whoever wants to be the most important must be last of all and servant of all."

36 Then Jesus took a small child and had him stand among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said, 37 "Whoever accepts a child like this in my name accepts me. And whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me."

### *Anyone Not Against Us Is for Us*

38 Then John said, "Teacher, we saw someone using your

name to force demons out of a person. We told him to stop, because he does not belong to our group."

39But Jesus said, "Don't stop him, because anyone who uses my name to do powerful things will not easily say evil things about me. 40Whoever is not against us is with us. 41I tell you the truth, whoever gives you a drink of water because you belong to the Christ will truly get his reward.

42"If one of these little children believes in me, and someone causes that child to sin, it would be better for that person to have a large stone tied around his neck and be drowned in the sea. 43If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to lose part of your body and live forever than to have two hands and go to hell, where the fire never goes out. [44In hell the worm does not die; the fire is never put out.][n]45If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to lose part of your body and to live forever than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. [46In hell the worm does not die; the fire is never put out.][n]47If your eye causes you to sin, take it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell. 48In hell the worm does not die; the fire is never put out. 49Every person will be salted with fire.

50"Salt is good, but if the salt loses its salty taste, you cannot make it salty again. So, be full of salt, and have peace with each other."

# March 7

## God Always Gives Grace

*“For God all things are possible.”*

Mark 10:27

our questions betray our lack of understanding: How can God be everywhere at one time? (Who says God is bound by a body?) How can God hear all the prayers which come to him? (Perhaps his ears are different from yours.)

How can God be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? (Could it be that heaven has a different set of physics than earth?)

If people down here won’t forgive me, how much more am I guilty before a holy God? (Oh, just the opposite. God is always able to give grace when we humans can’t—he invented it.)

from *The Great House of God*

### Numbers 11:1—12:16

#### *Fire from the Lord*

11 Now the people complained to the LORD about their troubles,
and when he heard them, he became angry. Then fire from the
LORD burned among the people at the edge of the camp. 2The
people cried out to Moses, and when he prayed to the LORD, the
fire stopped burning. 3So that place was called Taberah,[n]
because the LORD’s fire had burned among them.

#### *Seventy Elders Help Moses*

4Some troublemakers among them wanted better food, and
soon all the Israelites began complaining. They said, “We want
meat! 5We remember the fish we ate for free in Egypt. We also
had cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. 6But now we

have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

7The manna was like small white seeds. 8The people would
go to gather it, and then grind it in handmills, or crush it
between stones. After they cooked it in a pot or made cakes
with it, it tasted like bread baked with olive oil. 9When the dew
fell on the camp each night, so did the manna.

10Moses heard every family crying as they stood in the
entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and
Moses got upset. 11He asked the LORD, “Why have you brought
me, your servant, this trouble? What have I done wrong that
you made me responsible for all these people? 12I am not the
father of all these people, and I didn’t give birth to them. So
why do you make me carry them to the land you promised to
our ancestors? Must I carry them in my arms as a nurse carries
a baby? 13Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep
crying to me, ‘We want meat!’ 14I can’t take care of all these
people alone. It is too much for me. 15If you are going to
continue doing this to me, then kill me now. If you care about
me, put me to death, and then I won’t have any more troubles.”

16The LORD said to Moses, “Bring me seventy of Israel’s
elders, men that you know are leaders among the people. Bring
them to the Meeting Tent, and have them stand there with you.
17I will come down and speak with you there. I will take some of
the Spirit that is in you, and I will give it to them. They will help
you care for the people so that you will not have to care for
them alone.

18“Tell the people this: ‘Make yourselves holy for tomorrow,
and you will eat meat. You cried to the LORD, “We want meat! We
were better off in Egypt!” So now the LORD will give you meat to
eat. 19You will eat it not for just one, two, five, ten, or even
twenty days, 20but you will eat that meat for a whole month. You
will eat it until it comes out your nose, and you will grow to hate
it. This is because you have rejected the LORD, who is with you.
You have cried to him, saying, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?”’”

21Moses said, “LORD, here are six hundred thousand people
standing around me, and you say, ‘I will give them enough meat
to eat for a month!’ 22If we killed all the flocks and herds, that
would not be enough. If we caught all the fish in the sea, that
would not be enough.”

23But the LORD said to Moses, “Do you think I’m weak? Now
you will see if I can do what I say.”

24So Moses went out to the people and told them what the
LORD had said. He gathered seventy of the elders together and
had them stand around the Tent. 25Then the LORD came down in
the cloud and spoke to Moses. The LORD took some of the Spirit
Moses had, and he gave it to the seventy leaders. With the
Spirit in them, they prophesied, but just that one time.

26Two men named Eldad and Medad were also listed as

leaders, but they did not go to the Tent. They stayed in the camp, but the Spirit was also given to them, and they prophesied in the camp. 27A young man ran to Moses and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

28Joshua son of Nun said, “Moses, my master, stop them!” (Ever since he was a young boy, Joshua had been Moses’ assistant.)

29But Moses answered, “Are you jealous for me? I wish all the LORD’s people could prophesy. I wish the LORD would give his Spirit to all of them!” 30Then Moses and the leaders of Israel went back to the camp.

## *The Lord Sends Quail*

31The LORD sent a strong wind from the sea, and it blew quail into the area all around the camp. The quail were about three feet deep on the ground, and there were quail a day’s walk in any direction. 32The people went out and gathered quail all that day, that night, and the next day. Everyone gathered at least sixty bushels, and they spread them around the camp. 33But the LORD became very angry, and he gave the people a terrible sickness that came while the meat was still in their mouths. 34So the people named that place Kibroth Hattaavah,[n] because there they buried those who wanted other food.

35From Kibroth Hattaavah the people went to stay at Hazeroth.

## *Miriam and Aaron Speak Against Moses*

12 Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife (he had married a Cushite). 2They said, “Is Moses the only one the LORD speaks through? Doesn’t he also speak through us?” And the LORD heard this.

3(Now Moses was very humble. He was the least proud person on earth.)

4So the LORD suddenly spoke to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam and said, “All three of you come to the Meeting Tent.” So they went. 5The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance to the Tent. He called to Aaron and Miriam, and they both came near. 6He said, “Listen to my words:

When prophets are among you,
I, the LORD, will show myself to them in visions;
I will speak to them in dreams.

[7]But this is not true with my servant Moses.
I trust him to lead all my people.

[8]I speak face to face with him—
clearly, not with hidden meanings.
He has even seen the form of the LORD.

You should be afraid
to speak against my servant Moses."

[9]The LORD was very angry with them, and he left.
[10]When the cloud lifted from the Tent and Aaron turned toward Miriam, she was as white as snow; she had a skin disease. [11]Aaron said to Moses, "Please, my master, forgive us for our foolish sin. [12]Don't let her be like a baby who is born dead. (Sometimes a baby is born with half of its flesh eaten away.)"
[13]So Moses cried out to the LORD, "God, please heal her!"
[14]The LORD answered Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, she would have been shamed for seven days, so put her outside the camp for seven days. After that, she may come back." [15]So Miriam was put outside of the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until she came back.
[16]After that, the people left Hazeroth and camped in the Desert of Paran.

## Psalm 31:14–18

[14]LORD, I trust you.
I have said, "You are my God."

[15]My life is in your hands.
Save me from my enemies
and from those who are chasing me.

[16]Show your kindness to me, your servant.
Save me because of your love.

17 LORD, I called to you,
so do not let me be disgraced.

Let the wicked be disgraced
and lie silent in the grave.

18 With pride and hatred
they speak against those who do right.

So silence their lying lips.

## Proverbs 11:12–14

12 People without good sense find fault with their neighbors,
but those with understanding keep quiet.

13 Gossips can't keep secrets,
but a trustworthy person can.

14 Without leadership a nation falls,
but lots of good advice will save it.

## Mark 10:1–31

### *Jesus Teaches About Divorce*

10 Then Jesus left that place and went into the area of Judea and across the Jordan River. Again, crowds came to him, and he taught them as he usually did.

2 Some Pharisees came to Jesus and tried to trick him. They asked, "Is it right for a man to divorce his wife?"

3 Jesus answered, "What did Moses command you to do?"

4 They said, "Moses allowed a man to write out divorce papers and send her away."[n]

5 Jesus said, “Moses wrote that command for you because you
were stubborn. 6 But when God made the world, ‘he made them
male and female.’[n] 7 ‘So a man will leave his father and mother
and be united with his wife,[n] 8 and the two will become one
body.’[n] So there are not two, but one. 9 God has joined the two
together, so no one should separate them.”
10 Later, in the house, his followers asked Jesus again about
the question of divorce. 11 He answered, “Anyone who divorces
his wife and marries another woman is guilty of adultery
against her. 12 And the woman who divorces her husband and
marries another man is also guilty of adultery.”

## *Jesus Accepts Children*

13 Some people brought their little children to Jesus so he
could touch them, but his followers told them to stop. 14 When
Jesus saw this, he was upset and said to them, “Let the little
children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of
God belongs to people who are like these children. 15 I tell you
the truth, you must accept the kingdom of God as if you were a
little child, or you will never enter it.” 16 Then Jesus took the
children in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them.

## *A Rich Young Man’s Question*

17 As Jesus started to leave, a man ran to him and fell on his
knees before Jesus. The man asked, “Good teacher, what must I
do to have life forever?”
18 Jesus answered, “Why do you call me good? Only God is
good. 19 You know the commands: ‘You must not murder anyone.
You must not be guilty of adultery. You must not steal. You must
not tell lies about your neighbor. You must not cheat. Honor
your father and mother.’”[n]
20 The man said, “Teacher, I have obeyed all these things
since I was a boy.”
21 Jesus, looking at the man, loved him and said, “There is
one more thing you need to do. Go and sell everything you have,
and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in
heaven. Then come and follow me.”
22 He was very sad to hear Jesus say this, and he left
sorrowfully, because he was rich.
23 Then Jesus looked at his followers and said, “How hard it
will be for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”
24 The followers were amazed at what Jesus said. But he said
again, “My children, it is very hard[n] to enter the kingdom of
God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle
than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

[26]The followers were even more surprised and said to each other, “Then who can be saved?”

[27]Jesus looked at them and said, “For people this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

[28]Peter said to Jesus, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

[29]Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, all those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or farms for me and for the Good News [30]will get more than they left. Here in this world they will have a hundred times more homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields. And with those things, they will also suffer for their belief. But in this age they will have life forever. [31]Many who are first now will be last in the future. And many who are last now will be first in the future.”

# March 8

## Christ's Ultimate Aim

*"He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people."*

Mark 10:45

One of the incredible abilities of Jesus was to stay on target. His life never got off track ... He kept his life on course. As Jesus looked across the horizon of his future, he could see many targets. Many flags were flapping in the wind, each of which he could have pursued. He could have been a political revolutionary ... He could have been content to be a teacher and educate minds ... But in the end he chose to be a Savior and save souls.

Anyone near Christ for any length of time heard it from Jesus himself. "The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them" (Luke 19:10) ... The heart of Christ was relentlessly focused on one task. The day he left the carpentry shop of Nazareth he had one ultimate aim—the Cross of Calvary.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Numbers 13:1—14:45

### *The Spies Explore Canaan*

13 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Send men to explore the land of Canaan, which I will give to the Israelites. Send one leader from each tribe."

3So Moses obeyed the LORD's command and sent the Israelite leaders out from the Desert of Paran. 4These are their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur; 5from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; 6from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; 7from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph; 8from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; 9from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu; 10from the tribe of

Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi; 11from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi son of Susi; 12from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli; 13from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael; 14from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi; 15from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki.

16These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the new name Joshua.)

17Moses sent them to explore Canaan and said, “Go through southern Canaan and then into the mountains. 18See what the land looks like. Are the people who live there strong or weak? Are there a few or many? 19What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What about the towns they live in—are they open like camps, or do they have walls? 20What about the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees there? Try to bring back some of the fruit from that land.” (It was the season for the first grapes.)

21So they went up and explored the land, from the Desert of Zin all the way to Rehob by Lebo Hamath. 22They went through the southern area to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak lived. (The city of Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23In the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch of a grapevine that had one bunch of grapes on it and carried that branch on a pole between two of them. They also got some pomegranates and figs. 24That place was called the Valley of Eshcol,[n] because the Israelites cut off the bunch of grapes there. 25After forty days of exploring the land, the men returned to the camp.

26They came back to Moses and Aaron and all the Israelites at Kadesh, in the Desert of Paran. The men reported to them and showed everybody the fruit from the land. 27They told Moses, “We went to the land where you sent us, and it is a fertile land! Here is some of its fruit. 28But the people who live there are strong. Their cities are walled and very large. We even saw some Anakites there. 29The Amalekites live in the southern area; the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the mountains; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan River.”

30Then Caleb told the people near Moses to be quiet, and he said, “We should certainly go up and take the land for ourselves. We can certainly do it.”

31But the men who had gone with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32And those men gave the Israelites a bad report about the land they explored, saying, “The land that we explored is too large to conquer. All the people we saw are very tall. 33We saw the Nephilim people there. (The Anakites come from the Nephilim people.) We felt like grasshoppers, and we looked like grasshoppers to them.”

## *The People Complain Again*

14 That night all the people in the camp began crying loudly. 2All
the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron, and all the
people said to them, “We wish we had died in Egypt or in this
desert. 3Why is the LORD bringing us to this land to be killed
with swords? Our wives and children will be taken away. We
would be better off going back to Egypt.” 4They said to each
other, “Let’s choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

5Then Moses and Aaron bowed facedown in front of all the
Israelites gathered there. 6Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of
Jephunneh, who had explored the land, tore their clothes. 7They
said to all of the Israelites, “The land we explored is very good.
8If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land and
give us that fertile land. 9Don’t turn against the LORD! Don’t be
afraid of the people in that land! We will chew them up. They
have no protection, but the LORD is with us. So don’t be afraid of
them.”

10Then all the people talked about killing them with stones.
But the glory of the LORD appeared at the Meeting Tent to all the
Israelites. 11The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these
people ignore me? How long will they not believe me in spite of
the miracles I have done among them? 12I will give them a
terrible sickness and get rid of them. But I will make you into a
great nation that will be stronger than they are.”

13Then Moses said to the LORD, “The Egyptians will hear
about it! You brought these people from there by your great
power, 14and the Egyptians will tell this to those who live in this
land. They have already heard about you, LORD. They know that
you are with your people and that you were seen face to face.
They know that your cloud stays over your people and that you
lead your people with that cloud during the day and with fire at
night. 15If you put these people to death all at once, the nations
who have heard about your power will say, 16‘The LORD was not
able to bring them into the land he promised them. So he killed
them in the desert.’

17“So show your strength now, Lord. Do what you said:
18‘The LORD doesn’t become angry quickly, but he has great
love. He forgives sin and law breaking. But the LORD never
forgets to punish guilty people. When parents sin, he will also
punish their children, their grandchildren, their great-
grandchildren, and their great-great-grandchildren.’ 19By your
great love, forgive these people’s sin, just as you have forgiven
them from the time they left Egypt until now.”

20The LORD answered, “I have forgiven them as you asked.
21But, as surely as I live and as surely as my glory fills the
whole earth, I make this promise: 22All these people saw my
glory and the miracles I did in Egypt and in the desert, but they

disobeyed me and tested me ten times. [23]So not one of them will see the land I promised to their ancestors. No one who rejected me will see that land. [24]But my servant Caleb thinks differently and follows me completely. So I will bring him into the land he has already seen, and his children will own that land. [25]Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, leave tomorrow and follow the desert road toward the Red Sea."

## *The Lord Punishes the People*

[26]The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, [27]"How long will these evil people complain about me? I have heard the grumbling and complaining of these Israelites. [28]So tell them, 'This is what the LORD says. I heard what you said, and as surely as I live, I will do those very things to you: [29]You will die in this desert. Every one of you who is twenty years old or older and who was counted with the people—all of you who complained against me—will die. [30]Not one of you will enter the land where I promised you would live; only Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun will go in. [31]You said that your children would be taken away, but I will bring them into the land to enjoy what you refused. [32]As for you, you will die in this desert. [33]Your children will be shepherds here for forty years. Because you were not loyal, they will suffer until you lie dead in the desert. [34]For forty years you will suffer for your sins—a year for each of the forty days you explored the land. You will know me as your enemy.' [35]I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will certainly do these things to all these evil people who have come together against me. So they will all die here in this desert."

[36]The men Moses had sent to explore the land had returned and spread complaints among all the people. They had given a bad report about the land. [37]The men who gave a very bad report died; the LORD killed them with a terrible sickness. [38]Only two of the men who explored the land did not die—Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh.

[39]When Moses told these things to all the Israelites, they were very sad. [40]Early the next morning they started to go toward the top of the mountains, saying, "We have sinned. We will go where the LORD told us."

[41]But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD's command? You will not win! [42]Don't go, because the LORD is not with you and you will be beaten by your enemies. [43]You will run into the Amalekites and Canaanites, who will kill you with swords. You have turned away from the LORD, so the LORD will not be with you."

[44]But they were proud. They went toward the top of the mountains, but Moses and the Ark of the Agreement with the

LORD did not leave the camp. 45The Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in those mountains came down and attacked the Israelites and beat them back all the way to Hormah.

## Psalm 31:19–24

19How great is your goodness
that you have stored up for those who fear you,

that you have given to those who trust you.
You do this for all to see.

20You protect them by your presence
from what people plan against them.
You shelter them from evil words.

21Praise the LORD.
His love to me was wonderful
when my city was attacked.

22In my distress, I said,
"God cannot see me!"

But you heard my prayer
when I cried out to you for help.

23Love the LORD, all you who belong to him.
The LORD protects those who truly believe,
but he punishes the proud as much as they have sinned.

24All you who put your hope in the LORD
be strong and brave.

## Proverbs 11:15

15 Whoever guarantees to pay somebody else's loan will suffer.
It is safer to avoid such promises.

## Mark 10:32–52

### *Jesus Talks About His Death*

32 As Jesus and the people with him were on the road to Jerusalem, he was leading the way. His followers were amazed, but others in the crowd who followed were afraid. Again Jesus took the twelve apostles aside and began to tell them what was about to happen in Jerusalem. 33 He said, "Look, we are going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be turned over to the leading priests and the teachers of the law. They will say that he must die, and they will turn him over to the non-Jewish people, 34 who will laugh at him and spit on him. They will beat him with whips and crucify him. But on the third day, he will rise to life again."

### *Two Followers Ask Jesus a Favor*

35 Then James and John, sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want to ask you to do something for us."
36 Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"
37 They answered, "Let one of us sit at your right side and one of us sit at your left side in your glory in your kingdom."
38 Jesus said, "You don't understand what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I must drink? And can you be baptized with the same kind of baptism that I must go through?" [n]
39 They answered, "Yes, we can."
Jesus said to them, "You will drink the same cup that I will drink, and you will be baptized with the same baptism that I must go through. 40 But I cannot choose who will sit at my right or my left; those places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."
41 When the other ten followers heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.
42 Jesus called them together and said, "The other nations have rulers. You know that those rulers love to show their power over the people, and their important leaders love to use

all their authority. [43]But it should not be that way among you. Whoever wants to become great among you must serve the rest of you like a servant. [44]Whoever wants to become the first among you must serve all of you like a slave. [45]In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people."

## *Jesus Heals a Blind Man*

[46]Then they came to the town of Jericho. As Jesus was leaving there with his followers and a great many people, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was sitting by the road. [47]When he heard that Jesus from Nazareth was walking by, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

[48]Many people warned the blind man to be quiet, but he shouted even more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

[49]Jesus stopped and said, "Tell the man to come here."

So they called the blind man, saying, "Cheer up! Get to your feet. Jesus is calling you." [50]The blind man jumped up, left his coat there, and went to Jesus.

[51]Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do foryou?"

The blind man answered, "Teacher, I want to see."

[52]Jesus said, "Go, you are healed because you believed." At once the man could see, and he followed Jesus on the road.

# March 9

## Give God Your Worries

*When I kept things to myself, I felt weak deep inside me.*

Psalm 32:3

Ask yourself two questions: *Is there any unconfessed sin in my life?* Confession is telling God you did the thing he saw you do. He doesn't need to hear it as much as you need to say it. Whether it's too small to be mentioned or too big to be forgiven isn't yours to decide. Your task is to be honest …

*Are there any unsurrendered worries in my heart?*

"Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7).

The German word for *worry* means "to strangle." The Greek word means "to divide the mind." Both are accurate. Worry is a noose on the neck and a distraction of the mind, neither of which is befitting for joy.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## Numbers 15:1—16:50

### *Rules About Sacrifices*

15 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Speak to the Israelites and say to
them, 'When you enter the land that I am giving you as a home,
3give the LORD offerings made by fire. These may be from your
herds or flocks, as a smell pleasing to the LORD. These may be
burnt offerings or sacrifices for special promises, or as gifts to
him, or as festival offerings. 4The one who brings the offering
shall also give the LORD a grain offering. It should be two quarts
of fine flour mixed with one quart of olive oil. 5Each time you
offer a lamb as a burnt offering or sacrifice, also prepare a
quart of wine as a drink offering.

6"'If you are giving a male sheep, also prepare a grain
offering of four quarts of fine flour mixed with one and one-

fourth quarts of olive oil. 7Also prepare one and one-fourth quarts of wine as a drink offering. Its smell will be pleasing to the LORD.

8"'If you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering or sacrifice, whether it is for a special promise or a fellowship offering to the LORD, 9bring a grain offering with the bull. It should be six quarts of fine flour mixed with two quarts of olive oil. 10Also bring two quarts of wine as a drink offering. This offering is made by fire, and its smell will be pleasing to the LORD. 11Prepare each bull or male sheep, lamb or young goat this way. 12Do this for every one of the animals you bring.

13"'All citizens must do these things in this way, and the smell of their offerings by fire will be pleasing to the LORD. 14From now on if foreigners who live among you want to make offerings by fire so the smell will be pleasing to the LORD, they must offer them the same way you do. 15The law is the same for you and for foreigners, and it will be from now on; you and the foreigners are alike before the LORD. 16The teachings and rules are the same for you and for the foreigners among you.'"

17The LORD said to Moses, 18"Tell the Israelites: 'You are going to another land, where I am taking you. 19When you eat the food there, offer part of it to the LORD. 20Offer a loaf of bread from the first of your grain, which will be your offering from the threshing floor. 21From now on offer to the LORD the first part of your grain.

22"'Now what if you forget to obey any of these commands the LORD gave Moses? 23These are the LORD's commands given to you through Moses, which began the day the LORD gave them to you and will continue from now on. 24If the people forget to obey one of these commands, all the people must offer a young bull as a burnt offering, a smell pleasing to the LORD. By law you must also give the grain offering and the drink offering with it, and you must bring a male goat as a sin offering.

25"'The priest will remove that sin for all the Israelites so they will belong to the LORD. They are forgiven, because they didn't know they were sinning. For the wrong they did they brought offerings to the LORD, an offering by fire and a sin offering. 26So all of the people of Israel and the foreigners living among them will be forgiven. No one meant to do wrong.

27"'If just one person sins without meaning to, a year-old female goat must be brought for a sin offering. 28The priest will remove the sin of the person who sinned accidentally. He will remove it before the LORD, and the person will be forgiven. 29The same teaching is for everyone who sins accidentally—for those born Israelites and for foreigners living among you.

30"'But anyone who sins on purpose is against the LORD and must be cut off from the people, whether it is someone born among you or a foreigner. 31That person has turned against the

LORD's word and has not obeyed his commands. Such a person must surely be cut off from the others. He is guilty.'"

## *A Man Worked on the Sabbath*

32When the Israelites were still in the desert, they found a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. 33Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and all the people. 34They held the man under guard, because they did not know what to do with him. 35Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must surely die. All the people must kill him by throwing stones at him outside the camp." 36So all the people took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses.

## *The Tassels*

37The LORD said to Moses, 38"Speak to the Israelites and tell them this: 'Tie several pieces of thread together and attach them to the corners of your clothes. Put a blue thread in each one of these tassels. Wear them from now on. 39You will have these tassels to look at to remind you of all the LORD's commands. Then you will obey them and not be disloyal by following what your bodies and eyes want. 40Then you will remember to obey all my commands, and you will be God's holy people. 41I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God.'"

## *Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On*

16 Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On turned against Moses. (Korah was the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi; Dathan and Abiram were brothers, the sons of Eliab; and On was the son of Peleth; Dathan, Abiram, and On were from the tribe of Reuben.) 2These men gathered two hundred fifty other Israelite men, well-known leaders chosen by the community, and challenged Moses. 3They came as a group to speak to Moses and Aaron and said, "You have gone too far. All the people are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. So why do you put yourselves above all the people of the LORD?"

4When Moses heard this, he bowed facedown. 5Then he said to Korah and all his followers: "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who belongs to him. He will bring the one who is holy near to him; he will bring to himself the person he chooses. 6So Korah, you and all your followers do this: Get some pans for burning incense. 7Tomorrow put fire and incense in them and take them before the LORD. He will choose the man who is holy.

You Levites have gone too far."

[8]Moses also said to Korah, "Listen, you Levites. [9]The God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelites. He brought you near to himself to do the work in the LORD's Holy Tent and to stand before all the Israelites and serve them. Isn't that enough? [10]He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near to himself, yet now you want to be priests. [11]You and your followers have joined together against the LORD. Your complaint is not against Aaron."

[12]Then Moses called Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come! [13]You have brought us out of a fertile land to this desert to kill us, and now you want to order us around. [14]You haven't brought us into a fertile land; you haven't given us any land with fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? No! We will not come!"

[15]Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, "Don't accept their gifts. I have not taken anything from them, not even a donkey, and I have not done wrong to any of them."

[16]Then Moses said to Korah, "You and all your followers must stand before the LORD tomorrow. And Aaron will stand there with you and them. [17]Each of you must take your pan and put incense in it; present these two hundred fifty pans before the LORD. You and Aaron must also present your pans." [18]So each man got his pan and put burning incense in it and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. [19]Korah gathered all his followers who were against Moses and Aaron, and they stood at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to everyone.

[20]The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, [21]"Move away from these men so I can destroy them quickly."

[22]But Moses and Aaron bowed facedown and cried out, "God, you are the God over the spirits of all people. Please don't be angry with this whole group. Only one man has really sinned."

[23]Then the LORD said to Moses, [24]"Tell everyone to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."

[25]Moses stood and went to Dathan and Abiram; the elders of Israel followed him. [26]Moses warned the people, "Move away from the tents of these evil men! Don't touch anything of theirs, or you will be destroyed because of their sins." [27]So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram were standing outside their tents with their wives, children, and little babies.

[28]Then Moses said, "Now you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things; it was not my idea. [29]If these men die a normal death—the way men usually die—then the LORD did not really send me. [30]But if the LORD does something new, you will know they have insulted the LORD. The ground will open and swallow them. They will be buried alive and will go to

the place of the dead, and everything that belongs to them will go with them."

31When Moses finished saying these things, the ground under the men split open. 32The earth opened and swallowed them and all their families. All Korah's men and everything they owned went down. 33They were buried alive, going to the place of the dead, and everything they owned went with them. Then the earth covered them. They died and were gone from the community. 34The people of Israel around them heard their screams and ran away, saying, "The earth will swallow us, too!"

35Then a fire came down from the LORD and destroyed the two hundred fifty men who had presented the incense.

36The LORD said to Moses, 37"Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, to take all the incense pans out of the fire. Have him scatter the coals a long distance away. But the incense pans are still holy. 38Take the pans of these men who sinned and lost their lives, and hammer them into flat sheets that will be used to cover the altar. They are holy, because they were presented to the LORD, and they will be a sign to the Israelites."

39So Eleazar the priest gathered all the bronze pans that had been brought by the men who were burned up. He had the pans hammered into flat sheets to put on the altar, 40as the LORD had commanded him through Moses. These sheets were to remind the Israelites that only descendants of Aaron should burn incense before the LORD. Anyone else would die like Korah and his followers.

## *Aaron Saves the People*

41The next day all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron and said, "You have killed the LORD's people."

42When the people gathered to complain against Moses and Aaron, they turned toward the Meeting Tent, and the cloud covered it. The glory of the LORD appeared. 43Then Moses and Aaron went in front of the Meeting Tent.

44The LORD said to Moses, 45"Move away from these people so I can destroy them quickly." So Moses and Aaron bowed facedown.

46Then Moses said to Aaron, "Get your pan, and put fire from the altar and incense in it. Hurry to the people and remove their sin. The LORD is angry with them; the sickness has already started." 47So Aaron did as Moses said. He ran to the middle of the people, where the sickness had already started among them. So Aaron offered the incense to remove their sin. 48He stood between the dead and the living, and the sickness stopped there. 49But 14,700 people died from that sickness, in addition to those who died because of Korah. 50Then Aaron went back to Moses at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. The terrible

sickness had been stopped.

## Psalm 32:1–5

### *It Is Better to Confess Sin*

**A maskil of David.**

32 Happy is the person
whose sins are forgiven,
whose wrongs are pardoned.

2Happy is the person
whom the LORD does not consider guilty
and in whom there is nothing false.

3When I kept things to myself,
I felt weak deep inside me.
I moaned all day long.

4Day and night you punished me.
My strength was gone as in the summer heat. *Selah*

5Then I confessed my sins to you
and didn’t hide my guilt.

I said, “I will confess my sins to the LORD,”
and you forgave my guilt. *Selah*

## Proverbs 11:16–18

16A kind woman gets respect,
but cruel men get only wealth.

17 Kind people do themselves a favor,
but cruel people bring trouble on themselves.

18 An evil person really earns nothing,
but a good person will surely be rewarded.

## Mark 11:1–19

### *Jesus Enters Jerusalem as a King*

11 As Jesus and his followers were coming closer to Jerusalem,
they came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany near the
Mount of Olives. From there Jesus sent two of his followers 2 and
said to them, "Go to the town you can see there. When you
enter it, you will quickly find a colt tied, which no one has ever
ridden. Untie it and bring it here to me. 3 If anyone asks you why
you are doing this, tell him its Master needs the colt, and he will
send it at once."

4 The followers went into the town, found a colt tied in the
street near the door of a house, and untied it. 5 Some people
were standing there and asked, "What are you doing? Why are
you untying that colt?" 6 The followers answered the way Jesus
told them to answer, and the people let them take the colt.

7 They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it, and
Jesus sat on it. 8 Many people spread their coats on the road.
Others cut branches in the fields and spread them on the road.
9 The people were walking ahead of Jesus and behind him,
shouting,

"Praise God!

God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Psalm 118:26

10 God bless the kingdom of our father David!
That kingdom is coming!

Praise[n] to God in heaven!"

[11]Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. After he had looked at everything, since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve apostles.

[12]The next day as Jesus was leaving Bethany, he became hungry. [13]Seeing a fig tree in leaf from far away, he went to see if it had any figs on it. But he found no figs, only leaves, because it was not the right season for figs. [14]So Jesus said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And Jesus' followers heard him say this.

## *Jesus Goes to the Temple*

[15]When Jesus returned to Jerusalem, he went into the Temple and began to throw out those who were buying and selling there. He turned over the tables of those who were exchanging different kinds of money, and he upset the benches of those who were selling doves. [16]Jesus refused to allow anyone to carry goods through the Temple courts. [17]Then he taught the people, saying, "It is written in the Scriptures, 'My Temple will be called a house for prayer for people from all nations.'[n] But you are changing God's house into a 'hideout for robbers.'"[n]

[18]The leading priests and the teachers of the law heard all this and began trying to find a way to kill Jesus. They were afraid of him, because all the people were amazed at his teaching. [19]That evening, Jesus and his followers[n] left the city.

# March 10

## The Dungeon of Bitterness

*"When you are praying, if you are angry with someone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven will also forgive your sins."*

Mark 11:25

Bitterness is its own prison. The sides are slippery with resentment. A floor of muddy anger stills the feet. The stench of betrayal fills the air and stings the eyes. A cloud of self-pity blocks the view of the tiny exit above.

Step in and look at the prisoners. Victims are chained to the walls. Victims of betrayal. Victims of abuse.

The dungeon, deep and dark, is beckoning you to enter … You can, you know. You've experienced enough hurt … You can choose, like many, to chain yourself to your hurt … Or you can choose, like some, to put away your hurts before they become hates …

How does God deal with your bitter heart? He reminds you that what you have is more important than what you don't have. You still have your relationship with God. No one can take that.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Numbers 17:1—18:32

### *Aaron's Walking Stick Buds*

17 The LORD said to Moses, 2"Speak to the people of Israel and
get twelve walking sticks from them—one from the leader of
each tribe. Write the name of each man on his stick, and 3on the
stick from Levi, write Aaron's name. There must be one stick for
the head of each tribe. 4Put them in the Meeting Tent in front of
the Ark of the Agreement, where I meet with you. 5I will choose
one man whose walking stick will begin to grow leaves; in this
way I will stop the Israelites from always complaining against
you."

6So Moses spoke to the Israelites. Each of the twelve leaders
gave him a walking stick—one from each tribe—and Aaron's
walking stick was among them. 7Moses put them before the
LORD in the Tent of the Agreement.
8The next day, when Moses entered the Tent, he saw that
Aaron's stick (which stood for the family of Levi) had grown
leaves. It had even budded, blossomed, and produced almonds.
9So Moses brought out to the Israelites all the walking sticks
from the LORD's presence. They all looked, and each man took
back his stick.
10Then the LORD said to Moses, "Put Aaron's walking stick
back in front of the Ark of the Agreement. It will remind these
people who are always turning against me to stop their
complaining against me so they won't die." 11So Moses obeyed
what the LORD commanded him.
12The people of Israel said to Moses, "We are going to die!
We are destroyed. We are all destroyed! 13Anyone who even
comes near the Holy Tent of the LORD will die. Will we all die?"

## *The Work of the Priests and Levites*

18 The LORD said to Aaron, "You, your sons, and your family are
now responsible for any wrongs done against the Holy Place;
you and your sons are responsible for any wrongs done against
the priests. 2Bring with you your fellow Levites from your tribe,
and they will help you and your sons serve in the Tent of the
Agreement. 3They are under your control, to do all the work
that needs to be done in the Tent. But they must not go near the
things in the Holy Place or near the altar. If they do, both you
and they will die. 4They will join you in taking care of the
Meeting Tent. They must do the work at the Tent, and no one
else may come near you.
5"You must take care of the Holy Place and the altar so that I
won't become angry with the Israelites again. 6I myself chose
your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift given for
you to the LORD, to work at the Meeting Tent. 7But only you and
your sons may serve as priests. Only you may serve at the altar
or go behind the curtain. I am giving you this gift of serving as a
priest, and anyone else who comes near the Holy Place will be
put to death."
8Then the LORD said to Aaron, "I myself make you responsible
for the offerings given to me. All the holy offerings that the
Israelites give to me, I give to you and your sons as your share,
your continual portion. 9Your share of the holy offerings is that
part which is not burned. When the people bring me gifts as
most holy offerings, whether they are grain or sin or penalty
offerings, they will be set apart for you and your sons. 10You
must eat the offering in a most holy place. Any male may eat it,

but you must respect it as holy.

11 “I also give you the offerings the Israelites present to me. I
give these to you and your sons and daughters as your continual
share. Anyone in your family who is clean may eat it.

12 “And I give you all the best olive oil and all the best new
wine and grain. This is what the Israelites give to me, the LORD,
from the first crops they harvest. 13 When they bring to the LORD
all the first things they harvest, they will be yours. Anyone in
your family who is clean may eat these things.

14 “Everything in Israel that is given to the LORD is yours.
15 The first one born to any family, whether people or animals,
will be offered to the LORD. And that will be yours. But you must
make a payment for every firstborn child and every firstborn
animal that is unclean. 16 When they are one month old, you
must make a payment for them of two ounces of silver, as set by
the Holy Place measure.

17 “But you must not make a payment for the firstborn ox or
sheep or goat. Those animals are holy. Sprinkle their blood on
the altar and burn their fat as an offering made by fire. The
smell is pleasing to the LORD. 18 But the meat will be yours, just
as the breast that is presented and the right thigh will be yours.
19 Anything the Israelites present as holy gifts I, the LORD, give to
you, your sons and daughters as your continual portion. This is
a lasting agreement of salt[n] before the LORD for you and your
children forever.”

20 The LORD also said to Aaron, “You will not inherit any of the
land, and you will not own any land among the other people. I
will be yours. Out of all the Israelites, only you will inherit me.

21 “When the people of Israel give me a tenth of what they
make, I will give that tenth to the Levites. This is their payment
for the work they do serving at the Meeting Tent. 22 But the
other Israelites must never go near the Meeting Tent, or they
will die for their sin. 23 Only the Levites should work in the
Meeting Tent and be responsible for any sins against it. This is a
rule from now on. The Levites will not inherit any land among
the other Israelites, 24 but when the Israelites give a tenth of
everything they make to me, I will give that tenth to the Levites
as a reward. That is why I said about the Levites: ‘They will not
inherit any land among the Israelites.’”

25 The LORD said to Moses, 26 “Speak to the Levites and tell
them: ‘You will receive a tenth of everything the Israelites
make, which I will give to you. But you must give a tenth of that
back to the LORD. 27 I will accept your offering just as much as I
accept the offerings from others, who give new grain or new
wine. 28 In this way you will present an offering to the LORD as
the other Israelites do. When you receive a tenth from the
Israelites, you will give a tenth of that to Aaron, the priest, as
the LORD’s share. 29 Choose the best and holiest part from what

you are given as the portion you must give to the LORD.'
30"Say to the Levites: 'When you present the best, it will be
accepted as much as the grain and wine from the other people.
31You and your families may eat all that is left anywhere,
because it is your pay for your work in the Meeting Tent. 32And
if you always give the best part to the LORD, you will never be
guilty. If you do not sin against the holy offerings of the
Israelites, you will not die.'"

## Psalm 32:6–11

6For this reason, all who obey you
should pray to you while they still can.

When troubles rise like a flood,
they will not reach them.

7You are my hiding place.
You protect me from my troubles
and fill me with songs of salvation. *Selah*

8The LORD says, "I will make you wise and show you where to
go.
I will guide you and watch over you.

9So don't be like a horse or donkey,
that doesn't understand.

They must be led with bits and reins,
or they will not come near you."

10Wicked people have many troubles,
but the LORD's love surrounds those who trust him.

11Good people, rejoice and be happy in the LORD.
Sing all you whose hearts are right.

## Proverbs 11:19–21

19 Those who are truly good will live,
but those who chase after evil will die.

20 The LORD hates those with evil hearts
but is pleased with those who are innocent.

21 Evil people will certainly be punished,
but those who do right will be set free.

## Mark 11:20–33

### *The Power of Faith*

20 The next morning as Jesus was passing by with his
followers, they saw the fig tree dry and dead, even to the roots.
21 Peter remembered the tree and said to Jesus, “Teacher, look!
The fig tree you cursed is dry and dead!”
22 Jesus answered, “Have faith in God. 23 I tell you the truth,
you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, fall into the sea.’ And if you
have no doubts in your mind and believe that what you say will
happen, God will do it for you. 24 So I tell you to believe that you
have received the things you ask for in prayer, and God will give
them to you. 25 When you are praying, if you are angry with
someone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven will also
forgive your sins. [26 But if you don’t forgive other people, then
your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins.]”[n]

### *Leaders Doubt Jesus’ Authority*

27 Jesus and his followers went again to Jerusalem. As Jesus
was walking in the Temple, the leading priests, the teachers of
the law, and the elders came to him. 28 They said to him, “What
authority do you have to do these things? Who gave you this
authority?”
29 Jesus answered, “I will ask you one question. If you answer
me, I will tell you what authority I have to do these things.

[30]Tell me: When John baptized people, was that authority from God or just from other people?”

[31]They argued about Jesus’ question, saying, “If we answer, ‘John’s baptism was from God,’ Jesus will say, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ [32]But if we say, ‘It was from other people,’ the crowd will be against us.” (These leaders were afraid of the people, because all the people believed that John was a prophet.)

[33]So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Jesus said to them, “Then I won’t tell you what authority I have to do these things.”

# March 11

## In a Word

*He loves what is right and fair; the* LORD*'s love fills the earth.*

Psalm 33:5

Think for a moment about this question: What if God weren't here on earth? You think people can be cruel now, imagine us without the presence of God. You think we are brutal to each other now, imagine the world without the Holy Spirit. You think there is loneliness and despair and guilt now, imagine life without the touch of Jesus. No forgiveness. No hope. No acts of kindness. No words of love. No more food given in his name. No more songs sung to his praise. No more deeds done in his honor. If God took away his angels, his grace, his promise of eternity, and his servants, what would the world be like?

In a word, hell.

from *Just Like Jesus*

### Numbers 19:1—20:29

#### *The Offering for Cleansing*

19 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 2"These are the teachings
that the LORD commanded. Tell the Israelites to get a young red
cow that does not have anything wrong with it and that has
never been worked. 3Give the cow to Eleazar the priest; he will
take it outside the camp and kill it. 4Then Eleazar the priest
must put some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven
times toward the front of the Meeting Tent. 5The whole cow
must be burned while he watches; the skin, the meat, the blood,
and the intestines must all be burned. 6Then the priest must
take a cedar stick, a hyssop branch, and a red string and throw
them onto the burning cow. 7After the priest has washed himself
and his clothes with water, he may come back into the camp,
but he will be unclean until evening. 8The man who burns the

cow must wash himself and his clothes in water; he will be unclean until evening.

9 “Then someone who is clean will collect the ashes from the cow and put them in a clean place outside the camp. The Israelites will keep these ashes to use in the cleansing water, in a special ceremony to cleanse away sin. 10 The man who collected the cow’s ashes must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. This is a lasting rule for the Israelites and for the foreigners among them.

11 “Those who touch a dead person’s body will be unclean for seven days. 12 They must wash themselves with the cleansing water on the third day and on the seventh day; then they will be clean. But if they do not wash themselves on the third day and the seventh day, they cannot be clean. 13 If those who touch a dead person’s body stay unclean and go to the LORD’s Holy Tent, it becomes unclean; they must be cut off from Israel. If the cleansing water is not sprinkled on them, they are unclean and will stay unclean.

14 “This is the teaching about someone who dies in a tent: Anyone in the tent or anyone who enters it will be unclean for seven days. 15 And every open jar or pot without a cover becomes unclean. 16 If anyone is outside and touches someone who was killed by a sword or who died a natural death, or if anyone touches a human bone or a grave, that person will be unclean for seven days.

17 “So you must use the ashes from the burnt offering to make that person clean again. Pour fresh water over the ashes into a jar. 18 A clean person must take a hyssop branch and dip it into the water, and then he must sprinkle it over the tent and all its objects. He must also sprinkle the people who were there, as well as anyone who touched a bone, or the body of someone who was killed, or a dead person, or a grave. 19 The person who is clean must sprinkle this water on the unclean people on the third day and on the seventh day. On the seventh day they will become clean. They must wash their clothes and take a bath, and they will be clean that evening. 20 If any who are unclean do not become clean, they must be cut off from the community. Since they were not sprinkled with the cleansing water, they stay unclean, and they could make the LORD’s Holy Tent unclean. 21 This is a lasting rule. Those who sprinkle the cleansing water must also wash their clothes, and anyone who touches the water will be unclean until evening. 22 Anything an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and whoever touches it will be unclean until evening.”

## *Moses Disobeys God*

20 In the first month all the people of Israel arrived at the

Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. 2There was no water for the people, so they came together against Moses and Aaron. 3They argued with Moses and said, “We should have died in front of the LORD as our brothers did. 4Why did you bring the LORD’s people into this desert? Are we and our animals to die here? 5Why did you bring us from Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain, figs, grapevines, or pomegranates, and there’s no water to drink!”

6So Moses and Aaron left the people and went to the entrance of the Meeting Tent. There they bowed facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. 7The LORD said to Moses, 8“Take your walking stick, and you and your brother Aaron should gather the people. Speak to that rock in front of them so that its water will flow from it. When you bring the water out from that rock, give it to the people and their animals.”

9So Moses took the stick from in front of the LORD, as he had said. 10Moses and Aaron gathered the people in front of the rock, and Moses said, “Now listen to me, you who turn against God! Do you want us to bring water out of this rock?” 11Then Moses lifted his hand and hit the rock twice with his stick. Water began pouring out, and the people and their animals drank it.

12But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe me, and because you did not honor me as holy before the people, you will not lead them into the land I will give them.”

13These are the waters of Meribah,[n] where the Israelites argued with the LORD and where he showed them he was holy.

## *Edom Will Not Let Israel Pass*

14From Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom. He said, “Your brothers, the Israelites, say to you: You know about all the troubles we have had, 15how our ancestors went down into Egypt and we lived there for many years. The people of Egypt were cruel to us and our ancestors, 16but when we cried out to the LORD, he heard us and sent us an angel to bring us out of Egypt.

“Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your land. 17Please let us pass through your country. We will not touch any fields of grain or vineyards, and will not drink water from the wells. We will travel only along the king’s road, not turning right or left until we have passed through your country.”

18But the king of Edom answered: “You may not pass through here. If you try, I will come and meet you with swords.”

19The Israelites answered: “We will go along the main road, and if we or our animals drink any of your water, we will pay for

it. We only want to walk through. That's all."
20But he answered: "You may not pass through here."
Then the Edomites went out to meet the Israelites with a large and powerful army. 21The Edomites refused to let them pass through their country, so the Israelites turned back.

### *Aaron Dies*

22All the Israelites moved from Kadesh to Mount Hor, 23near the border of Edom. There the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 24"Aaron will die. He will not enter the land that I'm giving to the Israelites, because you both acted against my command at the waters of Meribah. 25Take Aaron and his son Eleazar up on Mount Hor, 26and take off Aaron's special clothes and put them on his son Eleazar. Aaron will die there; he will join his ancestors."
27Moses obeyed the LORD's command. They climbed up Mount Hor, and all the people saw them go. 28Moses took off Aaron's clothes and put them on Aaron's son Eleazar. Then Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Moses and Eleazar came back down the mountain, 29and when all the people learned that Aaron was dead, everyone in Israel cried for him for thirty days.

## Psalm 33:1–5

### *Praise God Who Creates and Saves*

33 Sing to the LORD, you who do what is right;
honest people should praise him.

2Praise the LORD on the harp;
make music for him on a ten-stringed lyre.

3Sing a new song to him;
play well and joyfully.

4God's word is true,
and everything he does is right.

5 He loves what is right and fair;
the LORD's love fills the earth.

## Proverbs 11:22–23

22 A beautiful woman without good sense
is like a gold ring in a pig's snout.

23 Those who do right only wish for good,
but the wicked can expect to be defeated by God's anger.

## Mark 12:1–27

### *A Story About God's Son*

12 Jesus began to use stories to teach the people. He said, "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it and dug a hole for a winepress and built a tower. Then he leased the land to some farmers and left for a trip. 2 When it was time for the grapes to be picked, he sent a servant to the farmers to get his share of the grapes. 3 But the farmers grabbed the servant and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Then the man sent another servant. They hit him on the head and showed no respect for him. 5 So the man sent another servant, whom they killed. The man sent many other servants; the farmers beat some of them and killed others.

6 "The man had one person left to send, his son whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

7 "But the farmers said to each other, 'This son will inherit the vineyard. If we kill him, it will be ours.' 8 So they took the son, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

9 "So what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those farmers and will give the vineyard to other farmers. 10 Surely you have read this Scripture:

'The stone that the builders rejected
became the cornerstone.

[11]The Lord did this,
and it is wonderful to us.'"

Psalm 118:22–23

[12]The Jewish leaders knew that the story was about them. So they wanted to find a way to arrest Jesus, but they were afraid of the people. So the leaders left him and went away.

## *Is It Right to Pay Taxes or Not?*

[13]Later, the Jewish leaders sent some Pharisees and Herodians[n] to Jesus to trap him in saying something wrong. [14]They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are an honest man. You are not afraid of what other people think about you, because you pay no attention to who they are. And you teach the truth about God's way. Tell us: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? [15]Should we pay them, or not?"

But knowing what these men were really trying to do, Jesus said to them, "Why are you trying to trap me? Bring me a coin to look at." [16]They gave Jesus a coin, and he asked, "Whose image and name are on the coin?"

They answered, "Caesar's."

[17]Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's." The men were amazed at what Jesus said.

## *Some Sadducees Try to Trick Jesus*

[18]Then some Sadducees came to Jesus and asked him a question. (Sadducees believed that people would not rise from the dead.) [19]They said, "Teacher, Moses wrote that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, then that man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. [20]Once there were seven brothers. The first brother married and died, leaving no children. [21]So the second brother married the widow, but he also died and had no children. The same thing happened with the third brother. [22]All seven brothers married her and died, and none of the brothers had any children. Finally the woman died too. [23]Since all seven brothers had married her, when people rise from the dead, whose wife will she be?"

[24]Jesus answered, "Why don't you understand? Don't you know what the Scriptures say, and don't you know about the power of God? [25]When people rise from the dead, they will not marry, nor will they be given to someone to marry. They will be like the angels in heaven. [26]Surely you have read what God said about people rising from the dead. In the book in which Moses wrote about the burning bush,[n] it says that God told Moses, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of

Jacob.’[n] 27God is the God of the living, not the dead. You Sadducees are wrong!”

# March 12

## The Purpose of Life

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength."*

Mark 12:30

mine deep enough in every heart and you'll find it: a longing for meaning, a quest for purpose. As surely as a child breathes, he will someday wonder, "What is the purpose of my life?"

Some search for meaning in a career. "My purpose is to be a dentist." Fine vocation but hardly a justification for existence. They opt to be a human "doing" rather than a human "being." Who they are is what they do; consequently they do a lot. They work many hours because if they don't work, they don't have an identity.

For others, who they are is what they have. They find meaning in a new car or a new house or new clothes. These people are great for the economy and rough on the budget because they are always seeking meaning in something they own … Some try sports, entertainment, cults, sex, you name it.

All mirages in the desert of purpose …

Shouldn't we face the truth? If we don't acknowledge God, we are flotsam in the universe.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

## Numbers 21:1—22:41

### *War with the Canaanites*

21 The Canaanite king of Arad lived in the southern area. When
he heard that the Israelites were coming on the road to
Atharim, he attacked them and captured some of them. 2Then
the Israelites made this promise to the LORD: "If you will help us
defeat these people, we will completely destroy their cities."
3The LORD listened to the Israelites, and he let them defeat the

Canaanites. The Israelites completely destroyed the Canaanites and their cities, so the place was named Hormah.[n]

## *The Bronze Snake*

4The Israelites left Mount Hor and went on the road toward
the Red Sea, in order to go around the country of Edom. But the
people became impatient on the way 5and grumbled at God and
Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in
this desert? There is no bread and no water, and we hate this
terrible food!"
6So the LORD sent them poisonous snakes; they bit the
people, and many of the Israelites died. 7The people came to
Moses and said, "We sinned when we grumbled at you and the
LORD. Pray that the LORD will take away these snakes." So Moses
prayed for the people.
8The LORD said to Moses, "Make a bronze snake, and put it
on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, that person
will live." 9So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole.
Then when a snake bit anyone, that person looked at the bronze
snake and lived.

## *The Journey to Moab*

10The Israelites went and camped at Oboth. 11They went
from Oboth to Iye Abarim, in the desert east of Moab. 12From
there they went and camped in the Zered Valley. 13From there
they went and camped across the Arnon, in the desert just
inside the Amorite country. The Arnon is the border between
the Moabites and the Amorites. 14That is why the Book of the
Wars of the LORD says:

"... and Waheb in Suphah, and the ravines,
the Arnon, 15and the slopes of the ravines

that lead to the settlement of Ar.
These places are at the border of Moab."

16The Israelites went from there to Beer; a well is there
where the LORD said to Moses, "Gather the people and I will give
them water."
17Then the Israelites sang this song:

"Pour out water, well!

Sing about it.

[18]Princes dug this well.
Important men made it.
With their scepters and poles, they dug it.”

The people went from the desert to Mattanah. [19]From Mattanah they went to Nahaliel and on to Bamoth. [20]From Bamoth they went to the valley of Moab where the top of Mount Pisgah looks over the desert.

## *Israel Kills Sihon and Og*

[21]The Israelites sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, saying, [22]“Let us pass through your country. We will not go through any fields of grain or vineyards, or drink water from the wells. We will travel only along the king’s road until we have passed through your country.”

[23]But King Sihon would not let the Israelites pass through his country. He gathered his whole army together, and they marched out to meet Israel in the desert. At Jahaz they fought the Israelites. [24]Israel killed the king and captured his land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River. They took the land as far as the Ammonite border, which was strongly defended. [25]Israel captured all the Amorite cities and lived in them, taking Heshbon and all the towns around it. [26]Heshbon was the city where Sihon, the Amorite king, lived. In the past he had fought with the king of Moab and had taken all the land as far as the Arnon.

[27]That is why the poets say:

“Come to Heshbon
and rebuild it;
rebuild Sihon’s city.

[28]A fire began in Heshbon;
flames came from Sihon’s city.

It destroyed Ar in Moab,
and it burned the Arnon highlands.

[29]How terrible for you, Moab!
The people of Chemosh are ruined.

His sons ran away
and his daughters were captured
by Sihon, king of the Amorites.

30 But we defeated those Amorites.
We ruined their towns from Heshbon to Dibon,
and we destroyed them as far as Nophah, near Medeba."

31 So Israel lived in the land of the Amorites.
32 After Moses sent spies to the town of Jazer, they captured the towns around it, forcing out the Amorites who lived there.
33 Then the Israelites went up the road toward Bashan. Og king of Bashan and his whole army marched out to meet the Israelites, and they fought at Edrei.
34 The LORD said to Moses, "Don't be afraid of him. I will hand him, his whole army, and his land over to you. Do to him what you did to Sihon, the Amorite king who lived in Heshbon."
35 So the Israelites killed Og and his sons and all his army; no one was left alive. And they took his land.

## *Balak Sends for Balaam*

22 Then the people of Israel went to the plains of Moab, and they camped near the Jordan River across from Jericho.
2 Balak son of Zippor saw everything the Israelites had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was scared of so many Israelites; truly, Moab was terrified by them.
4 The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "These people will take everything around us like an ox eating grass."
Balak son of Zippor was the king of Moab at this time. 5 He sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor at Pethor, near the Euphrates River in his native land. Balak said, "A nation has come out of Egypt that covers the land. They have camped next to me, 6 and they are too powerful for me. So come and put a curse on them. Maybe then I can defeat them and make them leave the area. I know that if you bless someone, the blessings happen, and if you put a curse on someone, it happens."
7 The elders of Moab and Midian went with payment in their hands. When they found Balaam, they told him what Balak had said.
8 Balaam said to them, "Stay here for the night, and I will tell you what the LORD tells me." So the Moabite leaders stayed with him.
9 God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?"
10 Balaam said to God, "The king of Moab, Balak son of Zippor, sent them to me with this message: 11 'A nation has come

out of Egypt that covers the land. So come and put a curse on them, and maybe I can fight them and force them out of my land.'"

12But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. Don't put a curse on those people, because I have blessed them."

13The next morning Balaam awoke and said to Balak's leaders, "Go back to your own country; the LORD has refused to let me go with you."

14So the Moabite leaders went back to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

15So Balak sent other leaders—this time there were more of them, and they were more important. 16They went to Balaam and said, "Balak son of Zippor says this: Please don't let anything stop you from coming to me. 17I will pay you very well, and I will do what you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me."

18But Balaam answered Balak's servants, "King Balak could give me his palace full of silver and gold, but I cannot disobey the LORD my God in anything, great or small. 19You stay here tonight as the other men did, and I will find out what more the LORD tells me."

20That night God came to Balaam and said, "These men have come to ask you to go with them. Go, but only do what I tell you."

## *Balaam's Donkey Speaks*

21Balaam got up the next morning and put a saddle on his donkey. Then he went with the Moabite leaders. 22But God became angry because Balaam went, so the angel of the LORD stood in the road to stop Balaam. Balaam was riding his donkey, and he had two servants with him. 23When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a sword in his hand, the donkey left the road and went into the field. Balaam hit the donkey to force her back on the road.

24Later, the angel of the LORD stood on a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. 25Again the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, and she walked close to one wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he hit her again.

26The angel of the LORD went ahead again and stood at a narrow place, too narrow to turn left or right. 27When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam. This made him so angry that he hit her with his stick. 28Then the LORD made the donkey talk, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to make you hit me three times?"

29Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made me look foolish! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!"

30But the donkey said to Balaam, “I am your very own
donkey, which you have ridden for years. Have I ever done this
to you before?”
“No,” Balaam said.
31Then the LORD let Balaam see the angel of the LORD, who
was standing in the road with his sword drawn. Then Balaam
bowed facedown on the ground.
32The angel of the LORD asked Balaam, “Why have you hit
your donkey three times? I have stood here to stop you, because
what you are doing is wrong. 33The donkey saw me and turned
away from me three times. If she had not turned away, I would
have killed you by now, but I would have let her live.”
34Then Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, “I have sinned; I
did not know you were standing in the road to stop me. If I am
wrong, I will go back.”
35The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, “Go with these men,
but say only what I tell you.” So Balaam went with Balak’s
leaders.
36When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to
meet him at Ar in Moab, which was beside the Arnon, at the
edge of his country. 37Balak said to Balaam, “I had asked you
before to come quickly. Why didn’t you come to me? I am able
to reward you well.”
38But Balaam answered, “I have come to you now, but I can’t
say just anything. I can only say what God tells me to say.”
39Then Balaam went with Balak to Kiriath Huzoth. 40Balak
offered cattle and sheep as a sacrifice and gave some meat to
Balaam and the leaders with him.
41The next morning Balak took Balaam to Bamoth Baal; from
there he could see the edge of the Israelite camp.

## Psalm 33:6–15

6The sky was made at the LORD’s command.
By the breath from his mouth, he made all the stars.

7He gathered the water of the sea into a heap.
He made the great ocean stay in its place.

8All the earth should worship the LORD;
the whole world should fear him.

9 He spoke, and it happened.
He commanded, and it appeared.

10 The LORD upsets the plans of nations;
he ruins all their plans.

11 But the LORD's plans will stand forever;
his ideas will last from now on.

12 Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he chose for his very own.

13 The LORD looks down from heaven
and sees every person.

14 From his throne he watches
all who live on earth.

15 He made their hearts
and understands everything they do.

## Proverbs 11:24–26

24 Some people give much but get back even more.
Others don't give what they should and end up poor.

25 Whoever gives to others will get richer;
those who help others will themselves be helped.

26 People curse those who keep all the grain,
but they bless the one who is willing to sell it.

## Mark 12:28–44

## *The Most Important Command*

[28]One of the teachers of the law came and heard Jesus
arguing with the Sadducees. Seeing that Jesus gave good
answers to their questions, he asked Jesus, “Which of the
commands is most important?”
[29]Jesus answered, “The most important command is this:
‘Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord.
[30]Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all
your mind, and all your strength.’[n] [31]The second command is
this: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’[n] There are no
commands more important than these.”
[32]The man answered, “That was a good answer, Teacher. You
were right when you said God is the only Lord and there is no
other God besides him. [33]One must love God with all his heart,
all his mind, and all his strength. And one must love his
neighbor as he loves himself. These commands are more
important than all the animals and sacrifices we offer to God.”
[34]When Jesus saw that the man answered him wisely, Jesus
said to him, “You are close to the kingdom of God.” And after
that, no one was brave enough to ask Jesus any more questions.
[35]As Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he asked, “Why do
the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David?
[36]David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, said:

‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit by me at my right side,
until I put your enemies under your control.”’

Psalm 110:1

[37]David himself calls the Christ ‘Lord,’ so how can the Christ be
his son?” The large crowd listened to Jesus with pleasure.
[38]Jesus continued teaching and said, “Beware of the teachers
of the law. They like to walk around wearing fancy clothes, and
they love for people to greet them with respect in the
marketplaces. [39]They love to have the most important seats in
the synagogues and at feasts. [40]But they cheat widows and steal
their houses and then try to make themselves look good by
saying long prayers. They will receive a greater punishment.”

## *True Giving*

41 Jesus sat near the Temple money box and watched the
people put in their money. Many rich people gave large sums of
money. 42 Then a poor widow came and put in two small copper
coins, which were only worth a few cents.
43 Calling his followers to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the
truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people.
44 They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very
poor, but she gave all she had; she gave all she had to live on.”

# March 13

## Endure to the End

*"Those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved."*

Mark 13:13

Are you close to quitting? Please don't do it. Are you discouraged as a parent? Hang in there. Are you weary with doing good? Do just a little more. Are you pessimistic about your job? Roll up your sleeves and go at it again. No communication in your marriage? Give it one more shot …

Remember, a finisher is not one with no wounds or weariness. Quite to the contrary, he, like the boxer, is scarred and bloody. Mother Teresa is credited with saying, "God didn't call us to be successful, just faithful." The fighter, like our Master, is pierced and full of pain. He, like Paul, may even be bound and beaten. But he remains.

The Land of Promise, says Jesus, awaits those who endure. It is not just for those who make the victory laps or drink champagne. No sir. The Land of Promise is for those who simply remain to the end.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Numbers 23:1—24:25

#### *Balaam's First Message*

23 Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and
prepare seven bulls and seven male sheep for me." 2Balak did
what Balaam asked, and they offered a bull and a male sheep on
each of the altars.

3Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your burnt
offering and I will go. If the LORD comes to me, I will tell you
whatever he shows me." Then Balaam went to a higher place.

4God came to Balaam there, and Balaam said to him, "I have
prepared seven altars, and I have offered a bull and a male

sheep on each altar."
5The LORD told Balaam what he should say. Then the LORD said, "Go back to Balak and give him this message."
6So Balaam went back to Balak. Balak and all the leaders of Moab were still standing beside his burnt offering 7when Balaam gave them this message:

"Balak brought me here from Aram;
the king of Moab brought me from the eastern mountains.

Balak said, 'Come, put a curse on the people of Jacob for me.
Come, call down evil on the people of Israel.'

8But God has not cursed them,
so I cannot curse them.

The LORD has not called down evil on them,
so I cannot call down evil on them.

9I see them from the top of the mountains;
I see them from the hills.

I see a people who live alone,
who think they are different from other nations.

10No one can number the many people of Jacob,
and no one can count a fourth of Israel.

Let me die like good men,
and let me end up like them!"

11Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I brought you here to curse my enemies, but you have only blessed them!"
12But Balaam answered, "I must say what the LORD tells me to say."

## *Balaam's Second Message*

13 Then Balak said to him, “Come with me to another place,
where you can also see the people. But you can only see part of
them, not all of them. Curse them for me from there.” 14 So
Balak took Balaam to the field of Zophim, on top of Mount
Pisgah. There Balak built seven altars and offered a bull and a
male sheep on each altar.
15 So Balaam said to Balak, “Stay here by your burnt offering,
and I will meet with God over there.”
16 So the LORD came to Balaam and told him what to say. Then
he said, “Go back to Balak and say such and such.”
17 So Balaam went to Balak, where he and the leaders of
Moab were standing beside his burnt offering. Balak asked him,
“What did the LORD say?”
18 Then Balaam gave this message:

“Stand up, Balak, and listen.
Hear me, son of Zippor.

19 God is not a human being, and he will not lie.
He is not a human, and he does not change his mind.

What he says he will do, he does.
What he promises, he makes come true.

20 He told me to bless them,
so I cannot change the blessing.

21 He has found no wrong in the people of Jacob;
he saw no fault in Israel.

The LORD their God is with them,
and they praise their King.

22 God brought them out of Egypt;
they are as strong as a wild ox.

23 No tricks will work on the people of Jacob,
and no magic will work against Israel.

People now say about them,
'Look what God has done for Israel!'

24 The people rise up like a lioness;
they get up like a lion.

Lions don't rest until they have eaten,
until they have drunk their enemies' blood."

25 Then Balak said to Balaam, "You haven't cursed these people, so at least don't bless them!"
26 Balaam answered Balak, "I told you before that I can only do what the LORD tells me."

## *Balaam's Third Message*

27 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Come, I will take you to another place. Maybe God will be pleased to let you curse them from there." 28 So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, the mountain that looks over the desert.
29 Balaam told Balak, "Build me seven altars here and prepare for me seven bulls and seven male sheep." 30 Balak did what Balaam asked, and he offered a bull and a male sheep on each altar.
24 Balaam saw that the LORD wanted to bless Israel, so he did not try to use any magic but looked toward the desert. 2 When Balaam saw the Israelites camped in their tribes, the Spirit of God took control of him, 3 and he gave this message:

"This is the message of Balaam son of Beor,
the message of a man who sees clearly;

4 this is the message of a man who hears the words of God.
I see a vision from the Almighty,
and my eyes are open as I fall before him.

5 Your tents are beautiful, people of Jacob!
So are your homes, Israel!

6 Your tents spread out like valleys,
like gardens beside a river.

They are like spices planted by the LORD,
like cedar trees growing by the water.

7 Israel's water buckets will always be full,
and their crops will have plenty of water.

Their king will be greater than Agag;
their kingdom will be very great.

8 God brought them out of Egypt;
they are as strong as a wild ox.

They will defeat their enemies
and break their enemies' bones;
they will shoot them with arrows.

9 Like a lion, they lie waiting to attack;
like a lioness, no one would be brave enough to wake them.

Anyone who blesses you will be blessed,
and anyone who curses you will be cursed."

10 Then Balak was angry with Balaam, and he pounded his fist. He said to Balaam, "I called you here to curse my enemies, but you have continued to bless them three times. 11 Now go home! I said I would pay you well, but the LORD has made you lose your reward."

12 Balaam said to Balak, "When you sent messengers to me, I told them, 13 'Balak could give me his palace filled with silver and gold, but I still cannot go against the LORD's commands. I could not do anything, good or bad, on my own, but I must say what the LORD says.' 14 Now I am going back to my own people, but I will tell you what these people will do to your people in the future."

## *Balaam's Final Message*

15 Then Balaam gave this message:

“This is the message of Balaam son of Beor,
the message of a man who sees clearly;

16 this is the message of a man who hears the words of God.
I know well the Most High God.

I see a vision from the Almighty,
and my eyes are open as I fall before him.

17 I see someone who will come someday,
someone who will come, but not soon.

A star will come from Jacob;
a ruler will rise from Israel.

He will crush the heads of the Moabites
and smash the skulls of the sons of Sheth.

18 Edom will be conquered;
his enemy Edom will be conquered,
but Israel will grow wealthy.

19 A ruler will come from the descendants of Jacob
and will destroy those left in the city.”

20 Then Balaam saw Amalek and gave this message:

“Amalek was the most important nation,
but Amalek will be destroyed at last.”

21 Then Balaam saw the Kenites and gave this message:

“Your home is safe,
like a nest on a cliff.

22 But you Kenites will be burned up;
Assyria will keep you captive.”

23 Then Balaam gave this message:

“No one can live when God does this.

24
Ships will sail from the shores of Cyprus
and defeat Assyria and Eber,
but they will also be destroyed.”

25 Then Balaam got up and returned home, and Balak also went on his way.

## Psalm 33:16–22

16 No king is saved by his great army.
No warrior escapes by his great strength.

17 Horses can’t bring victory;
they can’t save by their strength.

18 But the LORD looks after those who fear him,
those who put their hope in his love.

19 He saves them from death
and spares their lives in times of hunger.

20 So our hope is in the LORD.
He is our help, our shield to protect us.

21 We rejoice in him,
because we trust his holy name.

22 LORD, show your love to us
as we put our hope in you.

## Proverbs 11:27

27 Whoever looks for good will find kindness,
but whoever looks for evil will find trouble.

## Mark 13:1–27

### *The Temple Will Be Destroyed*

13 As Jesus was leaving the Temple, one of his followers said to
him, “Look, Teacher! How beautiful the buildings are! How big
the stones are!”

2 Jesus said, “Do you see all these great buildings? Not one
stone will be left on another. Every stone will be thrown down to
the ground.”

3 Later, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, opposite
the Temple, he was alone with Peter, James, John, and Andrew.
They asked Jesus, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And
what will be the sign that they are going to happen?”

5 Jesus began to answer them, “Be careful that no one fools
you. 6 Many people will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the
One,’ and they will fool many people. 7 When you hear about
wars and stories of wars that are coming, don’t be afraid. These
things must happen before the end comes. 8 Nations will fight
against other nations, and kingdoms against other kingdoms.
There will be earthquakes in different places, and there will be
times when there is no food for people to eat. These things are
like the first pains when something new is about to be born.

9 “You must be careful. People will arrest you and take you to
court and beat you in their synagogues. You will be forced to
stand before kings and governors, to tell them about me. This
will happen to you because you follow me. 10 But before these
things happen, the Good News must be told to all people.
11 When you are arrested and judged, don’t worry ahead of time
about what you should say. Say whatever is given you to say at
that time, because it will not really be you speaking; it will be
the Holy Spirit.

12 “Brothers will give their own brothers to be killed, and
fathers will give their own children to be killed. Children will
fight against their own parents and cause them to be put to
death. 13 All people will hate you because you follow me, but

those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved.
14"You will see 'a blasphemous object that brings destruction'[n] standing where it should not be." (You who read this should understand what it means.) "At that time, the people in Judea should run away to the mountains. 15If people are on the roofs[n] of their houses, they must not go down or go inside to get anything out of their houses. 16If people are in the fields, they must not go back to get their coats. 17At that time, how terrible it will be for women who are pregnant or have nursing babies! 18Pray that these things will not happen in winter, 19because those days will be full of trouble. There will be more trouble than there has ever been since the beginning, when God made the world, until now, and nothing as bad will ever happen again. 20God has decided to make that terrible time short. Otherwise, no one would go on living. But God will make that time short to help the people he has chosen. 21At that time, someone might say to you, 'Look, there is the Christ!' Or another person might say, 'There he is!' But don't believe them. 22False Christs and false prophets will come and perform great wonders and miracles. They will try to fool even the people God has chosen, if that is possible. 23So be careful. I have warned you about all this before it happens.
24"During the days after this trouble comes,

'the sun will grow dark,
and the moon will not give its light.

25The stars will fall from the sky.
And the powers of the heavens will be shaken.'

Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

26"Then people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27Then he will send his angels all around the earth to gather his chosen people from every part of the earth and from every part of heaven.

# March 14

## God's Mighty Angels

*The angel of the* LORD *camps around those who fear God, and he saves them.*

Psalm 34:7

chiffon wings and meringue sweetness? Perhaps for angels in the gift books and specialty shops, but God's angels are marked by indescribable strength. Paul says Christ will come with his mighty angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7). From the word translated *mighty,* we have the English word dynamic. Angels pack dynamic force. It took only one angel to slay the firstborn of Egypt and only one angel to close the mouths of the lions to protect Daniel. David called angels "mighty warriors who do what he says and who obey his voice" (Psalm 103:20).

No need for you to talk to angels; they won't listen. Their ears incline only to God's voice. They are "spirits who serve God," responding to his command and following only his directions (Hebrews 1:14). Jesus said they "are always with my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). Only one sound matters to angels—God's voice.

from *Come Thirsty*

### Numbers 25:1—26:65

#### *Israel Worships Baal at Peor*

25 While the people of Israel were still camped at Acacia, the men began sinning sexually with Moabite women. 2The women invited them to their sacrifices to their gods, and the Israelites ate food there and worshiped these gods. 3So the Israelites began to worship Baal of Peor, and the LORD was very angry with them.

4The LORD said to Moses, "Get all the leaders of the people and kill them in open daylight in the presence of the LORD. Then

the LORD will not be angry with the people of Israel."

5So Moses said to Israel's judges, "Each of you must put to death your people who have become worshipers of Baal of Peor."

6Moses and the Israelites were gathered at the entrance to the Meeting Tent, crying there. Then an Israelite man brought a Midianite woman to his brothers in plain sight of Moses and all the people. 7Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, so he left the meeting and got his spear. 8He followed the Israelite into his tent and drove his spear through both the Israelite man and the Midianite woman. Then the terrible sickness among the Israelites stopped.

9This sickness had killed twenty-four thousand people.

10The LORD said to Moses, 11"Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has saved the Israelites from my anger. He hates sin as much as I do. Since he tried to save my honor among them, I will not kill them. 12So tell Phinehas that I am making my peace agreement with him. 13He and his descendants will always be priests, because he had great concern for the honor of his God. He removed the sins of the Israelites so they would belong to God."

14The Israelite man who was killed with the Midianite woman was named Zimri son of Salu. He was the leader of a family in the tribe of Simeon. 15And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Cozbi daughter of Zur, who was the chief of a Midianite family.

16The LORD said to Moses, 17"The Midianites are your enemies, and you should kill them. 18They have already made you their enemies, because they tricked you at Peor and because of their sister Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader. She was the woman who was killed when the sickness came because the people sinned at Peor."

## *The People Are Counted*

26 After the great sickness, the LORD said to Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, 2"Count all the people of Israel by families. Count all the men who are twenty years old or older who will serve in the army of Israel." 3Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke to the people on the plains of Moab near the Jordan River, across from Jericho. They said, 4"Count the men twenty years old or older, as the LORD commanded Moses."

Here are the Israelites who came out of Egypt:

5The tribe of Reuben, the first son born to Israel, was counted. From Hanoch came the Hanochite family group; from Pallu came the Palluite family group; 6from Hezron came the Hezronite family group; from Carmi came the Carmite family group. 7These were the family groups of Reuben, and the total

number of men was 43,730.

[8]The son of Pallu was Eliab, [9]and Eliab's sons were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram were the leaders who turned against Moses and Aaron and followed Korah when he turned against the LORD. [10]The earth opened up and swallowed them and Korah; they died at the same time the fire burned up the 250 men. This was a warning, [11]but the children of Korah did not die.

[12]These were the family groups in the tribe of Simeon: From Nemuel came the Nemuelite family group; from Jamin came the Jaminite family group; from Jakin came the Jakinite family group; [13]from Zerah came the Zerahite family group; from Shaul came the Shaulite family group. [14]These were the family groups of Simeon, and the total number of men was 22,200.

[15]These were the family groups in the tribe of Gad: From Zephon came the Zephonite family group; from Haggi came the Haggite family group; from Shuni came the Shunite family group; [16]from Ozni came the Oznite family group; from Eri came the Erite family group; [17]from Arodi came the Arodite family group; from Areli came the Arelite family group. [18]These were the family groups of Gad, and the total number of men was 40,500.

[19]Two of Judah's sons, Er and Onan, died in Canaan.

[20]These were the family groups in the tribe of Judah: From Shelah came the Shelanite family group; from Perez came the Perezite family group; from Zerah came the Zerahite family group. [21]These were the family groups from Perez: From Hezron came the Hezronite family group; from Hamul came the Hamulite family group. [22]These were the family groups of Judah, and the total number of men was 76,500.

[23]These were the family groups in the tribe of Issachar: From Tola came the Tolaite family group; from Puah came the Puite family group; [24]from Jashub came the Jashubite family group; from Shimron came the Shimronite family group. [25]These were the family groups of Issachar, and the total number of men was 64,300.

[26]These were the family groups in the tribe of Zebulun: From Sered came the Seredite family group; from Elon came the Elonite family group; from Jahleel came the Jahleelite family group. [27]These were the family groups of Zebulun, and the total number of men was 60,500.

[28]These were the family groups of Joseph through Manasseh and Ephraim.

[29]These were the family groups of Manasseh: From Makir came the Makirite family group (Makir was the father of Gilead); from Gilead came the Gileadite family group. [30]These were the family groups that came from Gilead: From Iezer came the Iezerite family group; from Helek came the Helekite family

group; [31]from Asriel came the Asrielite family group; from Shechem came the Shechemite family group; [32]from Shemida came the Shemidaite family group; from Hepher came the Hepherite family group.[33](Zelophehad son of Hepher had no sons; he had only daughters, and their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.) [34]These were the family groups of Manasseh, and the total number of men was 52,700.

[35]These were the family groups in the tribe of Ephraim: From Shuthelah came the Shuthelahite family group; from Beker came the Bekerite family group; from Tahan came the Tahanite family group. [36]This was the family group from Shuthelah: From Eran came the Eranite family group. [37]These were the family groups of Ephraim, and the total number of men was 32,500. These are the family groups that came from Joseph.

[38]These were the family groups in the tribe of Benjamin: From Bela came the Belaite family group; from Ashbel came the Ashbelite family group; from Ahiram came the Ahiramite family group; [39]from Shupham came the Shuphamite family group; from Hupham came the Huphamite family group. [40]These were the family groups from Bela through Ard and Naaman: From Ard came the Ardite family group; from Naaman came the Naamite family group. [41]These were the family groups of Benjamin, and the total number of men was 45,600.

[42]This was the family group in the tribe of Dan: From Shuham came the Shuhamite family group. That was the family of Dan, [43]and the total number of men in the Shuhamite family group of Dan was 64,400.

[44]These were the family groups in the tribe of Asher: From Imnah came the Imnite family group; from Ishvi came the Ishvite family group; from Beriah came the Beriite family group. [45]These were the family groups that came from Beriah: From Heber came the Heberite family group; from Malkiel came the Malkielite family group. [46](Asher also had a daughter named Serah.) [47]These were the family groups of Asher, and the total number of men was 53,400.

[48]These were the family groups in the tribe of Naphtali: From Jahzeel came the Jahzeelite family group; from Guni came the Gunite family group; [49]from Jezer came the Jezerite family group; from Shillem came the Shillemite family group. [50]These were the family groups of Naphtali, and the total number of men was 45,400.

[51]So the total number of the men of Israel was 601,730.

[52]The LORD said to Moses, [53]“Divide the land among these people by the number of names. [54]A large tribe will get more land, and a small tribe will get less land; the amount of land each tribe gets will depend on the number of its people. [55]Divide the land by drawing lots, and the land each tribe gets

will be named for that tribe. [56]Divide the land between large and small groups by drawing lots."

[57]The tribe of Levi was also counted. These were the family groups of Levi: From Gershon came the Gershonite family group; from Kohath came the Kohathite family group; from Merari came the Merarite family group. [58]These also were Levite family groups: the Libnite family group, the Hebronite family group, the Mahlite family group, the Mushite family group, and the Korahite family group. (Kohath was the ancestor of Amram, [59]whose wife was named Jochebed. She was from the tribe of Levi and she was born in Egypt. She and Amram had two sons, Aaron and Moses, and their sister Miriam. [60]Aaron was the father of Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. [61]But Nadab and Abihu died because they made an offering before the LORD with the wrong kind of fire.)

[62]The total number of male Levites one month old or older was 23,000. But these men were not counted with the other Israelites, because they were not given any of the land among the other Israelites.

[63]Moses and Eleazar the priest counted all these people. They counted the Israelites on the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho. [64]Moses and Aaron the priest had counted the Israelites in the Desert of Sinai, but no one Moses counted on the plains of Moab was in the first counting. [65]The LORD had told the Israelites they would all die in the desert, and the only two left were Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

## Psalm 34:1–7

### *Praise God Who Judges and Saves*

**David's song from the time he acted crazy so Abimelech would send him away, and David did leave.**

[34] I will praise the LORD at all times;
his praise is always on my lips.

[2]My whole being praises the LORD.
The poor will hear and be glad.

[3]Glorify the LORD with me,
and let us praise his name together.

[4]I asked the LORD for help, and he answered me.
He saved me from all that I feared.

[5]Those who go to him for help are happy,
and they are never disgraced.

[6]This poor man called, and the LORD heard him
and saved him from all his troubles.

[7]The angel of the LORD camps around those who fear God,
and he saves them.

## Proverbs 11:28

[28]Those who trust in riches will be ruined,
but a good person will be healthy like a green leaf.

## Mark 13:28–37

[28]"Learn a lesson from the fig tree: When its branches become green and soft and new leaves appear, you know summer is near. [29]In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that the time is near, ready to come. [30]I tell you the truth, all these things will happen while the people of this time are still living. [31]Earth and sky will be destroyed, but the words I have said will never be destroyed.

[32]"No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows. [33]Be careful! Always be ready,[n] because you don't know when that time will be. [34]It is like a man who goes on a trip. He leaves his house and lets his servants take care of it, giving each one a special job to do. The man tells the servant guarding the door always to be watchful. [35]So always be ready, because you don't know when the owner of the house will come back. It might be

in the evening, or at midnight, or in the morning while it is still dark, or when the sun rises. [36]Always be ready. Otherwise he might come back suddenly and find you sleeping. [37]I tell you this, and I say this to everyone: ‘Be ready!’”

# March 15

## God Still Comes

*Examine and see how good the* LORD *is. Happy is the person who trusts him.*

Psalm 34:8

"Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us," Paul penned. "The Scriptures give us patience and encouragement so that we can have hope" (Romans 15:4).

These are not just Sunday school stories. Not romantic fables … They are historical moments in which a real God met real pain so we could answer the question, "Where is God when I hurt?"

How does God react to dashed hopes? Read the story of Jairus. How does the Father feel about those who are ill? Stand with him at the pool of Bethesda. Do you long for God to speak to your lonely heart? Then listen as he speaks to the Emmaus-bound disciples …

He's not doing it just for them. He's doing it for me. He's doing it for you …

The God who spoke still speaks … The God who came still comes. He comes into our world. He comes into your world. He comes to do what you can't.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Numbers 27:1—28:31

#### *Zelophehad's Daughters*

27 Then the daughters of Zelophehad came near. Zelophehad was the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh. Zelophehad's daughters belonged to the family groups of Manasseh son of Joseph. The daughters' names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 2They went to the entrance of the Meeting Tent and stood before Moses,

Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the people. They said,
3"Our father died in the desert. He was not one of Korah's
followers who came together against the LORD, but he died
because of his own sin, and he had no sons. 4Our father's name
will die out because he had no sons. Give us property among
our father's relatives."

5So Moses brought their case to the LORD, 6and the LORD said
to him, 7"The daughters of Zelophehad are right; they should
certainly get what their father owned. Give them property
among their father's relatives.

8"Tell the Israelites, 'If a man dies and has no son, then
everything he owned should go to his daughter. 9If he has no
daughter, then everything he owned should go to his brothers.
10If he has no brothers, then everything he owned should go to
his father's brothers. 11And if his father had no brothers, then
everything he owned should go to the nearest relative in his
family group. This should be a rule among the people of Israel,
as the LORD has given this command to Moses.'"

## *Joshua Is the New Leader*

12Then the LORD said to Moses, "Climb this mountain in the
Abarim Mountains, and look at the land I have given to the
Israelites. 13After you have seen it, you will die and join your
ancestors as your brother Aaron did, 14because you both acted
against my command in the Desert of Zin. You did not honor me
as holy before the people at the waters of Meribah." (This was
at Meribah in Kadesh in the Desert of Zin.)

15Moses said to the LORD, 16"The LORD is the God of the spirits
of all people. May he choose a leader for these people, 17who
will go in and out before them. He must lead them out like
sheep and bring them in; the LORD's people must not be like
sheep without a shepherd."

18So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun,
because my Spirit is in him. Put your hand on him, 19and have
him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the people. Then
give him his orders as they watch. 20Let him share your honor
so that all the Israelites will obey him. 21He must stand before
Eleazar the priest, and Eleazar will get advice from the LORD by
using the Urim. At his command all the Israelites will go out,
and at his command they will all come in."

22Moses did what the LORD told him. He took Joshua and had
him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the people, 23and he
put his hands on him and gave him orders, just as the LORD had
told him.

## *Daily Offerings*

28 The LORD said to Moses, 2“Give this command to the
Israelites. Tell them: ‘Bring me food offerings made by fire, for a
smell that is pleasing to me, and be sure to bring them at the
right time.’ 3Say to them, ‘These are the offerings you must
bring to the LORD: two male lambs, a year old, as a burnt
offering each day. They must have nothing wrong with them.
4Offer one lamb in the morning and the other lamb at twilight.
5Also bring a grain offering of two quarts of fine flour, mixed
with one quart of oil from pressed olives. 6This is the daily burnt
offering which began at Mount Sinai; its smell is pleasing to the
LORD. 7Offer one quart of wine with each lamb as a drink
offering; pour it out to the LORD at the Holy Place. 8Offer the
second lamb at twilight. As in the morning, also give a grain
offering and a drink offering. This offering is made by fire, and
its smell is pleasing to the LORD.

## *Sabbath Offerings*

9“‘On the Sabbath day you must give two male lambs, a year
old, that have nothing wrong with them. Also give a drink
offering and a grain offering; the grain offering must be four
quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil. 10This is the burnt
offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the daily burnt
offering and drink offering.

## *Monthly Offerings*

11“‘On the first day of each month bring a burnt offering to
the LORD. This will be two young bulls, one male sheep, and
seven male lambs a year old, and they must have nothing wrong
with them. 12Give a grain offering with each bull of six quarts of
fine flour mixed with olive oil. Also give a grain offering with
the male sheep. It must be four quarts of fine flour mixed with
olive oil. 13And give a grain offering with each lamb of two
quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil. This is a burnt offering,
and its smell is pleasing to the LORD. 14The drink offering with
each bull will be two quarts of wine, with the male sheep it will
be one and one-third quarts, and with each lamb it will be one
quart of wine. This is the burnt offering that must be offered
each month of the year. 15Besides the daily burnt offerings and
drink offerings, bring a sin offering of one goat to the LORD.

## *The Passover*

16“‘The LORD’s Passover will be on the fourteenth day of the
first month. 17The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the

fifteenth day of that month. For seven days, you may eat only bread made without yeast. 18Have a holy meeting on the first day of the festival, and don't work that day. 19Bring to the LORD an offering made by fire, a burnt offering of two young bulls, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. 20With each bull give a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil. With the male sheep it must be four quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. 21With each of the seven lambs, it must be two quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. 22Bring one goat as a sin offering, to remove your sins so you will belong to God. 23Bring these offerings in addition to the burnt offerings you give every morning. 24So bring food for the offering made by fire each day for seven days, for a smell that is pleasing to the LORD. Do it in addition to the daily burnt offering and its drink offering. 25On the seventh day have a holy meeting, and don't work that day.

### *The Feast of Weeks*

26"'On the day of firstfruits when you bring new grain to the LORD during the Feast of Weeks, have a holy meeting. Don't work that day. 27Bring this burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. This smell is pleasing to the LORD. 28Also, with each bull give a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. With the male sheep, it must be four quarts of flour, 29and with each of the seven lambs offer two quarts of flour. 30Offer one male goat to remove your sins so you will belong to God. 31Bring these offerings and their drink offerings in addition to the daily burnt offering and its grain offering. The animals must have nothing wrong with them.

## Psalm 34:8–14

8Examine and see how good the LORD is.
Happy is the person who trusts him.

9You who belong to the LORD, fear him!
Those who fear him will have everything they need.

10Even lions may get weak and hungry,

but those who look to the LORD will have every good thing.

11 Children, come and listen to me.
I will teach you to worship the LORD.

12 You must do these things
to enjoy life and have many happy days.

13 You must not say evil things,
and you must not tell lies.

14 Stop doing evil and do good.
Look for peace and work for it.

## Proverbs 11:29

29 Whoever brings trouble to his family
will be left with nothing but the wind.
A fool will be a servant to the wise.

## Mark 14:1–26

### *The Plan to Kill Jesus*

14 It was now only two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The leading priests and teachers of the law were trying to find a trick to arrest Jesus and kill him. 2 But they said, “We must not do it during the feast, because the people might cause a riot.”

### *A Woman with Perfume for Jesus*

3 Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. While Jesus was eating there, a woman approached him with an alabaster jar filled with very expensive perfume,

made of pure nard. She opened the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus' head.

4Some who were there became upset and said to each other,
"Why waste that perfume? 5It was worth a full year's work. It
could have been sold and the money given to the poor." And
they got very angry with the woman.

6Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why are you troubling her?
She did an excellent thing for me. 7You will always have the
poor with you, and you can help them anytime you want. But
you will not always have me. 8This woman did the only thing
she could do for me; she poured perfume on my body to prepare
me for burial. 9I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is
preached in all the world, what this woman has done will be
told, and people will remember her."

## *Judas Becomes an Enemy of Jesus*

10One of the twelve apostles, Judas Iscariot, went to talk to
the leading priests to offer to hand Jesus over to them. 11These
priests were pleased about this and promised to pay Judas
money. So he watched for the best time to turn Jesus in.

## *Jesus Eats the Passover Meal*

12It was now the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread
when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. Jesus' followers said to
him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat
the Passover meal?"

13Jesus sent two of his followers and said to them, "Go into
the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow
him. 14When he goes into a house, tell the owner of the house,
'The Teacher says: "Where is my guest room in which I can eat
the Passover meal with my followers?"' 15The owner will show
you a large room upstairs that is furnished and ready. Prepare
the food for us there."

16So the followers left and went into the city. Everything
happened as Jesus had said, so they prepared the Passover
meal.

17In the evening, Jesus went to that house with the twelve.
18While they were all eating, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth,
one of you will turn against me—one of you eating with me
now."

19The followers were very sad to hear this. Each one began
to say to Jesus, "I am not the one, am I?"

20Jesus answered, "It is one of the twelve—the one who dips
his bread into the bowl with me. 21The Son of Man will die, just
as the Scriptures say. But how terrible it will be for the person
who hands the Son of Man over to be killed. It would be better

for him if he had never been born.”

## *The Lord’s Supper*

22While they were eating, Jesus took some bread and
thanked God for it and broke it. Then he gave it to his followers
and said, “Take it; this is my body.”
23Then Jesus took a cup and thanked God for it and gave it to
the followers, and they all drank from the cup.
24Then Jesus said, “This is my blood which is the new[n]
agreement that God makes with his people. This blood is poured
out for many. 25I tell you the truth, I will not drink of this fruit of
the vine[n] again until that day when I drink it new in the
kingdom of God.”
26After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

# March 16

## The Cloak of Humanity

*Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be very sad and troubled.*

Mark 14:33

"while Jesus lived on earth, he prayed to God and asked God for help. He prayed with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him from death" (Hebrews 5:7). My, what a portrait! Jesus is in pain. Jesus is on the stage of fear. Jesus is cloaked, not in sainthood, but in humanity.

The next time the fog finds you, you might do well to remember Jesus in the garden. The next time you think that no one understands, reread the fourteenth chapter of Mark. The next time your self-pity convinces you that no one cares, pay a visit to Gethsemane. And the next time you wonder if God really perceives the pain that prevails on this dusty planet, listen to him pleading among the twisted trees.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## Numbers 29:1—30:16

### *The Feast of Trumpets*

29 "'Have a holy meeting on the first day of the seventh month,
and don't work on that day. That is the day you blow the
trumpets. 2Bring these burnt offerings as a smell pleasing to the
LORD: one young bull, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a
year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. 3With the
bull give a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with
oil. With the male sheep offer four quarts, 4and with each of the
seven lambs offer two quarts. 5Offer one male goat for a sin
offering to remove your sins so you will belong to God. 6These
offerings are in addition to the monthly and daily burnt
offerings. Their grain offerings and drink offerings must be

done as you have been told. These offerings are made by fire to the LORD, and their smell is pleasing to him.

## *The Day of Cleansing*

7"'Have a holy meeting on the tenth day of the seventh
month. On that day do not eat and do not work. 8Bring these
burnt offerings as a smell pleasing to the LORD: one young bull,
one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. They must
have nothing wrong with them. 9With the bull give a grain
offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. With the male
sheep it must be four quarts, 10and with each of the seven
lambs it must be two quarts. 11Offer one male goat as a sin
offering. This will be in addition to the sin offering which
removes your sins, the daily burnt offering with its grain
offering, and the drink offerings.

## *The Feast of Shelters*

12"'Have a holy meeting on the fifteenth day of the seventh
month, and do not work on that day. Celebrate a festival to the
LORD for seven days. 13Bring these burnt offerings, made by fire,
as a smell pleasing to the LORD: thirteen young bulls, two male
sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have
nothing wrong with them. 14With each of the thirteen bulls offer
a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. With
each of the two male sheep it must be four quarts, 15and with
each of the fourteen lambs it must be two quarts. 16Offer one
male goat as a sin offering in addition to the daily burnt offering
with its grain and drink offerings.
17"'On the second day of this festival give an offering of
twelve bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year
old. They must have nothing wrong with them. 18Bring the grain
and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to
the number required. 19Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in
addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink
offerings.
20"'On the third day offer eleven bulls, two male sheep, and
fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong
with them. 21Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls,
sheep, and lambs, according to the number required. 22Offer
one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt
offering with its grain and drink offerings.
23"'On the fourth day offer ten bulls, two male sheep, and
fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong
with them. 24Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls,
sheep, and lambs, according to the number required. 25Offer

one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

26"'On the fifth day offer nine bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. 27Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required. 28Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

29"'On the sixth day offer eight bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. 30Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required. 31Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

32"'On the seventh day offer seven bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. 33Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required. 34Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

35"'On the eighth day have a closing meeting, and do not work on that day. 36Bring an offering made by fire, a burnt offering, as a smell pleasing to the LORD. Offer one bull, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. 37Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bull, the male sheep, and the lambs, according to the number required. 38Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

39"'At your festivals you should bring these to the LORD: your burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings and fellowship offerings. These are in addition to other promised offerings and special gifts you want to give to the LORD.'"

40Moses told the Israelites everything the LORD had commanded him.

## *Rules About Special Promises*

30 Moses spoke with the leaders of the Israelite tribes. He told them these commands from the LORD.

2"If a man makes a promise to the LORD or says he will do something special, he must keep his promise. He must do what he said. 3If a young woman still living at home makes a promise to the LORD or pledges to do something special, 4and if her father hears about the promise or pledge and says nothing, she must do what she promised. She must keep her pledge. 5But if her father hears about the promise or pledge and does not allow it, then the promise or pledge does not have to be kept. Her

father would not allow it, so the LORD will free her from her promise.

6"If a woman makes a pledge or a careless promise and then gets married, 7and if her husband hears about it and says nothing, she must keep her promise or the pledge she made. 8But if her husband hears about it and does not allow it, he cancels her pledge or the careless promise she made. The LORD will free her from keeping it.

9"If a widow or divorced woman makes a promise, she must do whatever she promised.

10"If a woman makes a promise or pledge while she is married, 11and if her husband hears about it but says nothing and does not stop her, she must keep her promise or pledge. 12But if her husband hears about it and cancels it, she does not have to do what she said. Her husband has canceled it, so the LORD will free her from it. 13A woman's husband may make her keep or cancel any promise or pledge she has made. 14If he says nothing to her about it for several days, she must keep her promises. If he hears about them and says nothing, she must keep her promises. 15But if he cancels them long after he heard about them, he is responsible if she breaks her promise."

16These are commands that the LORD gave to Moses for husbands and wives, and for fathers with daughters living at home.

## Psalm 34:15–22

15The LORD sees the good people
and listens to their prayers.

16But the LORD is against those who do evil;
he makes the world forget them.

17The LORD hears good people when they cry out to him,
and he saves them from all their troubles.

18The LORD is close to the brokenhearted,
and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed.

19 People who do what is right may have many problems,
but the LORD will solve them all.

20 He will protect their very bones;
not one of them will be broken.

21 Evil will kill the wicked;
those who hate good people will be judged guilty.

22 But the LORD saves his servants' lives;
no one who trusts him will be judged guilty.

## Proverbs 11:30–31

30 A good person gives life to others;
the wise person teaches others how to live.

31 Good people will be rewarded on earth,
and the wicked and the sinners will be punished.

## Mark 14:27–52

### *Jesus' Followers Will Leave Him*

27 Then Jesus told the followers, "You will all stumble in your faith, because it is written in the Scriptures:

'I will kill the shepherd,
and the sheep will scatter.'

Zechariah 13:7

28 But after I rise from the dead, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."
29 Peter said, "Everyone else may stumble in their faith, but I will not."

30 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, tonight before the
rooster crows twice you will say three times you don’t know
me.”
31 But Peter insisted, “I will never say that I don’t know you! I
will even die with you!” And all the other followers said the
same thing.

## *Jesus Prays Alone*

32 Jesus and his followers went to a place called Gethsemane.
He said to them, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 Jesus took Peter,
James, and John with him, and he began to be very sad and
troubled. 34 He said to them, “My heart is full of sorrow, to the
point of death. Stay here and watch.”
35 After walking a little farther away from them, Jesus fell to
the ground and prayed that, if possible, he would not have this
time of suffering. 36 He prayed, “Abba,[n] Father! You can do all
things. Take away this cup[n] of suffering. But do what you want,
not what I want.”
37 Then Jesus went back to his followers and found them
asleep. He said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn’t you
stay awake with me for one hour? 38 Stay awake and pray for
strength against temptation. The spirit wants to do what is
right, but the body is weak.”
39 Again Jesus went away and prayed the same thing. 40 Then
he went back to his followers, and again he found them asleep,
because their eyes were very heavy. And they did not know
what to say to him.
41 After Jesus prayed a third time, he went back to his
followers and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting?
That’s enough. The time has come for the Son of Man to be
handed over to sinful people. 42 Get up, we must go. Look, here
comes the man who has turned against me.”

## *Jesus Is Arrested*

43 At once, while Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the
twelve apostles, came up. With him were many people carrying
swords and clubs who had been sent from the leading priests,
the teachers of the law, and the Jewish elders.
44 Judas had planned a signal for them, saying, “The man I
kiss is Jesus. Arrest him and guard him while you lead him
away.” 45 So Judas went straight to Jesus and said, “Teacher!”
and kissed him. 46 Then the people grabbed Jesus and arrested
him. 47 One of his followers standing nearby pulled out his sword
and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.
48 Then Jesus said, “You came to get me with swords and

clubs as if I were a criminal. [49]Every day I was with you teaching in the Temple, and you did not arrest me there. But all these things have happened to make the Scriptures come true."
[50]Then all of Jesus' followers left him and ran away.

[51]A young man, wearing only a linen cloth, was following Jesus, and the people also grabbed him. [52]But the cloth he was wearing came off, and he ran away naked.

# March 17

## Everyone Will See Him

*"And in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, the Powerful One, and coming on clouds in the sky."*

Mark 14:62

someday, according to Christ, he will set us free. He will come back. In the blink of an eye, as fast as the lightning flashes from the east to the west, he will come back. And everyone will see him—you will, I will. Bodies will push back the dirt and break the surface of the sea. The earth will tremble, the sky will roar, and those who do not know him will shudder. But in that hour you will not fear, because you know him.

from *When Christ Comes*

## Numbers 31:1—32:42

### *Israel Attacks the Midianites*

31 The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 2"Pay back the Midianites
for what they did to the Israelites; after that you will die."

3So Moses said to the people, "Get some men ready for war.
The LORD will use them to pay back the Midianites. 4Send to war
a thousand men from each of the tribes of Israel." 5So twelve
thousand men got ready for war, a thousand men from each
tribe. 6Moses sent those men to war; Phinehas son of Eleazar
the priest was with them. He took with him the holy things and
the trumpets for giving the alarm. 7They fought the Midianites
as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every
Midianite man. 8Among those they killed were Evi, Rekem, Zur,
Hur, and Reba, who were the five kings of Midian. They also
killed Balaam son of Beor with a sword.

9The Israelites captured the Midianite women and children,

and they took all their flocks, herds, and goods. [10]They burned all the Midianite towns where they had settled and all their camps, [11]but they took all the people and animals and goods. [12]Then they brought the captives, the animals, and the goods back to Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the Israelites. Their camp was on the plains of Moab near the Jordan River, across from Jericho.

[13]Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the people went outside the camp to meet them. [14]Moses was angry with the army officers, the commanders over a thousand men, and those over a hundred men, who returned from war.

[15]He asked them, "Why did you let the women live? [16]They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and turned the Israelites from the LORD at Peor. Then a terrible sickness struck the LORD's people. [17]Kill all the Midianite boys, and kill all the Midianite women who have had sexual relations. [18]But save for yourselves the girls who have not had sexual relations with a man.

[19]"All you men who killed anyone or touched a dead body must stay outside the camp for seven days. On the third and seventh days you and your captives must make yourselves clean. [20]You must clean all your clothes and anything made of leather, goat hair, or wood."

[21]Then Eleazar the priest said to the soldiers who had gone to war, "These are the teachings that the LORD gave to Moses: [22]Put any gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, or lead— [23]anything that will not burn—into the fire, and then it will be clean. But also purify those things with the cleansing water. Then they will be clean. If something cannot stand the fire, wash it with the water. [24]On the seventh day wash your clothes, and you will be clean. After that you may come into the camp."

## *Dividing the Goods*

[25]The LORD said to Moses, [26]"You, Eleazar the priest, and the leaders of the family groups should take a count of the goods, the men, and the animals that were taken. [27]Then divide those possessions between the soldiers who went to war and the rest of the people. [28]From the soldiers who went to war, take a tax for the LORD of one item out of every five hundred. This includes people, cattle, donkeys, or sheep. [29]Take it from the soldiers' half, and give it to Eleazar the priest as the LORD's share. [30]And from the people's half, take one item out of every fifty. This includes people, cattle, donkeys, sheep, or other animals. Give that to the Levites, who take care of the LORD's Holy Tent." [31]So Moses and Eleazar did as the LORD commanded Moses.

[32]There remained from what the soldiers had taken 675,000 sheep, [33]72,000 cattle, [34]61,000 donkeys, [35]and 32,000 women

who had not had sexual relations with a man. [36]The soldiers who went to war got 337,500 sheep, [37]and they gave 675 of them to the LORD. [38]They got 36,000 cattle, and they gave 72 of them to the LORD. [39]They got 30,500 donkeys, and they gave 61 of them to the LORD. [40]They got 16,000 people, and they gave 32 of them to the LORD. [41]Moses gave the LORD's share to Eleazar the priest, as the LORD had commanded him.

[42]Moses separated the people's half from the soldiers' half. [43]The people got 337,500 sheep, [44]36,000 cattle, [45]30,500 donkeys, [46]and 16,000 people. [47]From the people's half Moses took one item out of every fifty for the LORD. This included the animals and the people. Then he gave them to the Levites, who took care of the LORD's Holy Tent. This was what the LORD had commanded Moses.

[48]Then the officers of the army, the commanders of a thousand men and commanders of a hundred men, came to Moses. [49]They told Moses, "We, your servants, have counted our soldiers under our command, and not one of them is missing. [50]So we have brought the LORD a gift of the gold things that each of us found: arm bands, bracelets, signet rings, earrings, and necklaces. These are to remove our sins so we will belong to the LORD."

[51]So Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, which had been made into all kinds of objects. [52]The commanders of a thousand men and the commanders of a hundred men gave the LORD the gold, and all of it together weighed about 420 pounds; [53]each soldier had taken something for himself. [54]Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the commanders of a thousand men and the commanders of a hundred men. Then they put it in the Meeting Tent as a memorial before the LORD for the people of Israel.

## *The Tribes East of the Jordan*

32 [1]The people of Reuben and Gad had large flocks and herds. When they saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were good for the animals, [2]they came to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the leaders of the people. [3–4]They said, "We, your servants, have flocks and herds. The LORD has captured for the Israelites a land that is good for animals—the land around Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon. [5]If it pleases you, we would like this land to be given to us. Don't make us cross the Jordan River."

[6]Moses told the people of Gad and Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to war while you stay behind? [7]You will discourage the Israelites from going over to the land the LORD has given them. [8]Your ancestors did the same thing. I sent them from

Kadesh Barnea to look at the land. [9]They went as far as the Valley of Eshcol, and when they saw the land, they discouraged the Israelites from going into the land the LORD had given them. [10]The LORD became very angry that day and made this promise: [11]'None of the people who came from Egypt and who are twenty years old or older will see the land that I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These people have not followed me completely. [12]Only Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun followed the LORD completely.'

[13]"The LORD was angry with Israel, so he made them wander in the desert for forty years. Finally all the people who had sinned against the LORD died, [14]and now you are acting just like your ancestors! You sinful people are making the LORD even more angry with Israel. [15]If you quit following him, it will add to their stay in the desert, and you will destroy all these people."

[16]Then the Reubenites and Gadites came up to Moses and said, "We will build pens for our animals and cities for our children here. [17]Then our children will be in strong, walled cities, safe from the people who live in this land. Then we will prepare for war. We will help the other Israelites get their land, [18]and we will not return home until every Israelite has received his land. [19]We won't take any of the land west of the Jordan River; our part of the land is east of the Jordan."

[20]So Moses told them, "You must do these things. You must go before the LORD into battle [21]and cross the Jordan River armed, until the LORD forces out the enemy. [22]After the LORD helps us take the land, you may return home. You will have done your duty to the LORD and Israel, and you may have this land as your own.

[23]"But if you don't do these things, you will be sinning against the LORD; know for sure that you will be punished for your sin. [24]Build cities for your children and pens for your animals, but then you must do what you promised."

[25]The Gadites and Reubenites said to Moses, "We are your servants, and we will do what you, our master, command. [26]Our children, wives, and all our cattle will stay in the cities of Gilead, [27]but we, your servants, will prepare for battle. We will go over and fight for the LORD, as you, our master, have said."

[28]So Moses gave orders about them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua son of Nun, and to the leaders of the tribes of Israel. [29]Moses said to them, "If the Gadites and Reubenites prepare for battle and cross the Jordan River with you, to go before the LORD and help you take the land, give them the land of Gilead for their own. [30]But if they do not go over armed, they will not receive it; their land will be in Canaan with you."

[31]The Gadites and Reubenites answered, "We are your servants, and we will do as the LORD said. [32]We will cross over into Canaan and go before the LORD ready for battle. But our

land will be east of the Jordan River."

33So Moses gave that land to the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and East Manasseh. (Manasseh was Joseph's son.) That land had been the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan, as well as all the cities and the land around them.

34The Gadites rebuilt the cities of Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, 35Atroth Shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, 36Beth Nimrah, and Beth Haran. These were strong, walled cities. And they built sheep pens.

37The Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, 38Nebo, Baal Meon, and Sibmah. They renamed Nebo and Baal Meon when they rebuilt them.

39The descendants of Makir son of Manasseh went and captured Gilead and forced out the Amorites who were there. 40So Moses gave Gilead to the family of Makir son of Manasseh, and they settled there. 41Jair son of Manasseh went out and captured the small towns there, and he called them the Towns of Jair. 42Nobah went and captured Kenath and the small towns around it; then he named it Nobah after himself.

## Psalm 35:1–10

### *A Prayer for Help*

**Of David.**

35 LORD, battle with those who battle with me.
Fight against those who fight against me.

2Pick up the shield and armor.
Rise up and help me.

3Lift up your spears, both large and small,
against those who chase me.

Tell me, "I will save you."

[4]Make those who want to kill me
be ashamed and disgraced.

Make those who plan to harm me
turn back and run away.

[5]Make them like chaff blown by the wind
as the angel of the LORD forces them away.

[6]Let their road be dark and slippery
as the angel of the LORD chases them.

[7]For no reason they spread out their net to trap me;
for no reason they dug a pit for me.

[8]So let ruin strike them suddenly.
Let them be caught in their own nets;
let them fall into the pit and die.

[9]Then I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will be happy when he saves me.

[10]Even my bones will say,
"LORD, who is like you?

You save the weak from the strong,
the weak and poor from robbers."

## Proverbs 12:1

[12] Anyone who loves learning accepts correction,
but a person who hates being corrected is stupid.

## Mark 14:53–72

## *Jesus Before the Leaders*

53The people who arrested Jesus led him to the house of the
high priest, where all the leading priests, the elders, and the
teachers of the law were gathered. 54Peter followed far behind
and entered the courtyard of the high priest's house. There he
sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire.

55The leading priests and the whole Jewish council tried to
find something that Jesus had done wrong so they could kill
him. But the council could find no proof of anything. 56Many
people came and told false things about him, but all said
different things—none of them agreed.

57Then some people stood up and lied about Jesus, saying,
58"We heard this man say, 'I will destroy this Temple that people
made. And three days later, I will build another Temple not
made by people.'" 59But even the things these people said did
not agree.

60Then the high priest stood before them and asked Jesus,
"Aren't you going to answer? Don't you have something to say
about their charges against you?" 61But Jesus said nothing; he
did not answer.

The high priest asked Jesus another question: "Are you the
Christ, the Son of the blessed God?"

62Jesus answered, "I am. And in the future you will see the
Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, the Powerful One,
and coming on clouds in the sky."

63When the high priest heard this, he tore his clothes and
said, "We don't need any more witnesses! 64You all heard him
say these things against God. What do you think?"

They all said that Jesus was guilty and should die. 65Some of
the people there began to spit at Jesus. They blindfolded him
and beat him with their fists and said, "Prove you are a
prophet!" Then the guards led Jesus away and beat him.

## *Peter Says He Doesn't Know Jesus*

66While Peter was in the courtyard, a servant girl of the high
priest came there. 67She saw Peter warming himself at the fire
and looked closely at him.

Then she said, "You also were with Jesus, that man from
Nazareth."

68But Peter said that he was never with Jesus. He said, "I
don't know or understand what you are talking about." Then
Peter left and went toward the entrance of the courtyard. And

the rooster crowed.[n]

69The servant girl saw Peter there, and again she said to the people who were standing nearby, “This man is one of those who followed Jesus.” 70Again Peter said that it was not true.

A short time later, some people were standing near Peter saying, “Surely you are one of those who followed Jesus, because you are from Galilee, too.”

71Then Peter began to place a curse on himself and swear, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about!”

72At once, the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: “Before the rooster crows twice, you will say three times that you don’t know me.” Then Peter lost control of himself and began to cry.

# March 18

## The Sin of the World

*Then they led him out of the palace to be crucified.*

Mark 15:20

"Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross … " (1 Peter 2:24). Every aspect of the crucifixion was intended not only to hurt the victim but to shame him. Death on a cross was usually reserved for the most vile offenders: slaves, murderers, assassins, and the like. The condemned person was marched through the city streets, shouldering his crossbar and wearing a placard about his neck that named his crime. At the execution site he was stripped and mocked.

Crucifixion was so abhorrent that Cicero wrote, "Let the very name of the cross be far away, not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears."

Jesus was not only shamed before people, he was shamed before heaven.

Since he bore the sin of the murderer and adulterer, he felt the shame of the murderer and adulterer (1 Peter 2:24). Though he never lied, he bore the disgrace of a liar. Though he never cheated, he felt the embarrassment of a cheater. Since he bore the sin of the world, he felt the collective shame of the world.

from *He Chose the Nails*

## Numbers 33:1—34:29

### *Israel's Journey from Egypt*

33 These are the places the Israelites went as Moses and Aaron
led them out of Egypt in divisions. 2At the LORD's command
Moses recorded the places they went, and these are the places
they went.
3On the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the
Passover, the Israelites left Rameses and marched out boldly in

front of all the Egyptians. [4]The Egyptians were burying their
firstborn sons, whom the LORD had killed; the LORD showed that
the gods of Egypt were false.
[5]The Israelites left Rameses and camped at Succoth.
[6]They left Succoth and camped at Etham, at the edge of the
desert.
[7]They left Etham and went back to Pi Hahiroth, to the east of
Baal Zephon, and camped near Migdol.
[8]They left Pi Hahiroth and walked through the sea into the
desert. After going three days through the Desert of Etham,
they camped at Marah.
[9]They left Marah and went to Elim; there were twelve
springs of water and seventy palm trees where they camped.
[10]They left Elim and camped near the Red Sea.
[11]They left the Red Sea and camped in the Desert of Sin.
[12]They left the Desert of Sin and camped at Dophkah.
[13]They left Dophkah and camped at Alush.
[14]They left Alush and camped at Rephidim, where the people
had no water to drink.
[15]They left Rephidim and camped in the Desert of Sinai.
[16]They left the Desert of Sinai and camped at Kibroth
Hattaavah.
[17]They left Kibroth Hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth.
[18]They left Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah.
[19]They left Rithmah and camped at Rimmon Perez.
[20]They left Rimmon Perez and camped at Libnah.
[21]They left Libnah and camped at Rissah.
[22]They left Rissah and camped at Kehelathah.
[23]They left Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher.
[24]They left Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah.
[25]They left Haradah and camped at Makheloth.
[26]They left Makheloth and camped at Tahath.
[27]They left Tahath and camped at Terah.
[28]They left Terah and camped at Mithcah.
[29]They left Mithcah and camped at Hashmonah.
[30]They left Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth.
[31]They left Moseroth and camped at Bene Jaakan.
[32]They left Bene Jaakan and camped at Hor Haggidgad.
[33]They left Hor Haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah.
[34]They left Jotbathah and camped at Abronah.
[35]They left Abronah and camped at Ezion Geber.
[36]They left Ezion Geber and camped at Kadesh in the Desert
of Zin.
[37]They left Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the border
of Edom. [38]Aaron the priest obeyed the LORD and went up Mount
Hor. There he died on the first day of the fifth month in the
fortieth year after the Israelites left Egypt. [39]Aaron was 123

years old when he died on Mount Hor.
40 The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the southern area
of Canaan, heard that the Israelites were coming.
41 The people left Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah.
42 They left Zalmonah and camped at Punon.
43 They left Punon and camped at Oboth.
44 They left Oboth and camped at Iye Abarim, on the border
of Moab.
45 They left Iye Abarim and camped at Dibon Gad.
46 They left Dibon Gad and camped at Almon Diblathaim.
47 They left Almon Diblathaim and camped in the mountains
of Abarim, near Nebo.
48 They left the mountains of Abarim and camped on the
plains of Moab near the Jordan River across from Jericho.
49 They camped along the Jordan on the plains of Moab, and
their camp went from Beth Jeshimoth to Abel Acacia.
50 On the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from
Jericho, the LORD spoke to Moses. He said, 51 "Speak to the
Israelites and tell them, 'When you cross the Jordan River and
go into Canaan, 52 force out all the people who live there.
Destroy all of their carved statues and metal idols. Wreck all of
their places of worship. 53 Take over the land and settle there,
because I have given this land to you to own. 54 Throw lots to
divide up the land by family groups, giving larger portions to
larger family groups and smaller portions to smaller family
groups. The land will be given as the lots decide; each tribe will
get its own land.
55 "'But if you don't force those people out of the land, they
will bring you trouble. They will be like sharp hooks in your
eyes and thorns in your sides. They will bring trouble to the
land where you live. 56 Then I will punish you as I had planned to
punish them.'"

## *The Borders of Canaan*

34 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Give this command to the people of
Israel: 'You will soon enter Canaan and it will be yours. These
shall be the borders: 3 On the south you will get part of the
Desert of Zin near the border of Edom. On the east side your
southern border will start at the south end of the Dead Sea,
4 cross south of Scorpion Pass, and go through the Desert of Zin
and south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and
over to Azmon. 5 From Azmon it will go to the brook of Egypt,
and it will end at the Mediterranean Sea.
6 "'Your western border will be the Mediterranean Sea.
7 "'Your northern border will begin at the Mediterranean Sea
and go to Mount Hor. 8 From Mount Hor it will go to Lebo

Hamath, and on to Zedad. 9Then the border will go to Ziphron,
and it will end at Hazar Enan. This will be your northern border.
10"'Your eastern border will begin at Hazar Enan and go to
Shepham. 11From Shepham the border will go east of Ain to
Riblah and along the hills east of Lake Galilee. 12Then the
border will go down along the Jordan River and end at the Dead
Sea.
"'These are the borders around your country.'"
13So Moses gave this command to the Israelites: "This is the
land you will receive. Throw lots to divide it among the nine and
one-half tribes, because the LORD commanded that it should be
theirs. 14The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh have
already received their land. 15These two and one-half tribes
received land east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho."
16Then the LORD said to Moses, 17"These are the men who
will divide the land: Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun.
18Also take one leader from each tribe to help divide the land.
19These are the names of the leaders: from the tribe of Judah,
Caleb son of Jephunneh; 20from the tribe of Simeon, Shemuel
son of Ammihud; 21from the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad son of
Kislon; 22from the tribe of Dan, Bukki son of Jogli; 23from the
tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph, Hanniel son of Ephod; 24from
the tribe of Ephraim son of Joseph, Kemuel son of Shiphtan;
25from the tribe of Zebulun, Elizaphan son of Parnach; 26from
the tribe of Issachar, Paltiel son of Azzan; 27from the tribe of
Asher, Ahihud son of Shelomi; 28from the tribe of Naphtali,
Pedahel son of Ammihud."
29The LORD commanded these men to divide the land of
Canaan among the Israelites.

## Psalm 35:11–16

11Men without mercy stand up to testify.
They ask me things I do not know.

12They repay me with evil for the good I have done,
and they make me very sad.

13Yet when they were sick, I put on clothes of sadness
and showed my sorrow by fasting.

But my prayers were not answered.

14 I acted as if they were my friends or brothers.
I bowed in sadness as if I were crying for my mother.

15But when I was in trouble, they gathered and laughed;
they gathered to attack before I knew it.
They insulted me without stopping.

16They made fun of me and were cruel to me
and ground their teeth at me in anger.

## Proverbs 12:2

2The LORD is pleased with a good person,
but he will punish anyone who plans evil.

## Mark 15:1–20

### *Pilate Questions Jesus*

15 Very early in the morning, the leading priests, the elders, the teachers of the law, and all the Jewish council decided what to do with Jesus. They tied him, led him away, and turned him over to Pilate, the governor.

2Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Those are your words.”

3The leading priests accused Jesus of many things. 4So Pilate asked Jesus another question, “You can see that they are accusing you of many things. Aren’t you going to answer?”

5But Jesus still said nothing, so Pilate was very surprised.

### *Pilate Tries to Free Jesus*

6Every year at the time of the Passover the governor would free one prisoner whom the people chose. 7At that time, there was a man named Barabbas in prison who was a rebel and had

committed murder during a riot. [8]The crowd came to Pilate and began to ask him to free a prisoner as he always did.

[9]So Pilate asked them, “Do you want me to free the king of the Jews?” [10]Pilate knew that the leading priests had turned Jesus in to him because they were jealous. [11]But the leading priests had persuaded the people to ask Pilate to free Barabbas, not Jesus.

[12]Then Pilate asked the crowd again, “So what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?”

[13]They shouted, “Crucify him!”

[14]Pilate asked, “Why? What wrong has he done?”

But they shouted even louder, “Crucify him!”

[15]Pilate wanted to please the crowd, so he freed Barabbas for them. After having Jesus beaten with whips, he handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

[16]The soldiers took Jesus into the governor’s palace (called the Praetorium) and called all the other soldiers together. [17]They put a purple robe on Jesus and used thorny branches to make a crown for his head. [18]They began to call out to him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” [19]The soldiers beat Jesus on the head many times with a stick. They spit on him and made fun of him by bowing on their knees and worshiping him. [20]After they finished, the soldiers took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him out of the palace to be crucified.

# March 19

## Free to Enter His Presence

*Then Jesus cried in a loud voice and died. The curtain in the Temple was torn into two pieces, from the top to the bottom.*

Mark 15:37–38

It's as if the hands of heaven had been gripping the veil, waiting for this moment. Keep in mind the size of the curtain—sixty feet tall and thirty feet wide. One instant it was whole; the next it was ripped in two from top to bottom. No delay. No hesitation.

What did the torn curtain mean? For the Jews it meant no more barrier between them and the Holy of Holies. No more priests to go between them and God. No more animal sacrifices to atone for their sins.

And for us? What did the torn curtain signify for us?

We are welcome to enter into God's presence—any day, any time. God has removed the barrier that separates us from him. The barrier of sin? Down. He has removed the curtain.

from *He Chose the Nails*

## Numbers 35:1—36:13

### *The Levites' Towns*

35 The LORD spoke to Moses on the plains of Moab across from
Jericho by the Jordan River. He said, 2"Command the Israelites
to give the Levites cities to live in from the land they receive.
Also give the Levites the pastureland around these cities. 3Then
the Levites will have cities where they may live and pastureland
for their cattle, flocks, and other animals. 4The pastureland you
give the Levites will extend fifteen hundred feet from the city
wall. 5Also measure three thousand feet in each direction
outside the city wall—three thousand feet east of the city, three
thousand feet south of the city, three thousand feet west of the
city, and three thousand feet north of the city, with the city in

the center. This will be pastureland for the Levites' cities.

## *Cities of Safety*

6"Six of the cities you give the Levites will be cities of safety.
A person who accidentally kills someone may run to one of
those cities for safety. You must also give forty-two other cities
to the Levites; 7give the Levites a total of forty-eight cities and
their pastures. 8The larger tribes of Israel must give more
cities, and the smaller tribes must give fewer cities. Each tribe
must give some of its cities to the Levites, but the number of
cities they give will depend on the size of their land."
9Then the LORD said to Moses, 10"Tell the Israelites these
things: 'When you cross the Jordan River and go into Canaan,
11you must choose cities to be cities of safety, so that a person
who accidentally kills someone may run to them for safety.
12There the person will be safe from the dead person's relative
who has the duty of punishing the killer. He will not die before
he receives a fair trial in court. 13The six cities you give will be
cities of safety. 14Give three cities east of the Jordan River and
three cities in Canaan as cities of safety. 15These six cities will
be places of safety for citizens of Israel, as well as for foreigners
and other people living with you. Any of these people who
accidentally kills someone may run to one of these cities.
16"'Anyone who uses an iron weapon to kill someone is a
murderer. He must be put to death. 17Anyone who takes a rock
and kills a person with it is a murderer. He must be put to
death. 18Anyone who picks up a piece of wood and kills
someone with it is a murderer. He must be put to death. 19A
relative of the dead person must put the murderer to death;
when they meet, the relative must kill the murderer. 20A person
might shove someone or throw something at someone and
cause death. 21Or a person might hit someone with his hand
and cause death. If it were done from hate, the person is a
murderer and must be put to death. A relative of the dead
person must kill the murderer when they meet.
22"'But a person might suddenly shove someone, and not
from hatred. Or a person might accidentally throw something
and hit someone. 23Or a person might drop a rock on someone
he couldn't see and kill that person. There was no plan to hurt
anyone and no hatred for the one who was killed. 24If that
happens, the community must judge between the relative of the
dead person and the killer, according to these rules. 25They
must protect the killer from the dead person's relative, sending
the killer back to the original city of safety, to stay there until
the high priest dies (the high priest had the holy oil poured on
him).
26"'Such a person must never go outside the limits of the city

of safety. 27If a relative of the dead person finds the killer outside the city, the relative may kill that person and not be guilty of murder. 28The killer must stay in the city of safety until the high priest dies. After the high priest dies, the killer may go home.

29"'These laws are for you from now on, wherever you live.

30"'If anyone kills a person, the murderer may be put to death only if there are witnesses. No one may be put to death with only one witness.

31"'Don't take money to spare the life of a murderer who should be put to death. A murderer must be put to death.

32"'If someone has run to a city of safety, don't take money to let the person go back home before the high priest dies.

33"'Don't let murder spoil your land. The only way to remove the sin of killing an innocent person is for the murderer to be put to death. 34I am the LORD, and I live among the Israelites. I live in that land with you, so do not spoil it with murder.'"

## *Land for Zelophehad's Daughters*

36 The leaders of Gilead's family group went to talk to Moses and the leaders of the families of Israel. (Gilead was the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, the son of Joseph.) 2They said, "The LORD commanded you, our master, to give the land to the Israelites by throwing lots, and the LORD commanded you to give the land of Zelophehad, our brother, to his daughters. 3But if his daughters marry men from other tribes of Israel, then that land will leave our family, and the people of the other tribes will get that land. So we will lose some of our land. 4When the time of Jubilee comes for the Israelites, their land will go to the tribes of the people they marry; their land will be taken away from us, the land we received from our fathers."

5Then Moses gave the Israelites this command from the LORD: "These men from the tribe of Joseph are right. 6This is the LORD's command to Zelophehad's daughters: You may marry anyone you wish, as long as the person is from your own tribe. 7In this way the Israelites' land will not pass from tribe to tribe, and each Israelite will keep the land in the tribe that belonged to his ancestors. 8A woman who inherits her father's land may marry, but she must marry someone from her own tribe. In this way every Israelite will keep the land that belonged to his ancestors. 9The land must not pass from tribe to tribe, and each Israelite tribe will keep the land it received from its ancestors."

10Zelophehad's daughters obeyed the LORD's command to Moses.

11So Zelophehad's daughters—Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah—married their cousins, their father's relatives. 12Their husbands were from the tribe of Manasseh

son of Joseph, so their land stayed in their father's family group and tribe.

[13]These were the laws and commands that the LORD gave to the Israelites through Moses on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River, across from Jericho.

## Psalm 35:17–28

[17]Lord, how long will you watch this happen?
Save my life from their attacks;
save me from these people who are like lions.

[18]I will praise you in the great meeting.
I will praise you among crowds of people.

[19]Do not let my enemies laugh at me;
they hate me for no reason.

Do not let them make fun of me;
they have no cause to hate me.

[20]Their words are not friendly
but are lies about peace-loving people.

[21]They speak against me
and say, "Aha! We saw what you did!"

[22]LORD, you have been watching. Do not keep quiet.
LORD, do not leave me alone.

[23]Wake up! Come and defend me!
My God and LORD, fight for me!

[24]LORD my God, defend me with your justice.
Don't let them laugh at me.

[25]Don’t let them think, “Aha! We got what we wanted!”
Don’t let them say, “We destroyed him.”

[26]Let them be ashamed and embarrassed,
because they were happy when I hurt.

Cover them with shame and disgrace,
because they thought they were better than I was.

[27]May my friends sing and shout for joy.
May they always say, “Praise the greatness of the LORD,
who loves to see his servants do well.”

[28]I will tell of your goodness
and will praise you every day.

## Proverbs 12:3

[3]Doing evil brings no safety at all,
but a good person has safety and security.

## Mark 15:21–47

### *Jesus Is Crucified*

[21]A man named Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was coming from the fields to the city. The soldiers forced Simon to carry the cross for Jesus. [22]They led Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the Place of the Skull. [23]The soldiers tried to give Jesus wine mixed with myrrh to drink, but he refused. [24]The soldiers crucified Jesus and divided his clothes among themselves, throwing lots to decide what each soldier would get.

[25]It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified Jesus. [26]There was a sign with this charge against Jesus written on it: the king of the jews. [27]They also put two robbers on crosses

beside Jesus, one on the right, and the other on the left. [28And the Scripture came true that says, “They put him with criminals.”][n] 29People walked by and insulted Jesus and shook their heads, saying, “You said you could destroy the Temple and build it again in three days. 30So save yourself! Come down from that cross!”

31The leading priests and the teachers of the law were also making fun of Jesus. They said to each other, “He saved other people, but he can’t save himself. 32If he is really the Christ, the king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross. When we see this, we will believe in him.” The robbers who were being crucified beside Jesus also insulted him.

## *Jesus Dies*

33At noon the whole country became dark, and the darkness lasted for three hours. 34At three o’clock Jesus cried in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani.” This means, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

35When some of the people standing there heard this, they said, “Listen! He is calling Elijah.”

36Someone there ran and got a sponge, filled it with vinegar, tied it to a stick, and gave it to Jesus to drink. He said, “We want to see if Elijah will come to take him down from the cross.”

37Then Jesus cried in a loud voice and died.

38The curtain in the Temple[n] was torn into two pieces, from the top to the bottom. 39When the army officer who was standing in front of the cross saw what happened when Jesus died,[n] he said, “This man really was the Son of God!”

40Some women were standing at a distance from the cross, watching; among them were Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph. (James was her youngest son.) 41These women had followed Jesus in Galilee and helped him. Many other women were also there who had come with Jesus to Jerusalem.

## *Jesus Is Buried*

42This was Preparation Day. (That means the day before the Sabbath day.) That evening, 43Joseph from Arimathea was brave enough to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus’ body. Joseph, an important member of the Jewish council, was one of the people who was waiting for the kingdom of God to come. 44Pilate was amazed that Jesus would have already died, so he called the army officer who had guarded Jesus and asked him if Jesus had already died. 45The officer told Pilate that he was dead, so

Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. [46]Joseph bought some linen cloth, took the body down from the cross, and wrapped it in the linen. He put the body in a tomb that was cut out of a wall of rock. Then he rolled a very large stone to block the entrance of the tomb. [47]And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw the place where Jesus was laid.

# March 20

## Go with Your Heart

*After Mary saw Jesus, she went and told his followers, who were very sad and were crying.*

Mark 16:10

Tears represent the heart, the spirit, and the soul of a person. To put a lock and key on your emotions is to bury part of your Christlikeness! Especially when you come to Calvary.

You can't go to the Cross with just your head and not your heart. It doesn't work that way. Calvary is not a mental trip. It's not an intellectual exercise. It's not a divine calculation or a cold theological principle.

It's a heart-splitting hour of emotion.

Don't walk away from it dry-eyed and unstirred. Don't just straighten your tie and clear your throat. Don't allow yourself to descend Calvary cool and collected.

Please … pause. Look again.

Those are nails in those hands. That's God on that cross. It's us who put him there.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Deuteronomy 1:1—2:37

#### *Moses Talks to the Israelites*

1 This is the message Moses gave to all the people of Israel in
the desert east of the Jordan River. They were in the desert area
near Suph, between Paran and the towns of Tophel, Laban,
Hazeroth, and Dizahab.
2 (The trip from Mount Sinai to Kadesh Barnea on the Mount
Seir road takes eleven days.) 3 Forty years after the Israelites
had left Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses
told the people of Israel everything the LORD had commanded
him to tell them. 4 This was after the LORD had defeated Sihon

and Og. Sihon was king of the Amorite people and lived in Heshbon. Og was king of Bashan and lived in Ashteroth and Edrei.

5Now the Israelites were east of the Jordan River in the land of Moab, and there Moses began to explain what God had commanded. He said:

6The LORD our God spoke to us at Mount Sinai and said, “You have stayed long enough at this mountain. 7Get ready, and go to the mountain country of the Amorites, and to all the places around there—the Jordan Valley, the mountains, the western hills, the southern area, the seacoast, the land of Canaan, and Lebanon. Go as far as the great river, the Euphrates. 8See, I have given you this land, so go in and take it for yourselves. The LORD promised it to your ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants.”

## *Moses Appoints Leaders*

9At that time I said, “I am not able to take care of you by myself. 10The LORD your God has made you grow in number so that there are as many of you as there are stars in the sky. 11I pray that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, will give you a thousand times more people and do all the wonderful things he promised. 12But I cannot take care of your problems, your troubles, and your arguments by myself. 13So choose some men from each tribe—wise men who have understanding and experience—and I will make them leaders over you.”

14And you said, “That’s a good thing to do.”

15So I took the wise and experienced leaders of your tribes, and I made them your leaders. I appointed commanders over a thousand people, over a hundred people, over fifty people, and over ten people and made them officers over your tribes. 16Then I told your leaders, “Listen to the arguments between your people. Judge fairly between two Israelites or between an Israelite and a foreigner. 17When you judge, be fair to everyone; don’t act as if one person is more important than another, and don’t be afraid of anyone, because your decision comes from God. Bring the hard cases to me, and I will judge them.” 18At that time I told you everything you must do.

## *Spies Enter the Land*

19Then, as the LORD our God commanded us, we left Mount Sinai and went toward the mountain country of the Amorite people. We went through that large and terrible desert you saw, and then we came to Kadesh Barnea. 20I said to you, “You have now come to the mountain country of the Amorites, to the land the LORD our God will give us. 21Look, here it is! Go up and take

it. The LORD, the God of your ancestors, told you to do this, so don't be afraid and don't worry."

22Then all of you came to me and said, "Let's send men before us to spy out the land. They can come back and tell us about the way we should go and the cities we will find."

23I thought that was a good idea, so I chose twelve of your men, one for each tribe. 24They left and went up to the mountains, and when they came to the Valley of Eshcol they explored it. 25They took some of the fruit from that land and brought it down to us, saying, "It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us."

## *Israel Refuses to Enter*

26But you refused to go. You would not obey the command of the LORD your God, 27but grumbled in your tents, saying, "The LORD hates us. He brought us out of Egypt just to give us to the Amorites, who will destroy us. 28Where can we go now? The spies we sent have made us afraid, because they said, 'The people there are stronger and taller than we are. The cities are big, with walls up to the sky. And we saw the Anakites there!'"

29Then I said to you, "Don't be frightened; don't be afraid of those people. 30The LORD your God will go ahead of you and fight for you as he did in Egypt; you saw him do it. 31And in the desert you saw how the LORD your God carried you, like one carries a child. And he has brought you safely all the way to this place."

32But you still did not trust the LORD your God, even though 33he had always gone before you to find places for you to camp. In a fire at night and in a cloud during the day, he showed you which way to go.

34When the LORD heard what you said, he was angry and made an oath, saying, 35"I promised a good land to your ancestors, but none of you evil people will see it. 36Only Caleb son of Jephunneh will see it. I will give him and his descendants the land he walked on, because he followed the LORD completely."

37Because of you, the LORD was also angry with me and said, "You won't enter the land either, 38but your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will enter it. Encourage him, because he will lead Israel to take the land for their own.

39"Your little children that you said would be captured, who do not know right from wrong at this time, will go into the land. I will give the land to them, and they will take it for their own. 40But you must turn around and follow the desert road toward the Red Sea."

41Then you said to me, "We have sinned against the LORD, but now we will go up and fight, as the LORD our God commanded

us.” Then all of you put on weapons, thinking it would be easy to go into the mountains.

42But the LORD said to me, “Tell the people, ‘You must not go up there and fight. I will not be with you, and your enemies will defeat you.’”

43So I told you, but you would not listen. You would not obey the LORD’s command. You were proud, so you went on up into the mountains, 44and the Amorites who lived in those mountains came out and fought you. They chased you like bees and defeated you from Edom to Hormah. 45So you came back and cried before the LORD, but the LORD did not listen to you; he refused to pay attention to you. 46So you stayed in Kadesh a long time.

## *Israel Wanders in the Desert*

2 Then we turned around, and we traveled on the desert road toward the Red Sea, as the LORD had told me to do. We traveled through the mountains of Edom for many days.

2Then the LORD said to me, 3“You have traveled through these mountains long enough. Turn north 4and give the people this command: ‘You will soon go through the land that belongs to your relatives, the descendants of Esau who live in Edom. They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. 5Do not go to war against them. I will not give you any of their land—not even a foot of it, because I have given the mountains of Edom to Esau as his own. 6You must pay them in silver for any food you eat or water you drink.’”

7The LORD your God has blessed everything you have done; he has protected you while you traveled through this great desert. The LORD your God has been with you for the past forty years, and you have had everything you needed.

8So we passed by our relatives, the descendants of Esau who lived in Edom. We turned off the Jordan Valley road that comes from the towns of Elath and Ezion Geber and traveled along the desert road to Moab.

## *The Land of Ar*

9Then the LORD said to me, “Don’t bother the people of Moab. Don’t go to war against them, because I will not give you any of their land as your own; I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as their own.” 10(The Emites, who lived in Ar before, were strong people, and there were many of them. They were very tall, like the Anakites. 11The Emites were thought to be Rephaites, like the Anakites, but the Moabite people called them Emites. 12The Horites also lived in Edom before, but the descendants of Esau forced them out and destroyed them,

taking their place as Israel did in the land the LORD gave them as their own.)

13And the LORD said to me, “Now get up and cross the Zered Valley.” So we crossed the valley. 14It had been thirty-eight years from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, all the fighting men from that time had died, as the LORD had promised would happen. 15The LORD continued to work against them to remove them from the camp until they were all dead.

16When the last of those fighting men had died, 17the LORD said to me, 18“Today you will pass by Ar, on the border of Moab. 19When you come near the people of Ammon, don’t bother them or go to war against them, because I will not give you any of their land as your own. I have given it to the descendants of Lot for their own.”

20(That land was also thought to be a land of the Rephaites, because those people used to live there, but the Ammonites called them Zamzummites. 21They were strong people, and there were many of them; they were very tall, like the Anakites. The LORD destroyed the Zamzummites, and the Ammonites forced them out of the land and took their place. 22The LORD did the same thing for the descendants of Esau, who lived in Edom, when he destroyed the Horites. The Edomites forced them out of the land and took their place, and they live there to this day. 23The Cretan people came from Crete and destroyed the Avvites, who lived in towns all the way to Gaza; the Cretans destroyed them and took their place.)

## *Fighting the Amorites*

24The LORD said, “Get up and cross the Arnon Ravine. See, I am giving you the power to defeat Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and I am giving you his land. So fight against him and begin taking his land. 25Today I will begin to make all the people in the world afraid of you. When they hear reports about you, they will shake with fear, and they will be terrified of you.”

26I sent messengers from the desert of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon. They offered him peace, saying, 27“If you let us pass through your country, we will stay on the road and not turn right or left. 28We will pay you in silver for any food we eat or water we drink. We only want to walk through your country. 29The descendants of Esau in Edom let us go through their land, and so did the Moabites in Ar. We want to cross the Jordan River into the land the LORD our God has given us.” 30But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass, because the LORD your God had made him stubborn. The LORD wanted you to defeat Sihon, and now this has happened.

31The LORD said to me, “See, I have begun to give Sihon and

his country to you. Begin taking the land as your own.”

32Then Sihon and all his army came out and fought us at
Jahaz, 33but the LORD our God gave Sihon to us. We defeated
him, his sons, and all his army. 34We captured all his cities at
that time and completely destroyed them, as well as the men,
women, and children. We left no one alive. 35But we kept the
cattle and valuable things from the cities for ourselves. 36We
defeated Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Ravine, and we
defeated the town in the ravine, and even as far as Gilead. No
town was too strong for us; the LORD our God gave us all of
them. 37But you did not go near the land of the Ammonites, on
the shores of the Jabbok River, or the towns in the mountains,
as the LORD our God had commanded.

## Psalm 36:1–4

### *Wicked People and a Good God*

**For the director of music. Of David, the servant of the LORD.**

36 Sin speaks to the wicked in their hearts.
They have no fear of God.

2They think too much of themselves
so they don’t see their sin and hate it.

3Their words are wicked lies;
they are no longer wise or good.

4At night they make evil plans;
what they do leads to nothing good.
They don’t refuse things that are evil.

## Proverbs 12:4–6

4 A good wife is like a crown for her husband,
but a disgraceful wife is like a disease in his bones.

5 The plans that good people make are fair,
but the advice of the wicked will trick you.

6 The wicked talk about killing people,
but the words of good people will save them.

## Mark 16:1–20

### *Jesus Rises from the Dead*

16 The day after the Sabbath day, Mary Magdalene, Mary the
mother of James, and Salome bought some sweet-smelling
spices to put on Jesus' body. 2 Very early on that day, the first
day of the week, soon after sunrise, the women were on their
way to the tomb. 3 They said to each other, "Who will roll away
for us the stone that covers the entrance of the tomb?"
4 Then the women looked and saw that the stone had already
been rolled away, even though it was very large. 5 The women
entered the tomb and saw a young man wearing a white robe
and sitting on the right side, and they were afraid.
6 But the man said, "Don't be afraid. You are looking for Jesus
from Nazareth, who has been crucified. He has risen from the
dead; he is not here. Look, here is the place they laid him. 7 Now
go and tell his followers and Peter, 'Jesus is going into Galilee
ahead of you, and you will see him there as he told you before.'"
8 The women were confused and shaking with fear, so they
left the tomb and ran away. They did not tell anyone about what
happened, because they were afraid.
Verses 9–20 are not included in some of the earliest surviving
Greek copies of Mark.

### *Some Followers See Jesus*

[9 After Jesus rose from the dead early on the first day of the
week, he showed himself first to Mary Magdalene. One time in
the past, he had forced seven demons out of her. 10 After Mary
saw Jesus, she went and told his followers, who were very sad
and were crying. 11 But Mary told them that Jesus was alive. She
said that she had seen him, but the followers did not believe

her.

12 Later, Jesus showed himself to two of his followers while
they were walking in the country, but he did not look the same
as before. 13 These followers went back to the others and told
them what had happened, but again, the followers did not
believe them.

## *Jesus Talks to the Apostles*

14 Later Jesus showed himself to the eleven apostles while
they were eating, and he criticized them because they had no
faith. They were stubborn and refused to believe those who had
seen him after he had risen from the dead.

15 Jesus said to his followers, “Go everywhere in the world,
and tell the Good News to everyone. 16 Anyone who believes and
is baptized will be saved, but anyone who does not believe will
be punished. 17 And those who believe will be able to do these
things as proof: They will use my name to force out demons.
They will speak in new languages.[n] 18 They will pick up snakes
and drink poison without being hurt. They will touch the sick,
and the sick will be healed.”

19 After the Lord Jesus said these things to his followers, he
was carried up into heaven, and he sat at the right side of God.
20 The followers went everywhere in the world and told the Good
News to people, and the Lord helped them. The Lord proved
that the Good News they told was true by giving them power to
work miracles.]

## March 21

# God, Your Guardian

*God, your love is so precious! You protect people in the shadow of your wings.*

Psalm 36:7

"He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you can hide" (Psalm 91:4). The image of living beneath *Shaddai's* shadow reminds me of a rained-out picnic. My college friends and I barely escaped a West Texas storm before it pummeled the park where we were spending a Saturday afternoon. As we were leaving, my buddy brought the car to a sudden stop and gestured to a tender sight on the ground. A mother bird sat exposed to the rain, her wing extended over her baby who had fallen out of the nest. The fierce storm prohibited her from returning to the tree, so she covered her child until the wind passed.

From how many winds is God protecting you? His wing, at this moment, shields you.

A slanderous critic heading toward your desk is interrupted by a phone call. A burglar en route to your house has a flat tire. A drunk driver runs out of gas before your car passes his. God, your guardian, protects you.

from *Come Thirsty*

## Deuteronomy 3:1—4:49

### *The Battle at Bashan*

3 When we turned and went up the road toward Bashan, Og
king of Bashan and all his army came out to fight us at Edrei.
2The LORD said to me, "Don't be afraid of Og, because I will
hand him, his whole army, and his land over to you. Do to him
what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in
Heshbon."

3So the LORD our God gave us Og king of Bashan and all his
army; we defeated them and left no one alive. 4Then we
captured all of Og's cities, all sixty of them, and took the whole
area of Argob, Og's kingdom in Bashan. 5All these were strong
cities, with high walls and gates with bars. And there were also
many small towns with no walls. 6We completely destroyed
them, just like the cities of Sihon king of Heshbon. We killed all
the men, women, and children, 7but we kept all the cattle and
valuable things from the cities for ourselves.
8So at that time we took the land east of the Jordan River,
from the Arnon Ravine to Mount Hermon, from these two
Amorite kings. 9(Hermon is called Sirion by the Sidonian
people, but the Amorites call it Senir.) 10We captured all the
cities on the high plain and all of Gilead, and we took all of
Bashan as far as Salecah and Edrei, towns in Og's kingdom of
Bashan. 11(Only Og king of Bashan was left of the few
Rephaites. His bed was made of iron, and it was more than
thirteen feet long and six feet wide! It is still in the Ammonite
city of Rabbah.)

## *The Land Is Divided*

12At that time we took this land to be our own. I gave the
people of Reuben and Gad the land from Aroer by the Arnon
Ravine, as well as half of the mountain country of Gilead and
the cities in it. 13To the people of East Manasseh I gave the rest
of Gilead and all of Bashan, the kingdom of Og. (The area of
Argob in Bashan was called the land of the Rephaites. 14Jair, a
descendant of Manasseh, took the whole area of Argob, all the
way to the border of the Geshurites and Maacathites. So that
land was named for Jair, and even today Bashan is called the
Towns of Jair.) 15I gave Gilead to Makir. 16I gave the Reubenites
and the Gadites the land that begins at Gilead and goes from
the Arnon Ravine (the middle of the Arnon is the border) to the
Jabbok River, which is the Ammonite border. 17The border on
the west was the Jordan River in the Jordan Valley, and it goes
from Lake Galilee to the Dead Sea west of Mount Pisgah.
18At that time I gave you this command: "The LORD your God
has given you this land as your own. Now your fighting men
must take their weapons, and you must lead the other Israelites
across the river. 19Your wives, your young children, and your
cattle may stay here. I know you have many cattle, and they
may stay here in the cities I have given you, 20until the LORD
also gives your Israelite relatives a place to rest. They will
receive the land the LORD your God has given them on the other
side of the Jordan River. After that, you may each return to the
land I have given you."
21Then I gave this command to Joshua: "You have seen for

yourself all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings. The LORD will do the same thing to all the kingdoms where you are going. 22Don't be afraid of them, because the LORD your God will fight for you."

## *Moses Cannot Enter the Land*

23Then I begged the LORD: 24"Lord God, you have begun to show me, your servant, how great you are. You have great strength, and no other god in heaven or on earth can do the powerful things you do. There is no other god like you. 25Please let me cross the Jordan River so that I may see the good land by the Jordan. I want to see the beautiful mountains and Lebanon."

26But the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he would not listen to me. The LORD said to me, "That's enough. Don't talk to me anymore about it. 27Climb to the top of Mount Pisgah and look west, north, south, and east. You can look at the land, but you will not cross the Jordan River. 28Appoint Joshua and help him be brave and strong. He will lead the people across the river and give them the land that they are to inherit, but you can only look at it." 29So we stayed in the valley opposite Beth Peor.

## *Moses Tells Israel to Obey*

4 Now, Israel, listen to the laws and commands I will teach you. Obey them so that you will live and so that you will go over and take the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving to you. 2Don't add to these commands, and don't leave anything out, but obey the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

3You have seen for yourselves what the LORD did at Baal Peor, how the LORD your God destroyed everyone among you who followed Baal in Peor. 4But all of you who continued following the LORD your God are still alive today.

5Look, I have taught you the laws and rules the LORD my God commanded me. Now you can obey the laws in the land you are entering, in the land you will take. 6Obey these laws carefully, in order to show the other nations that you have wisdom and understanding. When they hear about these laws, they will say, "This great nation of Israel is wise and understanding." 7No other nation is as great as we are. Their gods do not come near them, but the LORD our God comes near when we pray to him. 8And no other nation has such good teachings and commands as those I am giving to you today.

9But be careful! Watch out and don't forget the things you have seen. Don't forget them as long as you live, but teach them to your children and grandchildren. 10Remember the day you

stood before the LORD your God at Mount Sinai. He said to me,
“Bring the people together so I can tell them what I have to say.
Then they will respect me as long as they live in the land, and
they will teach these things to their children.” 11When you came
and stood at the bottom of the mountain, it blazed with fire that
reached to the sky, and black clouds made it very dark. 12The
LORD spoke to you from the fire. You heard the sound of words,
but you did not see him; there was only a voice. 13The LORD told
you about his Agreement, the Ten Commandments. He told you
to obey them, and he wrote them on two stone tablets. 14Then
the LORD commanded me to teach you the laws and rules that
you must obey in the land you will take when you cross the
Jordan River.

## *Laws About Idols*

15Since the LORD spoke to you from the fire at Mount Sinai,
but you did not see him, watch yourselves carefully! 16Don’t sin
by making idols of any kind, and don’t make statues—of men or
women, 17of animals on earth or birds that fly in the air, 18of
anything that crawls on the ground, or of fish in the water
below. 19When you look up at the sky, you see the sun, moon,
and stars, and everything in the sky. But don’t bow down and
worship them, because the LORD your God has made these
things for all people everywhere. 20But the LORD brought you
out of Egypt, which tested you like a furnace for melting iron,
and he made you his very own people, as you are now.

21The LORD was angry with me because of you, and he swore
that I would not cross the Jordan River to go into the good land
the LORD your God is giving you as your own. 22I will die here in
this land and not cross the Jordan, but you will soon go across
and take that good land. 23Be careful. Don’t forget the
Agreement of the LORD your God that he made with you, and
don’t make any idols for yourselves, as the LORD your God has
commanded you not to do. 24The LORD your God is a jealous
God, like a fire that burns things up.

25Even after you have lived in the land a long time and have
had children and grandchildren, don’t do evil things. Don’t
make any kind of idol, and don’t do what the LORD your God says
is evil, because that will make him angry. 26If you do, I ask
heaven and earth to speak against you this day that you will
quickly be removed from this land that you are crossing the
Jordan River to take. You will not live there long after that, but
you will be completely destroyed. 27The LORD will scatter you
among the other nations. Only a few of you will be left alive,
and those few will be in other nations where the LORD will send
you. 28There you will worship gods made by people, gods made
of wood and stone, that cannot see, hear, eat, or smell. 29But

even there you can look for the LORD your God, and you will find him if you look for him with your whole being. 30It will be hard when all these things happen to you. But after that you will come back to the LORD your God and obey him, 31because the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you. He will not forget the Agreement with your ancestors, which he swore to them.

## *The Lord Is Great*

32Nothing like this has ever happened before! Look at the past, long before you were even born. Go all the way back to when God made humans on the earth, and look from one end of heaven to the other. Nothing like this has ever been heard of! 33No other people have ever heard God speak from a fire and have still lived. But you have. 34No other god has ever taken for himself one nation out of another. But the LORD your God did this for you in Egypt, right before your own eyes. He did it with tests, signs, miracles, war, and great sights, by his great power and strength.

35He showed you things so you would know that the LORD is God, and there is no other God besides him. 36He spoke to you from heaven to teach you. He showed you his great fire on earth, and you heard him speak from the fire. 37Because the LORD loved your ancestors, he chose you, their descendants, and he brought you out of Egypt himself by his great strength. 38He forced nations out of their land ahead of you, nations that were bigger and stronger than you were. The LORD did this so he could bring you into their land and give it to you as your own, and this land is yours today.

39Know and believe today that the LORD is God. He is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other god! 40Obey his laws and commands that I am giving you today so that things will go well for you and your children. Then you will live a long time in the land that the LORD your God is giving to you forever.

## *Cities of Safety*

41Moses chose three cities east of the Jordan River, 42where a person who accidentally killed someone could go. If the person was not killed because of hatred, the murderer's life could be saved by running to one of these cities. 43These were the cities: Bezer in the desert high plain was for the Reubenites; Ramoth in Gilead was for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan was for the Manassites.

## *The Laws Moses Gave*

44 These are the teachings Moses gave to the people of Israel.
45 They are the rules, commands, and laws he gave them when
they came out of Egypt. 46 They were in the valley near Beth
Peor, east of the Jordan River, in the land of Sihon. Sihon king of
the Amorites ruled in Heshbon and was defeated by Moses and
the Israelites as they came out of Egypt. 47 The Israelites took
his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, the two Amorite
kings east of the Jordan River. 48 This land went from Aroer, on
the edge of the Arnon Ravine, to Mount Hermon. 49 It included
all the Jordan Valley east of the Jordan River, and it went as far
as the Dead Sea below Mount Pisgah.

## Psalm 36:5–12

5 LORD, your love reaches to the heavens,
your loyalty to the skies.

6 Your goodness is as high as the mountains.
Your justice is as deep as the great ocean.

LORD, you protect both people and animals.

7 God, your love is so precious!
You protect people in the shadow of your wings.

8 They eat the rich food in your house,
and you let them drink from your river of pleasure.

9 You are the giver of life.
Your light lets us enjoy life.

10 Continue to love those who know you
and to do good to those who are good.

11 Don’t let proud people attack me

and the wicked force me away.

12 Those who do evil have been defeated.
They are overwhelmed;
they cannot do evil any longer.

## Proverbs 12:7

7 Wicked people die and they are no more,
but a good person's family continues.

## Luke 1:1–25

### *Luke Writes About Jesus' Life*

1 Many have tried to report on the things that happened among
us. 2 They have written the same things that we learned from
others—the people who saw those things from the beginning
and served God by telling people his message. 3 Since I myself
have studied everything carefully from the beginning, most
excellent[n] Theophilus, it seemed good for me to write it out for
you. I arranged it in order, 4 to help you know that what you
have been taught is true.

### *Zechariah and Elizabeth*

5 During the time Herod ruled Judea, there was a priest
named Zechariah who belonged to Abijah's group.[n] Zechariah's
wife, Elizabeth, came from the family of Aaron. 6 Zechariah and
Elizabeth truly did what God said was good. They did
everything the Lord commanded and were without fault in
keeping his law. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth
could not have a baby, and both of them were very old.

8 One day Zechariah was serving as a priest before God,
because his group was on duty. 9 According to the custom of the
priests, he was chosen by lot to go into the Temple of the Lord
and burn incense. 10 There were a great many people outside
praying at the time the incense was offered. 11 Then an angel of

the Lord appeared to Zechariah, standing on the right side of the incense table. 12When he saw the angel, Zechariah was startled and frightened. 13But the angel said to him, “Zechariah, don’t be afraid. God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a son, and you will name him John. 14He will bring you joy and gladness, and many people will be happy because of his birth. 15John will be a great man for the Lord. He will never drink wine or beer, and even from birth, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. 16He will help many people of Israel return to the Lord their God. 17He will go before the Lord in spirit and power like Elijah. He will make peace between parents and their children and will bring those who are not obeying God back to the right way of thinking, to make a people ready for the coming of the Lord.”

18Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I know that what you say is true? I am an old man, and my wife is old, too.”

19The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand before God, who sent me to talk to you and to tell you this good news. 20Now, listen! You will not be able to speak until the day these things happen, because you did not believe what I told you. But they will really happen.”

21Outside, the people were still waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he was staying so long in the Temple. 22When Zechariah came outside, he could not speak to them, and they knew he had seen a vision in the Temple. He could only make signs to them and remained unable to speak. 23When his time of service at the Temple was finished, he went home.

24Later, Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and did not go out of her house for five months. Elizabeth said, 25“Look what the Lord has done for me! My people were ashamed[n] of me, but now the Lord has taken away that shame.”

# March 22

## God Came Near

*“His kingdom will never end.”*

Luke 1:33

she looks into the face of the baby. Her son. Her Lord. His Majesty. At this point in history, the human being who best understands who God is and what he is doing is a teenage girl in a smelly stable. She can’t take her eyes off him. Somehow Mary knows she is holding God. So this is he. She remembers the words of the angel. “His kingdom will never end.”

He looks like anything but a king. His face is prunish and red. His cry, though strong and healthy, is still the helpless and piercing cry of a baby. And he is absolutely dependent upon Mary for his well-being.

Majesty in the midst of the mundane. Holiness in the filth of sheep manure and sweat.

Divinity entering the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager and in the presence of a carpenter.

She touches the face of the infant-God.

from *God Came Near*

### Deuteronomy 5:1—6:25

### *The Ten Commandments*

5 Moses called all the people of Israel together and said: Listen,
Israel, to the commands and laws I am giving you today. Learn
them and obey them carefully. 2The LORD our God made an
Agreement with us at Mount Sinai. 3He did not make this
Agreement with our ancestors, but he made it with us, with all
of us who are alive here today. 4The LORD spoke to you face to
face from the fire on the mountain. 5(At that time I stood
between you and the LORD in order to tell you what the LORD
said; you were afraid of the fire, so you would not go up on the

mountain.) The LORD said:

6"I am the LORD your God; I brought you out of the land of
Egypt where you were slaves.

7"You must not have any other gods except me.

8"You must not make for yourselves any idols or anything to
worship that looks like something in the sky above or on the
earth below or in the water below the land. 9You must not
worship or serve any idol, because I, the LORD your God, am a
jealous God. If people sin against me and hate me, I will punish
their children, even their grandchildren and great-
grandchildren. 10But I will be very kind for a thousand lifetimes
to those who love me and obey my commands.

11"You must not use the name of the LORD your God
thoughtlessly, because the LORD will punish anyone who uses his
name in this way.

12"Keep the Sabbath as a holy day, as the LORD your God has
commanded you. 13You may work and get everything done
during six days each week, 14but the seventh day is a day of rest
to honor the LORD your God. On that day no one may do any
work: not you, your son or daughter, your male or female slaves,
your ox, your donkey, or any of your animals, or the foreigners
living in your cities. That way your servants may rest as you do.
15Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD
your God brought you out of there by his great power and
strength. So the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on
the Sabbath day.

16"Honor your father and your mother as the LORD your God
has commanded you. Then you will live a long time, and things
will go well for you in the land that the LORD your God is going
to give you.

17"You must not murder anyone.

18"You must not be guilty of adultery.

19"You must not steal.

20"You must not tell lies about your neighbor.

21"You must not want to take your neighbor's wife. You must
not want to take your neighbor's house or land, his male or
female slaves, his ox or his donkey, or anything that belongs to
your neighbor."

22The LORD spoke these commands to all of you on the
mountain in a loud voice out of the fire, the cloud, and the deep
darkness; he did not say anything else. Then he wrote them on
two stone tablets, and he gave them to me.

23When you heard the voice from the darkness, as the
mountain was blazing with fire, all the leaders of your tribes
and your elders came to me. 24And you said, "The LORD our God
has shown us his glory and majesty, and we have heard his
voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live
even if God speaks to him. 25But now, we will die! This great fire

will burn us up, and we will die if we hear the LORD our God speak anymore. 26No human being has ever heard the living God speaking from a fire and still lived, but we have. 27Moses, you go near and listen to everything the LORD our God says. Then you tell us what the LORD our God tells you, and we will listen and obey."

28The LORD heard what you said to me, and he said to me, "I have heard what the people said to you. Everything they said was good. 29I wish their hearts would always respect me and that they would always obey my commands so that things would go well for them and their children forever!

30"Go and tell the people to return to their tents, 31but you stay here with me so that I may give you all the commands, rules, and laws that you must teach the people to obey in the land I am giving them as their own."

32So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you, and follow the commands exactly. 33Live the way the LORD your God has commanded you so that you may live and have what is good and have a long life in the land you will take.

## *The Command to Love God*

6 These are the commands, rules, and laws that the LORD your God told me to teach you to obey in the land you are crossing the Jordan River to take. 2You, your children, and your grandchildren must respect the LORD your God as long as you live. Obey all his rules and commands I give you so that you will live a long time. 3Listen, Israel, and carefully obey these laws. Then all will go well for you, and you will become a great nation in a fertile land, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

4Listen, people of Israel! The LORD our God is the only LORD. 5Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. 6Always remember these commands I give you today. 7Teach them to your children, and talk about them when you sit at home and walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8Write them down and tie them to your hands as a sign. Tie them on your forehead to remind you, 9and write them on your doors and gates.

10The LORD your God will bring you into the land he promised to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he will give it to you. The land has large, growing cities you did not build, 11houses full of good things you did not buy, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. You will eat as much as you want. 12But be careful! Do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves.

13 Respect the LORD your God. You must worship him and
make your promises only in his name. 14 Do not worship other
gods as the people around you do, 15 because the LORD your God
is a jealous God. He is present with you, and if you worship
other gods, he will become angry with you and destroy you from
the earth. 16 Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah.
17 Be sure to obey the commands of the LORD your God and the
rules and laws he has given you. 18 Do what the LORD says is
good and right so that things will go well for you. Then you may
go in and take the good land the LORD promised to your
ancestors. 19 He will force all your enemies out as you go in, as
the LORD has said.
20 In the future when your children ask you, "What is the
meaning of the laws, commands, and rules the LORD our God
gave us?" 21 tell them, "We were slaves to the king of Egypt, but
the LORD brought us out of Egypt by his great power. 22 The LORD
showed us great and terrible signs and miracles, which he did
to Egypt, the king, and his whole family. 23 The LORD brought us
out of Egypt to lead us here and to give us the land he promised
our ancestors. 24 The LORD ordered us to obey all these
commands and to respect the LORD our God so that we will
always do well and stay alive, as we are today. 25 The right thing
for us to do is this: Obey all these rules in the presence of the
LORD our God, as he has commanded."

## Psalm 37:1–6

### *God Will Reward Fairly*

**Of David.**

37 Don't be upset because of evil people.
Don't be jealous of those who do wrong,

2 because like the grass, they will soon dry up.
Like green plants, they will soon die away.

3 Trust the LORD and do good.
Live in the land and feed on truth.

4 Enjoy serving the LORD,
and he will give you what you want.

5 Depend on the LORD;
trust him, and he will take care of you.

6 Then your goodness will shine like the sun,
and your fairness like the noonday sun.

## Proverbs 12:8

8 The wisdom of the wise wins praise,
but there is no respect for the stupid.

## Luke 1:26–38

### *An Angel Appears to Mary*

26 During Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the
angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin. She
was engaged to marry a man named Joseph from the family of
David. Her name was Mary. 28 The angel came to her and said,
"Greetings! The Lord has blessed you and is with you."
29 But Mary was very startled by what the angel said and
wondered what this greeting might mean.
30 The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has
shown you his grace. 31 Listen! You will become pregnant and
give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be
great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God
will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. 33 He will
rule over the people of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will
never end."
34 Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I am a
virgin?"
35 The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon
you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. For this
reason the baby will be holy and will be called the Son of God.
36 Now Elizabeth, your relative, is also pregnant with a son

though she is very old. Everyone thought she could not have a baby, but she has been pregnant for six months. [37]God can do anything!”

[38]Mary said, “I am the servant of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!” Then the angel went away.

# March 23

## Dealing with the Past

*Don't get angry. Don't be upset; it only leads to trouble.*

Psalm 37:8

A*nger*. It's easy to define: the noise of the soul. *Anger*. The unseen irritant of the heart. *Anger*. The relentless invader of silence … The louder it gets the more desperate we become …

Some of you are thinking … *you don't have any idea how hard my life has been.* And you're right, I don't. But I have a very clear idea how miserable your future will be unless you deal with your anger.

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

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

### Deuteronomy 7:1—8:20

#### *You Are God's People*

7 The LORD your God will bring you into the land that you are
entering and that you will have as your own. As you go in, he
will force out these nations: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites,
Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—seven nations
that are stronger than you. 2The LORD your God will hand these
nations over to you, and when you defeat them, you must
destroy them completely. Do not make a peace treaty with them
or show them any mercy. 3Do not marry any of them, or let your
daughters marry their sons, or let your sons marry their
daughters. 4If you do, those people will turn your children away
from me, to begin serving other gods. Then the LORD will be very

angry with you, and he will quickly destroy you. 5This is what
you must do to those people: Tear down their altars, smash
their holy stone pillars, cut down their Asherah idols, and burn
their idols in the fire. 6You are holy people who belong to the
LORD your God. He has chosen you from all the people on earth
to be his very own.

7The LORD did not care for you and choose you because there
were many of you—you are the smallest nation of all. 8But the
LORD chose you because he loved you, and he kept his promise
to your ancestors. So he brought you out of Egypt by his great
power and freed you from the land of slavery, from the power of
the king of Egypt. 9So know that the LORD your God is God, the
faithful God. He will keep his agreement of love for a thousand
lifetimes for people who love him and obey his commands. 10But
he will pay back those people who hate him. He will destroy
them, and he will not be slow to pay back those who hate him.
11So be careful to obey the commands, rules, and laws I give
you today.

12If you pay attention to these laws and obey them carefully,
the LORD your God will keep his agreement and show his love to
you, as he promised your ancestors. 13He will love and bless
you. He will make the number of your people grow; he will bless
you with children. He will bless your fields with good crops and
will give you grain, new wine, and oil. He will bless your herds
with calves and your flocks with lambs in the land he promised
your ancestors he would give you. 14You will be blessed more
than any other people. Every husband and wife will have
children, and all your cattle will have calves. 15The LORD will
take away all disease from you; you will not have the terrible
diseases that were in Egypt, but he will give them to all the
people who hate you. 16You must destroy all the people the LORD
your God hands over to you. Do not feel sorry for them, and do
not worship their gods, or they will trap you.

17You might say to yourselves, “Because these nations are
stronger than we are, we can’t force them out.” 18But don’t be
afraid of them. Remember what the LORD your God did to all of
Egypt and its king. 19You saw for yourselves the troubles, signs,
and miracles he did, how the LORD’s great power and strength
brought you out of Egypt. The LORD your God will do the same
thing to all the nations you now fear. 20The LORD your God will
also send terror among them so that even those who are alive
and hiding from you will die. 21Don’t be afraid of them, because
the LORD your God is with you; he is a great God and people are
afraid of him. 22When the LORD your God forces those nations
out of the land, he will do it little by little ahead of you. You
won’t be able to destroy them all at once; otherwise, the wild
animals will grow too many in number. 23But the LORD your God
will hand those nations over to you, confusing them until they

are destroyed. 24The LORD will help you defeat their kings, and the world will forget who they were. No one will be able to stop you; you will destroy them all. 25Burn up their idols in the fire. Do not wish for the silver and gold they have, and don't take it for yourselves, or you will be trapped by it. The LORD your God hates it. 26Do not bring one of those hateful things into your house, or you will be completely destroyed along with it. Hate and reject those things; they must be completely destroyed.

## *Remember the Lord*

8 Carefully obey every command I give you today. Then you will live and grow in number, and you will enter and take the land the LORD promised your ancestors. 2Remember how the LORD your God has led you in the desert for these forty years, taking away your pride and testing you, because he wanted to know what was in your heart. He wanted to know if you would obey his commands. 3He took away your pride when he let you get hungry, and then he fed you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever seen. This was to teach you that a person does not live on bread alone, but by everything the LORD says. 4During these forty years, your clothes did not wear out, and your feet did not swell. 5Know in your heart that the LORD your God corrects you as a parent corrects a child.

6Obey the commands of the LORD your God, living as he has commanded you and respecting him. 7The LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with rivers and pools of water, with springs that flow in the valleys and hills, 8a land that has wheat and barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey. 9It is a land where you will have plenty of food, where you will have everything you need, where the rocks are iron, and where you can dig copper out of the hills.

10When you have all you want to eat, then praise the LORD your God for giving you a good land. 11Be careful not to forget the LORD your God so that you fail to obey his commands, laws, and rules that I am giving to you today. 12When you eat all you want and build nice houses and live in them, 13when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase, when you have more of everything, 14then your heart will become proud. You will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. 15He led you through the large and terrible desert that was dry and had no water, and that had poisonous snakes and stinging insects. He gave you water from a solid rock 16and manna to eat in the desert. Manna was something your ancestors had never seen. He did this to take away your pride and to test you, so things would go well for you in the end. 17You might say to yourself, "I am rich because of my own power and strength," 18but

remember the LORD your God! It is he who gives you the power to become rich, keeping the agreement he promised to your ancestors, as it is today.

19 If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship them and bow down to them, I warn you today that you will be destroyed. 20 Just as the LORD destroyed the other nations for you, you can be destroyed if you do not obey the LORD your God.

## Psalm 37:7–11

7 Wait and trust the LORD.
Don't be upset when others get rich
or when someone else's plans succeed.

8 Don't get angry.
Don't be upset; it only leads to trouble.

9 Evil people will be sent away,
but those who trust the LORD will inherit the land.

10 In a little while the wicked will be no more.
You may look for them, but they will be gone.

11 People who are not proud will inherit the land
and will enjoy complete peace.

## Proverbs 12:9–10

9 A person who is not important but has a servant is better off
than someone who acts important but has no food.

10 Good people take care of their animals,

but even the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.

## Luke 1:39–56

### *Mary Visits Elizabeth*

39 Mary got up and went quickly to a town in the hills of
Judea. 40 She came to Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.
41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the unborn baby
inside her jumped, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
42 She cried out in a loud voice, "God has blessed you more than
any other woman, and he has blessed the baby to which you will
give birth. 43 Why has this good thing happened to me, that the
mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 When I heard your voice, the
baby inside me jumped with joy. 45 You are blessed because you
believed that what the Lord said to you would really happen."

### *Mary Praises God*

46 Then Mary said,

"My soul praises the Lord;

47
my heart rejoices in God my Savior,

48 because he has shown his concern for his humble servant
girl.

From now on, all people will say that I am blessed,

49 because the Powerful One has done great things for me.
His name is holy.

50 God will show his mercy forever and ever
to those who worship and serve him.

51 He has done mighty deeds by his power.
He has scattered the people who are proud
and think great things about themselves.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
and raised up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with nothing.

54 He has helped his servant, the people of Israel,
remembering to show them mercy

55 as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his children forever.”

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

# March 24

## The Choice Is Ours

*"With the loving mercy of our God, a new day from heaven will dawn upon us."*

Luke 1:78

"And I will make you my promised bride forever. I will be good and fair; I will show you my love and mercy" (Hosea 2:19). For all its peculiarities and unevenness, the Bible has a simple story. God made man. Man rejected God. God won't give up until he wins him back.

God will whisper. He will shout. He will touch and tug. He will take away our burdens; he'll even take away our blessings. If there are a thousand steps between us and him, he will take all but one. But he will leave the final one for us. The choice is ours.

Please understand. His goal is not to make you happy. His goal is to make you his. His goal is not to get you what you want; it is to get you what you need.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

### Deuteronomy 9:1—10:22

### *The Lord Will Be with Israel*

9 Listen, Israel. You will soon cross the Jordan River to go in and
force out nations that are bigger and stronger than you. They
have large cities with walls up to the sky. 2The people there are
Anakites, who are strong and tall. You know about them, and
you have heard it said: "No one can stop the Anakites." 3But
today remember that the LORD your God goes in before you to
destroy them like a fire that burns things up. He will defeat
them ahead of you, and you will force them out and destroy
them quickly, just as the LORD has said.

4After the LORD your God has forced those nations out ahead

of you, don't say to yourself, "The LORD brought me here to take this land because I am so good." No! It is because these nations are evil that the LORD will force them out ahead of you. 5You are going in to take the land, not because you are good and honest, but because these nations are evil. That is why the LORD your God will force them out ahead of you, to keep his promise to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 6The LORD your God is giving you this good land to take as your own. But know this: It is not because you are good; you are a stubborn people.

## *Remember the Lord's Anger*

7Remember this and do not forget it: You made the LORD your God angry in the desert. You would not obey the LORD from the day you left Egypt until you arrived here. 8At Mount Sinai you made the LORD angry—angry enough to destroy you. 9When I went up on the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets with the Agreement the LORD had made with you, I stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights; I did not eat bread or drink water. 10The LORD gave me two stone tablets, which God had written on with his own finger. On them were all the commands that the LORD gave to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day you were gathered there.

11When the forty days and forty nights were over, the LORD gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets with the Agreement on them. 12Then the LORD told me, "Get up and go down quickly from here, because the people you brought out from Egypt are ruining themselves. They have quickly turned away from what I commanded and have made an idol for themselves."

13The LORD said to me, "I have watched these people, and they are very stubborn! 14Get away so that I may destroy them and make the whole world forget who they are. Then I will make another nation from you that will be bigger and stronger than they are."

15So I turned and came down the mountain that was burning with fire, and the two stone tablets with the Agreement were in my hands. 16When I looked, I saw you had sinned against the LORD your God and had made an idol in the shape of a calf. You had quickly turned away from what the LORD had told you to do. 17So I took the two stone tablets and threw them down, breaking them into pieces right in front of you.

18Then I again bowed facedown on the ground before the LORD for forty days and forty nights; I did not eat bread or drink water. You had sinned by doing what the LORD said was evil, and you made him angry. 19I was afraid of the LORD's anger and rage, because he was angry enough with you to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me again. 20And the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but then I prayed for Aaron, too. 21I

took that sinful calf idol you had made and burned it in the fire. I crushed it into a powder like dust and threw the dust into a stream that flowed down the mountain.

22You also made the LORD angry at Taberah, Massah, and Kibroth Hattaavah.

23Then the LORD sent you away from Kadesh Barnea and said, “Go up and take the land I have given you.” But you rejected the command of the LORD your God. You did not trust him or obey him. 24You have refused to obey the LORD as long as I have known you.

25The LORD had said he would destroy you, so I threw myself down in front of him for those forty days and forty nights. 26I prayed to the LORD and said, “Lord God, do not destroy your people, your own people, whom you freed and brought out of Egypt by your great power and strength. 27Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Don’t look at how stubborn these people are, and don’t look at their sin and evil. 28Otherwise, Egypt will say, ‘It was because the LORD was not able to take his people into the land he promised them, and it was because he hated them that he took them into the desert to kill them.’ 29But they are your people, LORD, your own people, whom you brought out of Egypt with your great power and strength.”

## *New Stone Tablets*

10 At that time the LORD said to me, “Cut two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden Ark. 2I will write on the tablets the same words that were on the first tablets, which you broke, and you will put the new tablets in the Ark.”

3So I made the Ark out of acacia wood, and I cut out two stone tablets like the first ones. Then I went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hands. 4The LORD wrote the same things on these tablets he had written before—the Ten Commandments that he had told you on the mountain from the fire, on the day you were gathered there. And the LORD gave them to me. 5Then I turned and came down the mountain; I put the tablets in the Ark I had made, as the LORD had commanded, and they are still there.

6(The people of Israel went from the wells of the Jaakanites to Moserah. Aaron died there and was buried; his son Eleazar became priest in his place. 7From Moserah they went to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah they went to Jotbathah, a place with streams of water. 8At that time the LORD chose the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD. They were to serve the LORD and to bless the people in his name, which they still do today. 9That is why the Levites did not receive any

land of their own; instead, they received the LORD himself as their gift, as the LORD your God told them.)

10I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights just like the first time, and the LORD listened to me this time also. He did not want to destroy you. 11The LORD said to me, “Go and lead the people so that they will go in and take the land I promised their ancestors.”

### *What the Lord Wants You to Do*

12Now, Israel, this is what the LORD your God wants you to do: Respect the LORD your God, and do what he has told you to do. Love him. Serve the LORD your God with your whole being, 13and obey the LORD’s commands and laws that I am giving you today for your own good.

14The LORD owns the world and everything in it—the heavens, even the highest heavens, are his. 15But the LORD cared for and loved your ancestors, and he chose you, their descendants, over all the other nations, just as it is today. 16Give yourselves completely to serving him, and do not be stubborn any longer. 17The LORD your God is God of all gods and Lord of all lords. He is the great God, who is strong and wonderful. He does not take sides, and he will not be talked into doing evil. 18He helps orphans and widows, and he loves foreigners and gives them food and clothes. 19You also must love foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt. 20Respect the LORD your God and serve him. Be loyal to him and make your promises in his name. 21He is the one you should praise; he is your God, who has done great and wonderful things for you, which you have seen with your own eyes. 22There were only seventy of your ancestors when they went down to Egypt, and now the LORD your God has made you as many as the stars in the sky.

## Psalm 37:12–15

12The wicked make evil plans against good people.
They grind their teeth at them in anger.

13But the Lord laughs at the wicked,
because he sees that their day is coming.

14 The wicked draw their swords
and bend their bows

to kill the poor and helpless,
to kill those who are honest.

15 But their swords will stab their own hearts,
and their bows will break.

## Proverbs 12:11

11 Those who work their land will have plenty of food,
but the one who chases empty dreams is not wise.

## Luke 1:57–80

### *The Birth of John*

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to give birth, she had a boy.
58 Her neighbors and relatives heard how good the Lord was to
her, and they rejoiced with her.
59 When the baby was eight days old, they came to circumcise
him. They wanted to name him Zechariah because this was his
father's name, 60 but his mother said, "No! He will be named
John."
61 The people said to Elizabeth, "But no one in your family
has this name." 62 Then they made signs to his father to find out
what he would like to name him.
63 Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name
is John," and everyone was surprised. 64 Immediately Zechariah
could talk again, and he began praising God. 65 All their
neighbors became alarmed, and in all the mountains of Judea
people continued talking about all these things. 66 The people
who heard about them wondered, saying, "What will this child
be?" because the Lord was with him.

### *Zechariah Praises God*

67 Then Zechariah, John’s father, was filled with the Holy
Spirit and prophesied:

68 “Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to help his people and has given
them freedom.

69 He has given us a powerful Savior
from the family of God’s servant David.

70 He said that he would do this
through his holy prophets who lived long ago:

71 He promised he would save us from our enemies
and from the power of all those who hate us.

72 He said he would give mercy to our ancestors
and that he would remember his holy promise.

73 God promised Abraham, our father,

74 that he would save us from the power of our enemies
so we could serve him without fear,

75 being holy and good before God as long as we live.

76 “Now you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High
God.
You will go before the Lord to prepare his way.

77 You will make his people know that they will be saved
by having their sins forgiven.

78 With the loving mercy of our God,
a new day from heaven will dawn upon us.

79 It will shine on those who live in darkness,
in the shadow of death.

It will guide us into the path of peace.”

80 And so the child grew up and became strong in spirit. John
lived in the desert until the time when he came out to preach to
Israel.

# March 25

## An EXTRA-Ordinary Night

*"Today your Savior was born in the town of David. He is Christ, the Lord."*

Luke 2:11

A n ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds. And were it not for a God who loves to hook an "extra" on the front of the ordinary, the night would have gone unnoticed. The sheep would have been forgotten, and the shepherds would have slept the night away.

But God dances amidst the common. And that night he did a waltz.

The black sky exploded with brightness. Trees that had been shadows jumped into clarity. Sheep that had been silent became a chorus of curiosity. One minute the shepherd was dead asleep, the next he was rubbing his eyes and staring into the face of an alien.

The night was ordinary no more.

The angel came in the night because that is when lights are best seen and that is when they are most needed. God comes into the common for the same reason. His most powerful tools are the simplest.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Deuteronomy 11:1—12:32

### *Great Things Israel Saw*

11 Love the LORD your God and always obey his orders, rules,
laws, and commands. 2Remember today it was not your children
who saw and felt the correction of the LORD your God. They did
not see his majesty, his power, his strength, 3or his signs and
the things he did in Egypt to the king and his whole country.
4They did not see what he did to the Egyptian army, its horses

and chariots, when he drowned them in the Red Sea as they were chasing you. The LORD ruined them forever. 5They did not see what he did for you in the desert until you arrived here. 6They did not see what he did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the ground opened up and swallowed them, their families, their tents, and everyone who stood with them in Israel. 7It was you who saw all these great things the LORD has done.

8So obey all the commands I am giving you today so that you will be strong and can go in and take the land you are going to take as your own. 9Then you will live a long time in the land that the LORD promised to give to your ancestors and their descendants, a fertile land. 10The land you are going to take is not like Egypt, where you were. There you had to plant your seed and water it, like a vegetable garden, by using your feet. 11But the land that you will soon cross the Jordan River to take is a land of hills and valleys, a land that drinks rain from heaven. 12It is a land the LORD your God cares for. His eyes are on it continually, and he watches it from the beginning of the year to the end.

13If you carefully obey the commands I am giving you today and love the LORD your God and serve him with your whole being, 14then he will send rain on your land at the right time, in the fall and spring, and you will be able to gather your grain, new wine, and oil. 15He will put grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will have plenty to eat.

16Be careful, or you will be fooled and will turn away to serve and worship other gods. 17If you do, the LORD will become angry with you and will shut the heavens so it will not rain. Then the land will not grow crops, and you will soon die in the good land the LORD is giving you. 18Remember my words with your whole being. Write them down and tie them to your hands as a sign; tie them on your foreheads to remind you. 19Teach them well to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20Write them on your doors and gates 21so that both you and your children will live a long time in the land the LORD promised your ancestors, as long as the skies are above the earth.

22If you are careful to obey every command I am giving you to follow, and love the LORD your God, and do what he has told you to do, and are loyal to him, 23then the LORD will force all those nations out of the land ahead of you, and you will take the land from nations that are bigger and stronger than you. 24Everywhere you step will be yours. Your land will go from the desert to Lebanon and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. 25No one will be able to stop you. The LORD your God will do what he promised and will make the people afraid everywhere you go.

[26]See, today I am letting you choose a blessing or a curse. [27]You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today. [28]But you will be cursed if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God. So do not disobey the commands I am giving you today, and do not worship other gods you do not know. [29]When the LORD your God brings you into the land you will take as your own, you are to announce the blessings from Mount Gerizim and the curses from Mount Ebal. [30](These mountains are on the other side of the Jordan River, to the west, toward the sunset. They are near the great trees of Moreh in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Jordan Valley opposite Gilgal.) [31]You will soon cross the Jordan River to enter and take the land the LORD your God is giving you. When you take it over and live there, [32]be careful to obey all the commands and laws I am giving you today.

## *The Place for Worship*

[12] These are the commands and laws you must carefully obey in the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Obey them as long as you live in the land. [2]When you inherit the lands of these nations, you must completely destroy all the places where they serve their gods, on high mountains and hills and under every green tree. [3]Tear down their altars, smash their holy stone pillars, and burn their Asherah idols in the fire. Cut down their idols and destroy their names from those places.

[4]Don't worship the LORD your God that way, [5]but look for the place the LORD your God will choose—a place among your tribes where he is to be worshiped. Go there, [6]and bring to that place your burnt offerings and sacrifices; bring a tenth of what you gain and your special gifts; bring what you have promised and the special gifts you want to give the LORD, and bring the first animals born to your herds and flocks.

[7]There you will be together with the LORD your God. There you and your families will eat, and you will enjoy all the good things for which you have worked, because the LORD your God has blessed you.

[8]Do not worship the way we have been doing today, each person doing what he thinks is right. [9]You have not yet come to a resting place, to the land the LORD your God will give you as your own. [10]But soon you will cross the Jordan River to live in the land the LORD your God is giving you as your own, where he will give you rest from all your enemies and you will live in safety. [11]Then the LORD your God will choose a place where he is to be worshiped. To that place you must bring everything I tell you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your offerings of a tenth of what you gain, your special gifts, and all your best things you promised to the LORD. [12]There rejoice before the LORD

your God. Everyone should rejoice: you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns who have no land of their own. 13Be careful that you don't sacrifice your burnt offerings just anywhere you please. 14Offer them only in the place the LORD will choose. He will choose a place in one of your tribes, and there you must do everything I am commanding you.

15But you may kill your animals in any of your towns and eat as much of the meat as you want, as if it were a deer or a gazelle; this is the blessing the LORD your God is giving you. Anyone, clean or unclean, may eat this meat, 16but do not eat the blood. Pour it out on the ground like water. 17Do not eat in your own towns what belongs to the LORD: one-tenth of your grain, new wine, or oil; the first animals born to your herds or flocks; whatever you have promised to give; the special gifts you want to give to the LORD, or any other gifts. 18Eat these things when you are together with the LORD your God, in the place the LORD your God chooses to be worshiped. Everyone must do this: you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns. Rejoice in the LORD your God's presence about the things you have worked for. 19Be careful not to forget the Levites as long as you live in the land.

20When the LORD your God enlarges your country as he has promised, and you want some meat so you say, "I want some meat," you may eat as much meat as you want. 21If the LORD your God chooses a place where he is to be worshiped that is too far away from you, you may kill animals from your herds and flocks, which the LORD has given to you. I have commanded that you may do this. You may eat as much of them as you want in your own towns, 22as you would eat gazelle or deer meat. Both clean and unclean people may eat this meat, 23but be sure you don't eat the blood, because the life is in the blood. Don't eat the life with the meat. 24Don't eat the blood, but pour it out on the ground like water. 25If you don't eat it, things will go well for you and your children, because you will be doing what the LORD says is right.

26Take your holy things and the things you have promised to give, and go to the place the LORD will choose. 27Present your burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD your God, both the meat and the blood. The blood of your sacrifices should be poured beside the altar of the LORD your God, but you may eat the meat. 28Be careful to obey all the rules I am giving you so that things will always go well for you and your children, and you will be doing what the LORD your God says is good and right.

29You will enter the land and take it away from the nations that the LORD your God will destroy ahead of you. When you force them out and live in their land, 30they will be destroyed

for you, but be careful not to be trapped by asking about their gods. Don't say, "How do these nations worship? I will do the same." 31Don't worship the LORD your God that way, because the LORD hates the evil ways they worship their gods. They even burn their sons and daughters as sacrifices to their gods!

32Be sure to do everything I have commanded you. Do not add anything to it, and do not take anything away from it.

## Psalm 37:16–22

16It is better to have little and be right
than to have much and be wrong.

17The power of the wicked will be broken,
but the LORD supports those who do right.

18The LORD watches over the lives of the innocent,
and their reward will last forever.

19They will not be ashamed when trouble comes.
They will be full in times of hunger.

20But the wicked will die.
The LORD's enemies will be like the flowers of the fields;
they will disappear like smoke.

21The wicked borrow and don't pay back,
but those who do right give freely to others.

22Those whom the LORD blesses will inherit the land,
but those he curses will be sent away.

## Proverbs 12:12–14

12 The wicked want what other evil people have stolen,
but good people want to give what they have to others.

13 Evil people are trapped by their evil talk,
but good people stay out of trouble.

14 People will be rewarded for what they say,
and they will also be rewarded for what they do.

## Luke 2:1–24

### *The Birth of Jesus*

2 At that time, Augustus Caesar sent an order that all people in
the countries under Roman rule must list their names in a
register. 2 This was the first registration;[n] it was taken while
Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to their own
towns to be registered.
4 So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and went to the
town of Bethlehem in Judea, known as the town of David. Joseph
went there because he was from the family of David. 5 Joseph
registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged[n] and who was
now pregnant. 6 While they were in Bethlehem, the time came
for Mary to have the baby, 7 and she gave birth to her first son.
Because there were no rooms left in the inn, she wrapped the
baby with pieces of cloth and laid him in a feeding trough.

### *Shepherds Hear About Jesus*

8 That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby
watching their sheep. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before
them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they
became very frightened. 10 The angel said to them, “Do not be
afraid. I am bringing you good news that will be a great joy to
all the people. 11 Today your Savior was born in the town of
David. He is Christ, the Lord. 12 This is how you will know him:
You will find a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in a
feeding box.”
13 Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the
first angel, praising God and saying:

14 “Give glory to God in heaven,
and on earth let there be peace among the people who
please God.”[n]

15 When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the
shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem. Let’s see
this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about.”
16 So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary and Joseph
and the baby, who was lying in a feeding trough. 17 When they
had seen him, they told what the angels had said about this
child. 18 Everyone was amazed at what the shepherds said to
them. 19 But Mary treasured these things and continued to think
about them. 20 Then the shepherds went back to their sheep,
praising God and thanking him for everything they had seen
and heard. It had been just as the angel had told them.
21 When the baby was eight days old, he was circumcised and
was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before the baby
began to grow inside Mary.

## *Jesus Is Presented in the Temple*

22 When the time came for Mary and Joseph to do what the
law of Moses taught about being made pure,[n] they took Jesus to
Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. 23 (It is written in the law
of the Lord: “Every firstborn male shall be given to the Lord.”)[n]
24 Mary and Joseph also went to offer a sacrifice, as the law of
the Lord says: “You must sacrifice two doves or two young
pigeons.”[n]

# March 26

## Worthless Worry

*I was young, and now I am old, but I have never seen good people left helpless or their children begging for food.*

Psalm 37:25

we worry. We worry about the IRS and the SAT and the FBI … We worry that we won't have enough money, and when we have money we worry that we won't manage it well. We worry that the world will end before the parking meter expires. We worry what the dog thinks if he sees us step out of the shower. We worry that someday we'll learn that fat-free yogurt was fattening.

Honestly, now. Did God save you so you would fret? Would he teach you to walk just to watch you fall? Would he be nailed to the cross for your sins and then disregard your prayers? Come on. Is Scripture teasing us when it reads, "He has put his angels in charge of you to watch over you wherever you go"? (Psalm 91:11).

I don't think so either.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### Deuteronomy 13:1—14:29

### *False Prophets*

13 Prophets or those who tell the future with dreams might
come to you and say they will show you a miracle or a sign.
2The miracle or sign might even happen, and then they might
say, "Let's serve other gods" (gods you have not known) "and
let's worship them." 3But you must not listen to those prophets
or dreamers. The LORD your God is testing you, to find out if you
love him with your whole being. 4Serve only the LORD your God.
Respect him, keep his commands, and obey him. Serve him and
be loyal to him. 5The prophets or dreamers must be killed,

because they said you should turn against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and saved you from the land where you were slaves. They tried to turn you from doing what the LORD your God commanded you to do. You must get rid of the evil among you.

6Someone might try to lead you to serve other gods—it might be your brother, your son or daughter, the wife you love, or a close friend. The person might say, “Let’s go and worship other gods.” (These are gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, 7gods of the people who live around you, either nearby or far away, from one end of the land to the other.) 8Do not give in to such people. Do not listen or feel sorry for them, and do not let them go free or protect them. 9You must put them to death. You must be the first one to start to kill them, and then everyone else must join in. 10You must throw stones at them until they die, because they tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. 11Then everyone in Israel will hear about this and be afraid, and no one among you will ever do such an evil thing again.

## *Cities to Destroy*

12The LORD your God is giving you cities in which to live, and you might hear something about one of them. Someone might say 13that evil people have moved in among you. And they might lead the people of that city away from God, saying, “Let’s go and worship other gods.” (These are gods you have not known.) 14Then you must ask about it, looking into the matter and checking carefully whether it is true. If it is proved that a hateful thing has happened among you, 15you must kill with a sword everyone who lives in that city. Destroy the city completely and kill everyone in it, as well as the animals, with a sword. 16Gather up everything those people owned, and put it in the middle of the city square. Then completely burn the city and everything they owned as a burnt offering to the LORD your God. That city should never be rebuilt; let it be ruined forever. 17Don’t keep for yourselves any of the things found in that city, so the LORD will not be angry anymore. He will give you mercy and feel sorry for you, and he will make your nation grow larger, as he promised to your ancestors. 18You will have obeyed the LORD your God by keeping all his commands that I am giving to you today, and you will be doing what the LORD says is right.

## *God’s Special People*

14 You are the children of the LORD your God. When someone dies, do not cut yourselves or shave your heads to show your

sadness. 2You are holy people, who belong to the LORD your God.
He has chosen you from all the people on earth to be his very
own.

3Do not eat anything the LORD hates. 4These are the animals
you may eat: oxen, sheep, goats, 5deer, gazelle, roe deer, wild
goats, ibex, antelope, and mountain sheep. 6You may eat any
animal that has a split hoof and chews the cud, 7but you may
not eat camels, rabbits, or rock badgers. These animals chew
the cud, but they do not have split hoofs, so they are unclean for
you. 8Pigs are also unclean for you; they have split hoofs, but
they do not chew the cud. Do not eat their meat or touch their
dead bodies.

9There are many things that live in the water. You may eat
anything that has fins and scales, 10but do not eat anything that
does not have fins and scales. It is unclean for you.

11You may eat any clean bird. 12But do not eat these birds:
eagles, vultures, black vultures, 13red kites, falcons, any kind of
kite, 14any kind of raven, 15horned owls, screech owls, sea gulls,
any kind of hawk, 16little owls, great owls, white owls, 17desert
owls, ospreys, cormorants, 18storks, any kind of heron, the
hoopoes, or bats.

19All insects with wings are unclean for you; do not eat them.
20Other things with wings are clean, and you may eat them.

21Do not eat anything you find that is already dead. You may
give it to a foreigner living in your town, and he may eat it, or
you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are holy people, who
belong to the LORD your God.

Do not cook a baby goat in its mother's milk.

## *Giving One-Tenth*

22Be sure to save one-tenth of all your crops each year.
23Take it to the place the LORD your God will choose where he is
to be worshiped. There, where you will be together with the
LORD, eat the tenth of your grain, new wine, and oil, and eat the
animals born first to your herds and flocks. Do this so that you
will learn to respect the LORD your God always. 24But if the
place the LORD will choose to be worshiped is too far away and
he has blessed you so much you cannot carry a tenth,
25exchange your one-tenth for silver. Then take the silver with
you to the place the LORD your God shall choose. 26Use the silver
to buy anything you wish—cattle, sheep, wine, beer, or anything
you wish. Then you and your family will eat and celebrate there
before the LORD your God. 27Do not forget the Levites in your
town, because they have no land of their own among you.

28At the end of every third year, everyone should bring one-
tenth of that year's crop and store it in your towns. 29This is for

the Levites so they may eat and be full. (They have no land of their own among you.) It is also for strangers, orphans, and widows who live in your towns so that all of them may eat and be full. Then the LORD your God will bless you and all the work you do.

## Psalm 37:23–29

23 When people's steps follow the LORD,
God is pleased with their ways.

24 If they stumble, they will not fall,
because the LORD holds their hand.

25 I was young, and now I am old,
but I have never seen good people left helpless
or their children begging for food.

26 Good people always lend freely to others,
and their children are a blessing.

27 Stop doing evil and do good,
so you will live forever.

28 The LORD loves justice
and will not leave those who worship him.

He will always protect them,
but the children of the wicked will die.

29 Good people will inherit the land
and will live in it forever.

## Proverbs 12:15–16

15 Fools think they are doing right,
but the wise listen to advice.

16 Fools quickly show that they are upset,
but the wise ignore insults.

## Luke 2:25–52

### *Simeon Sees Jesus*

25 In Jerusalem lived a man named Simeon who was a good
man and godly. He was waiting for the time when God would
take away Israel's sorrow, and the Holy Spirit was in him.
26 Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die
before he saw the Christ promised by the Lord. 27 The Spirit led
Simeon to the Temple. When Mary and Joseph brought the baby
Jesus to the Temple to do what the law said they must do,
28 Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God:

29 "Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant,
die in peace as you said.

30 With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,

31 which you prepared before all people.

32 It is a light for the non-Jewish people to see
and an honor for your people, the Israelites."

33 Jesus' father and mother were amazed at what Simeon had
said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary,
"God has chosen this child to cause the fall and rise of many in
Israel. He will be a sign from God that many people will not
accept 35 so that the thoughts of many will be made known. And
the things that will happen will make your heart sad, too."

## *Anna Sees Jesus*

[36]There was a prophetess, Anna, from the family of Phanuel
in the tribe of Asher. Anna was very old. She had once been
married for seven years. [37]Then her husband died, and she was
a widow for eighty-four years. Anna never left the Temple but
worshiped God, going without food and praying day and night.
[38]Standing there at that time, she thanked God and spoke about
Jesus to all who were waiting for God to free Jerusalem.

## *Joseph and Mary Return Home*

[39]When Joseph and Mary had done everything the law of the
Lord commanded, they went home to Nazareth, their own town
in Galilee. [40]The little child grew and became strong. He was
filled with wisdom, and God's goodness was upon him.

## *Jesus As a Boy*

[41]Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the
Passover Feast. [42]When he was twelve years old, they went to
the feast as they always did. [43]After the feast days were over,
they started home. The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem,
but his parents did not know it. [44]Thinking that Jesus was with
them in the group, they traveled for a whole day. Then they
began to look for him among their family and friends. [45]When
they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for
him there. [46]After three days they found Jesus sitting in the
Temple with the teachers, listening to them and asking them
questions. [47]All who heard him were amazed at his
understanding and answers. [48]When Jesus' parents saw him,
they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why did
you do this to us? Your father and I were very worried about you
and have been looking for you."

[49]Jesus said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't
you know that I must be in my Father's house?" [50]But they did
not understand the meaning of what he said.

[51]Jesus went with them to Nazareth and was obedient to
them. But his mother kept in her mind all that had happened.
[52]Jesus became wiser and grew physically. People liked him, and
he pleased God.

# March 27

# Set Apart

*He went all over the area around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins.*

Luke 3:3

John the Baptist would never get hired today. No church would touch him. He was a public relations disaster. He "wore clothes made from camel's hair, had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6). Who would want to look at a guy like that every Sunday?

His message was as rough as his dress: a no-nonsense, bare-fisted challenge to repent because God was on his way.

John the Baptist set himself apart for one task, to be a voice of Christ. Everything about John centered on his purpose. His dress. His diet. His actions. His demands.

You don't have to be like the world to have an impact on the world. You don't have to be like the crowd to change the crowd. You don't have to lower yourself down to their level to lift them up to your level. Holiness doesn't seek to be odd. Holiness seeks to be like God.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

## Deuteronomy 15:1—17:7

### *The Special Seventh Year*

15 At the end of every seven years, you must tell those who owe
you anything that they do not have to pay you back. 2This is
how you must do it: Everyone who has loaned money must
cancel the loan and not make a neighbor or relative pay it back.
This is the LORD's time for canceling what people owe. 3You may
make a foreigner pay what is owed to you, but you must not
collect what another Israelite owes you. 4But there should be no
poor people among you, because the LORD your God will richly

bless you in the land he is giving you as your own. [5]He will bless you if you obey the LORD your God completely, but you must be careful to obey all the commands I am giving you today. [6]The LORD your God will bless you as he promised, and you will lend to other nations, but you will not need to borrow from them. You will rule over many nations, but none will rule over you.

[7]If there are poor among you, in one of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be selfish or greedy toward them. [8]But give freely to them, and freely lend them whatever they need. [9]Beware of evil thoughts. Don't think, "The seventh year is near, the year to cancel what people owe." You might be mean to the needy and not give them anything. Then they will complain to the LORD about you, and he will find you guilty of sin. [10]Give freely to the poor person, and do not wish that you didn't have to give. The LORD your God will bless your work and everything you touch. [11]There will always be poor people in the land, so I command you to give freely to your neighbors and to the poor and needy in your land.

## *Letting Slaves Go Free*

[12]If one of your own people sells himself to you as a slave, whether it is a Hebrew man or woman, that person will serve you for six years. But in the seventh year you must let the slave go free. [13]When you let slaves go, don't send them away without anything. [14]Give them some of your flock, your grain, and your wine, giving to them as the LORD has given to you. [15]Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the LORD your God saved you. That is why I am commanding this to you today.

[16]But if your slave says to you, "I don't want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and has a good life with you, [17]stick an awl[n] through his ear into the door; he will be your slave for life. Also do this to a female slave.

[18]Do not think of it as a hard thing when you let your slaves go free. After all, they served you six years and did twice the work of a hired person. The LORD your God will bless you in everything you do.

## *Rules About Firstborn Animals*

[19]Save all the first male animals born to your herds and flocks. They are for the LORD your God. Do not work the first calf born to your oxen, and do not cut off the wool from the first lamb born to your sheep. [20]Each year you and your family are to eat these animals in the presence of the LORD your God, in the place he will choose to be worshiped. [21]If an animal is crippled or blind or has something else wrong, do not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. [22]But you may eat that animal in your own town.

Both clean and unclean people may eat it, as they would eat a gazelle or a deer. 23But don't eat its blood; pour it out on the ground like water.

## *The Passover*

16 Celebrate the Passover of the LORD your God during the month of Abib, because it was during Abib that he brought you out of Egypt at night. 2As the sacrifice for the Passover to the LORD your God, offer an animal from your flock or herd at the place the LORD will choose to be worshiped. 3Do not eat it with bread made with yeast. But for seven days eat bread made without yeast, the bread of suffering, because you left Egypt in a hurry. So all your life you will remember the time you left Egypt. 4There must be no yeast anywhere in your land for seven days. Offer the sacrifice on the evening of the first day, and eat all the meat before morning; do not leave it overnight.

5Do not offer the Passover sacrifice in just any town the LORD your God gives you, 6but offer it in the place he will choose to be worshiped. Offer it in the evening as the sun goes down, which is when you left Egypt. 7Roast the meat and eat it at the place the LORD your God will choose. The next morning go back to your tents. 8Eat bread made without yeast for six days. On the seventh day have a special meeting for the LORD your God, and do not work that day.

## *The Feast of Weeks*

9Count seven weeks from the time you begin to harvest the grain, 10and then celebrate the Feast of Weeks for the LORD your God. Bring an offering as a special gift to him, giving to him just as he has blessed you. 11Rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose to be worshiped. Everybody should rejoice: you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your town, the strangers, orphans, and widows living among you. 12Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and carefully obey all these laws.

## *The Feast of Shelters*

13Celebrate the Feast of Shelters for seven days, after you have gathered your harvest from the threshing floor and winepress. 14Everybody should rejoice at your Feast: you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites, strangers, orphans, and widows who live in your towns. 15Celebrate the Feast to the LORD your God for seven days at the place he will choose, because the LORD your God will bless all

your harvest and all the work you do, and you will be completely happy.

16All your men must come before the LORD three times a year to the place he will choose. They must come at these times: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Shelters. No man should come before the LORD without a gift. 17Each of you must bring a gift that will show how much the LORD your God has blessed you.

## *Judges for the People*

18Appoint judges and officers for your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you; they must judge the people fairly. 19Do not judge unfairly or take sides. Do not let people pay you to make wrong decisions, because that kind of payment makes wise people seem blind, and it changes the words of good people. 20Always do what is right so that you will live and always have the land the LORD your God is giving you.

## *God Hates Idols*

21Do not set up a wooden Asherah idol next to the altar you build for the LORD your God, 22and do not set up holy stone pillars. The LORD your God hates them.

17 If an ox or sheep has something wrong with it, do not offer it as a sacrifice to the LORD your God. He would hate that.

2A man or woman in one of the towns the LORD gave you might be found doing something evil and breaking the Agreement. 3That person may have served other gods and bowed down to them or to the sun or moon or stars of the sky, which I have commanded should not be done. 4If someone has told you about it, you must look into the matter carefully. If it is true that such a hateful thing has happened in Israel, 5take the man or woman who has done the evil thing to the city gates and throw stones at that person until he dies. 6There must be two or three witnesses that it is true before the person is put to death; if there is only one witness, the person should not be put to death. 7The witnesses must be the first to throw stones at the person, and then everyone else will follow. You must get rid of the evil among you.

# Psalm 37:30–36

30 Good people speak with wisdom,
and they say what is fair.

31 The teachings of their God are in their heart,
so they do not fail to keep them.

32 The wicked watch for good people
so that they may kill them.

33 But the LORD will not take away his protection
or let good people be judged guilty.

34 Wait for the LORD's help
and follow him.

He will honor you and give you the land,
and you will see the wicked sent away.

35 I saw a wicked and cruel man
who looked strong like a healthy tree in good soil.

36 But he died and was gone;
I looked for him, but he couldn't be found.

## Proverbs 12:17–19

17 An honest witness tells the truth,
but a dishonest witness tells lies.

18 Careless words stab like a sword,
but wise words bring healing.

19 Truth will continue forever,
but lies are only for a moment.

# Luke 3:1–38

## *The Preaching of John*

3 It was the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar. These
men were under Caesar: Pontius Pilate, the ruler of Judea;
Herod, the ruler of Galilee; Philip, Herod's brother, the ruler of
Iturea and Traconitis; and Lysanias, the ruler of Abilene. 2Annas
and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time, the word of
God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. 3He went all
over the area around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of
changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins. 4As it is
written in the book of Isaiah the prophet:

"This is a voice of one
who calls out in the desert:

'Prepare the way for the Lord.
Make the road straight for him.

5Every valley should be filled in,
and every mountain and hill should be made flat.

Roads with turns should be made straight,
and rough roads should be made smooth.

6And all people will know about the salvation ofGod!'"

Isaiah 40:3–5

7To the crowds of people who came to be baptized by John,
he said, "You are all snakes! Who warned you to run away from
God's coming punishment? 8Do the things that show you really
have changed your hearts and lives. Don't begin to say to
yourselves, 'Abraham is our father.' I tell you that God could
make children for Abraham from these rocks. 9The ax is now
ready to cut down the trees, and every tree that does not
produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."[n]

10The people asked John, "Then what should we do?"

11John answered, "If you have two shirts, share with the
person who does not have one. If you have food, share that

also.”
12Even tax collectors came to John to be baptized. They said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?”
13John said to them, “Don’t take more taxes from people than you have been ordered to take.”
14The soldiers asked John, “What about us? What should we do?”
John said to them, “Don’t force people to give you money, and don’t lie about them. Be satisfied with the pay you get.”
15Since the people were hoping for the Christ to come, they wondered if John might be the one.
16John answered everyone, “I baptize you with water, but there is one coming who is greater than I am. I am not good enough to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17He will come ready to clean the grain, separating the good grain from the chaff. He will put the good part of the grain into his barn, but he will burn the chaff with a fire that cannot be put out.”[n] 18And John continued to preach the Good News, saying many other things to encourage the people.
19But John spoke against Herod, the governor, because of his sin with Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother, and because of the many other evil things Herod did. 20So Herod did something even worse: He put John in prison.

## *Jesus Is Baptized by John*

21When all the people were being baptized by John, Jesus also was baptized. While Jesus was praying, heaven opened 22and the Holy Spirit came down on him in the form of a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “You are my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with you.”

## *The Family History of Jesus*

23When Jesus began his ministry, he was about thirty years old. People thought that Jesus was Joseph’s son.

Joseph was the son[n] of Heli.

24Heli was the son of Matthat.

Matthat was the son of Levi.

Levi was the son of Melki.

Melki was the son of Jannai.

Jannai was the son of Joseph.

[25]Joseph was the son of Mattathias.

Mattathias was the son of Amos.

Amos was the son of Nahum.

Nahum was the son of Esli.

Esli was the son of Naggai.

[26]Naggai was the son of Maath.

Maath was the son of Mattathias.

Mattathias was the son of Semein.

Semein was the son of Josech.

Josech was the son of Joda.

[27]Joda was the son of Joanan.

Joanan was the son of Rhesa.

Rhesa was the son of Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel was the grandson of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel was the son of Neri.

[28]Neri was the son of Melki.

Melki was the son of Addi.

Addi was the son of Cosam.

Cosam was the son of Elmadam.

Elmadam was the son of Er.

[29]Er was the son of Joshua.

Joshua was the son of Eliezer.

Eliezer was the son of Jorim.

Jorim was the son of Matthat.

Matthat was the son of Levi.

[30]Levi was the son of Simeon.

Simeon was the son of Judah.

Judah was the son of Joseph.

Joseph was the son of Jonam.

Jonam was the son of Eliakim.

31 Eliakim was the son of Melea.

Melea was the son of Menna.

Menna was the son of Mattatha.

Mattatha was the son of Nathan.

Nathan was the son of David.

32 David was the son of Jesse.

Jesse was the son of Obed.

Obed was the son of Boaz.

Boaz was the son of Salmon.[n]

Salmon was the son of Nahshon.

33 Nahshon was the son of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the son of Admin.

Admin was the son of Arni.

Arni was the son of Hezron.

Hezron was the son of Perez.

Perez was the son of Judah.

[34]Judah was the son of Jacob.

Jacob was the son of Isaac.

Isaac was the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the son of Terah.

Terah was the son of Nahor.

[35]Nahor was the son of Serug.

Serug was the son of Reu.

Reu was the son of Peleg.

Peleg was the son of Eber.

Eber was the son of Shelah.

[36]Shelah was the son of Cainan.

Cainan was the son of Arphaxad.

Arphaxad was the son of Shem.

Shem was the son of Noah.

Noah was the son of Lamech.

[37]Lamech was the son of Methuselah.

Methuselah was the son of Enoch.

Enoch was the son of Jared.

Jared was the son of Mahalalel.

Mahalalel was the son of Kenan.

[38]Kenan was the son of Enosh.

Enosh was the son of Seth.

Seth was the son of Adam.

Adam was the son of God.

# March 28

## God Loves the Truth

*The Lord hates those who tell lies but is pleased with those who keep their promises.*

Proverbs 12:22

Our Master has a strict honor code. From Genesis to Revelation, the theme is the same: God loves the truth and hates deceit. In 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 Paul lists the type of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God. The covey he portrays is a ragged assortment of those who sin sexually, worship idols, take part in adultery, sell their bodies, get drunk, rob people, and—there it is—*lie about others.*

Such rigor may surprise you. *You mean my fibbing and flattering stir the same heavenly anger as adultery and aggravated assault?* Apparently so …

Why the hard line? Why the tough stance?

For one reason: dishonesty is absolutely contrary to the character of God.

from *Just Like Jesus*

### Deuteronomy 17:8—18:22

### *Courts of Law*

8 Some cases that come before you, such as murder,
quarreling, or attack, may be too difficult to judge. Take these
cases to the place the LORD your God will choose. 9 Go to the
priests who are Levites and to the judge who is on duty at that
time. Ask them about the case, and they will decide. 10 You must
follow the decision they give you at the place the LORD your God
will choose. Be careful to do everything they tell you. 11 Follow
the teachings they give you, and do whatever they decide,
exactly as they tell you. 12 The person who does not show
respect for the judge or priest who is there serving the LORD

your God must be put to death. You must get rid of that evil from Israel. 13Then everyone will hear about this and will be afraid, and they will not show disrespect anymore.

## *Choosing a King*

14When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, taking it as your own and living in it, you will say, “Let’s appoint a king over us like the nations all around us.” 15Be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be one of your own people. Do not appoint as your king a foreigner who is not a fellow Israelite. 16The king must not have too many horses for himself, and he must not send people to Egypt to get more horses, because the LORD has told you, “Don’t return that way again.” 17The king must not have many wives, or his heart will be led away from God. He must not have too much silver and gold.

18When he becomes king, he should write a copy of the teachings on a scroll for himself, a copy taken from the priests and Levites. 19He should keep it with him all the time and read from it every day of his life. Then he will learn to respect the LORD his God, and he will obey all the teachings and commands. 20He should not think he is better than his fellow Israelites, and he must not stop obeying the law in any way so that he and his descendants may rule the kingdom for a long time.

## *Shares for Priests and Levites*

18 The priests are from the tribe of Levi, and that tribe will not receive a share of the land with the Israelites. They will eat the offerings made to the LORD by fire, which is their share. 2They will not inherit any of the land like their brothers, but they will inherit the LORD himself, as he has promised them.

3When you offer a bull or sheep as a sacrifice, you must share with the priests, giving them the shoulder, the cheeks, and the inner organs. 4Give them the first of your grain, new wine, and oil, as well as the first wool you cut from your sheep. 5The LORD your God has chosen the priests and their descendants out of all your tribes to stand and serve the LORD always.

6If a Levite moves from one of your towns anywhere in Israel where he lives and comes to the place the LORD will choose, because he wants to serve the LORD there, 7he may serve the LORD his God. He will be like his fellow Levites who serve there before the LORD. 8They all will have an equal share of the food. That is separate from what he has received from the sale of family possessions.

## *Do Not Follow Other Nations*

9When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you,
don't learn to do the hateful things the other nations do. 10Don't
let anyone among you offer a son or daughter as a sacrifice in
the fire. Don't let anyone use magic or witchcraft, or try to
explain the meaning of signs. 11Don't let anyone try to control
others with magic, and don't let them be mediums or try to talk
with the spirits of dead people. 12The LORD hates anyone who
does these things. Because the other nations do these things,
the LORD your God will force them out of the land ahead of you.
13But you must be innocent in the presence of the LORD your
God.

## *The Lord's Special Prophet*

14The nations you will force out listen to people who use
magic and witchcraft, but the LORD your God will not let you do
those things. 15The LORD your God will give you a prophet like
me, who is one of your own people. Listen to him. 16This is what
you asked the LORD your God to do when you were gathered at
Mount Sinai. You said, "Don't make us listen to the voice of the
LORD our God again, and don't make us look at this terrible fire
anymore, or we will die."

17So the LORD said to me, "What they have said is good. 18So
I will give them a prophet like you, who is one of their own
people. I will tell him what to say, and he will tell them
everything I command. 19This prophet will speak for me; anyone
who does not listen when he speaks will answer to me. 20But if
a prophet says something I did not tell him to say as though he
were speaking for me, or if a prophet speaks in the name of
other gods, that prophet must be killed."

21You might be thinking, "How can we know if a message is
not from the LORD?" 22If what a prophet says in the name of the
LORD does not happen, it is not the LORD's message. That prophet
was speaking his own ideas. Don't be afraid of him.

# Psalm 37:37–40

37Think of the innocent person,
and watch the honest one.

The man who has peace
will have children to live after him.

38 But sinners will be destroyed;
in the end the wicked will die.

39 The LORD saves good people;
he is their strength in times of trouble.

40 The LORD helps them and saves them;
he saves them from the wicked,
because they trust in him for protection.

## Proverbs 12:20–22

20 Those who plan evil are full of lies,
but those who plan peace are happy.

21 No harm comes to a good person,
but an evil person's life is full of trouble.

22 The LORD hates those who tell lies
but is pleased with those who keep their promises.

## Luke 4:1–30

### *Jesus Is Tempted by the Devil*

4 Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. The Spirit led Jesus into the desert 2 where the devil tempted Jesus for forty days. Jesus ate nothing during that time, and when those days were ended, he was very hungry.

3 The devil said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, tell this rock to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written in the Scriptures: 'A person

does not live on bread alone.’”[n]
5Then the devil took Jesus and showed him all the kingdoms
of the world in an instant. 6The devil said to Jesus, “I will give
you all these kingdoms and all their power and glory. It has all
been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I wish. 7If you
worship me, then it will all be yours.”
8Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scriptures: ‘You must
worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’”[n]
9Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem and put him on a high
place of the Temple. He said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of
God, jump down. 10It is written in the Scriptures:

‘He has put his angels in charge of you
to watch over you.’

Psalm 91:11

11It is also written:

‘They will catch you in their hands
so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.’”

Psalm 91:12

12Jesus answered, “But it also says in the Scriptures: ‘Do not
test the Lord your God.’”[n]
13After the devil had tempted Jesus in every way, he left him
to wait until a better time.

## *Jesus Teaches the People*

14Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit,
and stories about him spread all through the area. 15He began
to teach in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.
16Jesus traveled to Nazareth, where he had grown up. On the
Sabbath day he went to the synagogue, as he always did, and
stood up to read. 17The book of Isaiah the prophet was given to
him. He opened the book and found the place where this is
written:

18“The Lord has put his Spirit in me,
because he appointed me to tell the Good News to the
poor.

He has sent me to tell the captives they are free
and to tell the blind that they can see again.

Isaiah 61:1

God sent me to free those who have been treated unfairly

Isaiah 58:6

19 and to announce the time when the Lord will show his
kindness.”

Isaiah 61:2

20Jesus closed the book, gave it back to the assistant, and sat
down. Everyone in the synagogue was watching Jesus closely.
21He began to say to them, “While you heard these words just
now, they were coming true!”
22All the people spoke well of Jesus and were amazed at the
words of grace he spoke. They asked, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”
23Jesus said to them, “I know that you will tell me the old
saying: ‘Doctor, heal yourself.’ You want to say, ‘We heard about
the things you did in Capernaum. Do those things here in your
own town!’” 24Then Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, a prophet is
not accepted in his hometown. 25But I tell you the truth, there
were many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah. It did not
rain in Israel for three and one-half years, and there was no
food anywhere in the whole country. 26But Elijah was sent to
none of those widows, only to a widow in Zarephath, a town in
Sidon. 27And there were many with skin diseases living in Israel
during the time of the prophet Elisha. But none of them were
healed, only Naaman, who was from the country of Syria.”
28When all the people in the synagogue heard these things,
they became very angry. 29They got up, forced Jesus out of
town, and took him to the edge of the cliff on which the town
was built. They planned to throw him off the edge, 30but Jesus
walked through the crowd and went on his way.

# March 29

## Saying Yes to God's Purpose

*"I must preach about God's kingdom … This is why I was sent."*

Luke 4:43

After Christ's forty-day pause in the wilderness, the people of Capernaum "tried to keep him from leaving. But Jesus said to them, 'I must preach about God's kingdom to other towns, too. This is why I was sent'" (Luke 4:42–43).

He resisted the undertow of the people by anchoring to the rock of his purpose: employing his uniqueness to make a big deal out of God everywhere he could.

And aren't you glad he did? Suppose he had heeded the crowd and set up camp in Capernaum, reasoning, "I thought the whole world was my target and the Cross my destiny. But the entire town tells me to stay in Capernaum. Could all these people be wrong?"

Yes they could! In defiance of the crowd, Jesus … said no to good things so he could say yes to the right thing: his unique call.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Deuteronomy 19:1—20:20

### *Cities of Safety*

19 When the LORD your God gives you land that belongs to the
other nations, nations that he will destroy, you will force them
out and live in their cities and houses. 2Then choose three cities
in the middle of the land the LORD your God is giving you as your
own. 3Build roads to these cities, and divide the land the LORD is
giving you into three parts so that someone who kills another
person may run to these cities.

4This is the rule for someone who kills another person and
runs to one of these cities in order to save his life. But the

person must have killed a neighbor without meaning to, not out of hatred. 5For example, suppose someone goes into the forest with a neighbor to cut wood and swings an ax to cut down a tree. If the ax head flies off the handle, hitting and killing the neighbor, the one who killed him may run to one of these cities to save his life. 6Otherwise, the dead person's relative who has the duty of punishing a murderer might be angry and chase him. If the city is far away, the relative might catch and kill the person, even though he should not be killed because there was no intent to kill his neighbor. 7This is why I command you to choose these three cities.

8–9Carefully obey all these laws I'm giving you today. Love the LORD your God, and always do what he wants you to do. Then the LORD your God will enlarge your land as he promised your ancestors, giving you the whole land he promised to them. After that, choose three more cities of safety 10so that innocent people will not be killed in your land, the land that the LORD your God is giving you as your own. By doing this you will not be guilty of allowing the death of innocent people.

11But if a person hates his neighbor and, after hiding and waiting, attacks and kills him and then runs to one of these cities for safety, 12the elders of his own city should send for the murderer. They should bring the person back from the city of safety and hand him over to the relative who has the duty of punishing the murderer. 13Show no mercy. You must remove from Israel the guilt of murdering innocent people so that things will go well for you.

14Do not move the stone that marks the border of your neighbor's land, which people long ago set in place. It marks what you inherit in the land the LORD your God is giving you as your own.

## *Rules About Witnesses*

15One witness is not enough to accuse a person of a crime or sin. A case must be proved by two or three witnesses.

16If a witness lies and accuses a person of a crime, 17the two people who are arguing must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and judges who are on duty. 18The judges must check the matter carefully. The witness who is a liar, lying about a fellow Israelite, 19must be punished. He must be punished in the same way the other person would have been punished. You must get rid of the evil among you. 20The rest of the people will hear about this and be afraid, and no one among you will ever do such an evil thing again. 21Show no mercy. A life must be paid for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot.

## *Laws for War*

20 When you go to war against your enemies and you see horses
and chariots and an army that is bigger than yours, don't be
afraid of them. The LORD your God, who brought you out of
Egypt, will be with you. 2The priest must come and speak to the
army before you go into battle. 3He will say, "Listen, Israel!
Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Don't lose
your courage or be afraid. Don't panic or be frightened,
4because the LORD your God goes with you, to fight for you
against your enemies and to save you."

5The officers should say to the army, "Has anyone built a new
house but not given it to God? He may go home, because he
might die in battle and someone else would get to give his
house to God. 6Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to
enjoy it? He may go home, because he might die in battle and
someone else would enjoy his vineyard. 7Is any man engaged to
a woman and not yet married to her? He may go home, because
he might die in battle and someone else would marry her."
8Then the officers should also say, "Is anyone here afraid? Has
anyone lost his courage? He may go home so that he will not
cause others to lose their courage, too." 9When the officers
finish speaking to the army, they should appoint commanders to
lead it.

10When you march up to attack a city, first make them an
offer of peace. 11If they accept your offer and open their gates
to you, all the people of that city will become your slaves and
work for you. 12But if they do not make peace with you and fight
you in battle, you should surround that city. 13The LORD your
God will give it to you. Then kill all the men with your swords,
14and you may take everything else in the city for yourselves.
Take the women, children, and animals, and you may use these
things the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. 15Do this
to all the cities that are far away, that do not belong to the
nations nearby.

16But leave nothing alive in the cities of the land the LORD
your God is giving you. 17Completely destroy these people: the
Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and
Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded. 18Otherwise,
they will teach you what they do for their gods, and if you do
these hateful things, you will sin against the LORD your God.

19If you surround and attack a city for a long time, trying to
capture it, do not destroy its trees with an ax. You can eat the
fruit from the trees, but do not cut them down. These trees are
not the enemy, so don't make war against them. 20But you may
cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them
to build devices to attack the city walls, until the city is
captured.

## Psalm 38:1–8

### *A Prayer in Time of Sickness*

**A psalm of David to remember.**

38 LORD, don't correct me when you are angry.
Don't punish me when you are furious.

2 Your arrows have wounded me,
and your hand has come down on me.

3 My body is sick from your punishment.
Even my bones are not healthy because of my sin.

4 My guilt has overwhelmed me;
like a load it weighs me down.

5 My sores stink and become infected
because I was foolish.

6 I am bent over and bowed down;
I am sad all day long.

7 I am burning with fever,
and my whole body is sore.

8 I am weak and faint.
I moan from the pain I feel.

## Proverbs 12:23–25

[23]Wise people keep what they know to themselves,
but fools can’t keep from showing how foolish they are.

[24]Hard workers will become leaders,
but those who are lazy will be slaves.

[25]Worry is a heavy load,
but a kind word cheers you up.

## Luke 4:31–44

### *Jesus Forces Out an Evil Spirit*

[31]Jesus went to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and on the Sabbath day, he taught the people. [32]They were amazed at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. [33]In the synagogue a man who had within him an evil spirit shouted in a loud voice, [34]“Jesus of Nazareth! What do you want with us? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are—God’s Holy One!”

[35]Jesus commanded the evil spirit, “Be quiet! Come out of the man!” The evil spirit threw the man down to the ground before all the people and then left the man without hurting him.

[36]The people were amazed and said to each other, “What does this mean? With authority and power he commands evil spirits, and they come out.” [37]And so the news about Jesus spread to every place in the whole area.

### *Jesus Heals Many People*

[38]Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon.[n] Simon’s mother-in-law was sick with a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. [39]He came to her side and commanded the fever to leave. It left her, and immediately she got up and began serving them.

[40]When the sun went down, the people brought those who were sick to Jesus. Putting his hands on each sick person, he healed every one of them. [41]Demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God.” But Jesus commanded the demons and would not allow them to speak, because they knew Jesus was the Christ.

[42]At daybreak, Jesus went to a lonely place, but the people looked for him. When they found him, they tried to keep him

from leaving. [43]But Jesus said to them, “I must preach about God’s kingdom to other towns, too. This is why I was sent.”
[44]Then he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.[n]

# March 30

## Try Again

*"We worked hard all night ... and we caught nothing."*

Luke 5:5

Do you have any worn, wet, empty nets? Do you know the feeling of a sleepless, fishless night? Of course you do. For what have you been casting? Solvency? "My debt is an anvil around my neck ..."

Faith? "I want to believe, but ..."

Healing? "I've been sick so long ..."

A happy marriage? "No matter what I do ..."

I've worked hard all night and caught nothing.

You've felt what Peter felt. You've sat where Peter sat. And now Jesus is asking you to go fishing. He knows your nets are empty. He knows your heart is weary. He knows you'd like nothing more than to turn your back on the mess and call it a life.

But he urges, "It's not too late to try again."

See if Peter's reply won't help you formulate your own. "You say to put the nets in the water, so I will" (Luke 5:5).

from *Next Door Savior*

## Deuteronomy 21:1—22:30

### *A Person Found Murdered*

21 Suppose someone is found murdered, lying in a field in the
land the LORD your God is giving you as your own, and no one
knows who killed the person. 2Your elders and judges should go
to where the body was found, and they should measure how far
it is to the nearby cities. 3The elders of the city nearest the body
must take a young cow that has never worked or worn a yoke,
4and they must lead her down to a valley that has never been
plowed or planted, with a stream flowing through it. There they

must break the young cow's neck. [5]The priests, the sons of Levi, should come forward, because they have been chosen by the LORD your God to serve him and to give blessings in the LORD's name. They are the ones who decide cases of quarreling and attacks. [6]Then all the elders of the city nearest the murdered person should wash their hands over the young cow whose neck was broken in the valley. [7]They should declare: "We did not kill this person, and we did not see it happen. [8]LORD, remove this sin from your people Israel, whom you have saved. Don't blame your people, the Israelites, for the murder of this innocent person." And so the murder will be paid for. [9]Then you will have removed from yourselves the guilt of murdering an innocent person, because you will be doing what the LORD says is right.

## *Captive Women as Wives*

[10]When you go to war against your enemies, the LORD will help you defeat them so that you will take them captive. [11]If you see a beautiful woman among the captives and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. [12]Bring her into your home, where she must shave her head and cut her nails [13]and change the clothes she was wearing when you captured her. After she has lived in your house and cried for her parents for a month, you may marry her. You will be her husband, and she will be your wife. [14]But if you are not pleased with her, you must let her go anywhere she wants. You must not sell her for money or make her a slave, because you have taken away her honor.

## *The Oldest Son*

[15]A man might have two wives, one he loves and one he doesn't. Both wives might have sons by him. If the older son belongs to the wife he does not love, [16]when that man wills his property to his sons he must not give the son of the wife he loves what belongs to the older son, the son of the wife he does not love. [17]He must agree to give the older son two shares of everything he owns, even though the older son is from the wife he does not love. That son was the first to prove his father could have children, so he has the rights that belong to the older son.

## *Sons Who Refuse to Obey*

[18]If someone has a son who is stubborn, who turns against his father and mother and doesn't obey them or listen when they correct him, [19]his parents must take him to the elders at the city gate. [20]They will say to the elders, "Our son is stubborn and turns against us. He will not obey us. He eats too much,

and he is always drunk.” 21Then all the men in his town must
throw stones at him until he dies. Get rid of the evil among you,
because then all the people of Israel will hear about this and be
afraid.

## *Other Laws*

22If someone is guilty of a sin worthy of death, he must be
put to death and his body displayed on a tree. 23But don’t leave
his body hanging on the tree overnight; be sure to bury him that
same day, because anyone whose body is displayed on a tree is
cursed by God. You must not ruin the land the LORD your God is
giving you as your own.
22 If you see your fellow Israelite’s ox or sheep wandering away,
don’t ignore it. Take it back to its owner. 2If the owner does not
live close to you, or if you do not know who the owner is, take
the animal home with you. Keep it until the owner comes
looking for it; then give it back. 3Do the same thing if you find a
donkey or coat or anything someone lost. Don’t just ignore it.
4If you see your fellow Israelite’s donkey or ox fallen on the
road, don’t ignore it. Help the owner get it up.
5A woman must not wear men’s clothes, and a man must not
wear women’s clothes. The LORD your God hates anyone who
does that.
6If you find a bird’s nest by the road, either in a tree or on
the ground, and the mother bird is sitting on the young birds or
eggs, do not take the mother bird with the young birds. 7You
may take the young birds, but you must let the mother bird go
free. Then things will go well for you, and you will live a long
time.
8When you build a new house, build a low wall around the
edge of the roof[n] so you will not be guilty if someone falls off
the roof.
9Don’t plant two different kinds of seeds in your vineyard.
Otherwise, both crops will be ruined.
10Don’t plow with an ox and a donkey tied together.
11Don’t wear clothes made of wool and linen woven together.
12Tie several pieces of thread together; then put these
tassels on the four corners of your coat.

## *Marriage Laws*

13If a man marries a girl and has sexual relations with her
but then decides he does not like her, 14he might talk badly
about her and give her a bad name. He might say, “I married
this woman, but when I had sexual relations with her, I did not
find that she was a virgin.” 15Then the girl’s parents must bring

proof that she was a virgin to the elders at the city gate. [16]The girl's father will say to the elders, "I gave my daughter to this man to be his wife, but now he does not want her. [17]This man has told lies about my daughter. He has said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin,' but here is the proof that my daughter was a virgin." Then her parents are to show the sheet to the elders of the city, [18]and the elders must take the man and punish him. [19]They must make him pay about two and one-half pounds of silver to the girl's father, because the man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name. The girl will continue to be the man's wife, and he may not divorce her as long as he lives.

[20]But if the things the husband said about his wife are true, and there is no proof that she was a virgin, [21]the girl must be brought to the door of her father's house. Then the men of the town must put her to death by throwing stones at her. She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by having sexual relations before she was married. You must get rid of the evil among you.

[22]If a man is found having sexual relations with another man's wife, both the woman and the man who had sexual relations with her must die. Get rid of this evil from Israel.

[23]If a man meets a virgin in a city and has sexual relations with her, but she is engaged to another man, [24]you must take both of them to the city gate and put them to death by throwing stones at them. Kill the girl, because she was in a city and did not scream for help. And kill the man for having sexual relations with another man's wife. You must get rid of the evil among you.

[25]But if a man meets an engaged girl out in the country and forces her to have sexual relations with him, only the man who had sexual relations with her must be put to death. [26]Don't do anything to the girl, because she has not done a sin worthy of death. This is like the person who attacks and murders a neighbor; [27]the man found the engaged girl in the country and she screamed, but no one was there to save her.

[28]If a man meets a virgin who is not engaged to be married and forces her to have sexual relations with him and people find out about it, [29]the man must pay the girl's father about one and one-fourth pounds of silver. He must also marry the girl, because he has dishonored her, and he may never divorce her for as long as he lives.

[30]A man must not marry his father's wife; he must not dishonor his father in this way.

## Psalm 38:9–22

9 Lord, you know everything I want;
my cries are not hidden from you.

10 My heart pounds, and my strength is gone.
I am losing my sight.

11 Because of my wounds, my friends and neighbors avoid me,
and my relatives stay far away.

12 Some people set traps to kill me.
Those who want to hurt me plan trouble;
all day long they think up lies.

13 I am like the deaf; I cannot hear.
Like the mute, I cannot speak.

14 I am like those who do not hear,
who have no answer to give.

15 I trust you, LORD.
You will answer, my Lord and God.

16 I said, “Don’t let them laugh at me
or brag when I am defeated.”

17 I am about to die,
and I cannot forget my pain.

18 I confess my guilt;
I am troubled by my sin.

19 My enemies are strong and healthy,
and many hate me for no reason.

20 They repay me with evil for the good I did.

They lie about me because I try to do good.

21 LORD, don't leave me;
my God, don't go away.

22 Quickly come and help me,
my Lord and Savior.

## Proverbs 12:26–28

26 Good people take advice from their friends,
but an evil person is easily led to do wrong.

27 The lazy catch no food to cook,
but a hard worker will have great wealth.

28 Doing what is right is the way to life,
but there is another way that leads to death.

## Luke 5:1–16

### *Jesus' First Followers*

5 One day while Jesus was standing beside Lake Galilee, many
people were pressing all around him to hear the word of God.
2 Jesus saw two boats at the shore of the lake. The fishermen
had left them and were washing their nets. 3 Jesus got into one
of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon,[n] and asked him to
push off a little from the land. Then Jesus sat down and
continued to teach the people from the boat.
4 When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Take
the boat into deep water, and put your nets in the water to
catch some fish."
5 Simon answered, "Master, we worked hard all night trying
to catch fish, and we caught nothing. But you say to put the
nets in the water, so I will." 6 When the fishermen did as Jesus

told them, they caught so many fish that the nets began to break. 7They called to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full that they were almost sinking.

8When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he bowed down before Jesus and said, “Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man!” 9He and the other fishermen were amazed at the many fish they caught, as were 10James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid. From now on you will fish for people.” 11When the men brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

## *Jesus Heals a Sick Man*

12When Jesus was in one of the towns, there was a man covered with a skin disease. When he saw Jesus, he bowed before him and begged him, “Lord, you can heal me if you will.”

13Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, “I will. Be healed!” Immediately the disease disappeared. 14Then Jesus said, “Don’t tell anyone about this, but go and show yourself to the priest[n] and offer a gift for your healing, as Moses commanded.[n] This will show the people what I have done.”

15But the news about Jesus spread even more. Many people came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their sicknesses, 16but Jesus often slipped away to be alone so he could pray.

# March 31

## A Plea for Help

*My sins have caught me so that I cannot see a way to escape … Please, LORD, save me. Hurry, LORD, to help me.*

Psalm 40:12–13

"we are punished justly, getting what we deserve for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). We are guilty and he is innocent. We are filthy and he is pure. We are wrong and he is right. He is not on that cross for his sins. He is there for ours.

And once the crook understands this, his request seems only natural. As he looks into the eyes of his last hope, he makes the same request any Christian has made: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

No stained-glass homilies. No excuses. Just a desperate plea for help.

At this point, Jesus performs the greatest miracle of the cross. Greater than the earthquake. Greater than the tearing of the temple curtain… . He performs the miracle of forgiveness: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

from *Six Hours One Friday*

### Deuteronomy 23:1—24:22

### *The Lord's People*

23 No man who has had part of his sex organ cut off may come into the meeting to worship the LORD.

2No one born to parents who were forbidden by law to marry may come into the meeting to worship the LORD. The descendants for ten generations may not come in either.

3No Ammonite or Moabite may come into the meeting to worship the LORD, and none of their descendants for ten generations may come in. 4This is because the Ammonites and

Moabites did not give you bread and water when you came out of Egypt. And they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor in Northwest Mesopotamia, to put a curse on you. 5But the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam. He turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. 6Don't wish for their peace or success as long as you live.

7Don't hate Edomites; they are your close relatives. Don't hate Egyptians, because you were foreigners in their country. 8The great-grandchildren of these two peoples may come into the meeting to worship the LORD.

## *Keeping the Camp Clean*

9When you are camped in time of war, keep away from unclean things. 10If a man becomes unclean during the night, he must go outside the camp and not come back. 11But when evening comes, he must wash himself, and at sunset he may come back into the camp.

12Choose a place outside the camp where people may go to relieve themselves. 13Carry a tent peg with you, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your dung. 14The LORD your God moves around through your camp to protect you and to defeat your enemies for you, so the camp must be holy. He must not see anything unclean among you so that he will not leave you.

## *Other Laws*

15If an escaped slave comes to you, do not hand over the slave to his master. 16Let the slave live with you anywhere he likes, in any town he chooses. Do not mistreat him.

17No Israelite man or woman must ever become a temple prostitute. 18Do not bring a male or female prostitute's pay to the Temple of the LORD your God to pay what you have promised to the LORD, because the LORD your God hates prostitution.

19If you loan your fellow Israelites money or food or anything else, don't make them pay back more than you loaned them. 20You may charge foreigners, but not fellow Israelites. Then the LORD your God will bless everything you do in the land you are entering to take as your own.

21If you make a promise to give something to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, because the LORD your God demands it from you. Do not be guilty of sin. 22But if you do not make the promise, you will not be guilty. 23You must do whatever you say you will do, because you chose to make the promise to the LORD your God.

24If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat as

many grapes as you wish, but do not put any grapes into your basket. 25If you go into your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick grain with your hands, but you must not cut down your neighbor's grain with your sickle.

24 A man might marry a woman but later decide she doesn't please him because he has found something bad about her. He writes out divorce papers for her, gives them to her, and sends her away from his house. 2After she leaves his house, she goes and marries another man, 3but her second husband does not like her either. So he writes out divorce papers for her, gives them to her, and sends her away from his house. Or the second husband might die. 4In either case, her first husband who divorced her must not marry her again, because she has become unclean. The LORD would hate this. Don't bring this sin into the land the LORD your God is giving you as your own.

5A man who has just married must not be sent to war or be given any other duty. He should be free to stay home for a year to make his new wife happy.

6If someone owes you something, do not take his two stones for grinding grain—not even the upper one—in place of what he owes, because this is how the person makes a living.

7If someone kidnaps a fellow Israelite, either to make him a slave or sell him, the kidnapper must be killed. You must get rid of the evil among you.

8Be careful when someone has a skin disease. Do exactly what the priests, the Levites, teach you, being careful to do what I have commanded them. 9Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on your way out of Egypt.

10When you make a loan to your neighbors, don't go into their homes to get something in place of it. 11Stay outside and let them go in and get what they promised you. 12If a poor person gives you a coat to show he will pay the loan back, don't keep it overnight. 13Give the coat back at sunset, because your neighbor needs that coat to sleep in, and he will be grateful to you. And the LORD your God will see that you have done a good thing.

14Don't cheat hired servants who are poor and needy, whether they are fellow Israelites or foreigners living in one of your towns. 15Pay them each day before sunset, because they are poor and need the money. Otherwise, they may complain to the LORD about you, and you will be guilty of sin.

16Parents must not be put to death if their children do wrong, and children must not be put to death if their parents do wrong. Each person must die for his own sin.

17Do not be unfair to a foreigner or an orphan. Don't take a widow's coat to make sure she pays you back. 18Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the LORD your God saved you from there. That is why I am commanding you to do this.

19 When you are gathering your harvest in the field and leave
behind a bundle of grain, don't go back and get it. Leave it
there for foreigners, orphans, and widows so that the LORD your
God can bless everything you do. 20 When you beat your olive
trees to knock the olives off, don't beat the trees a second time.
Leave what is left for foreigners, orphans, and widows. 21 When
you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, don't pick the vines a
second time. Leave what is left for foreigners, orphans, and
widows. 22 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt; that is why
I am commanding you to do this.

## Psalm 39:1–6

### *Life Is Short*

**For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.**

39 I said, "I will be careful how I act
and will not sin by what I say.

I will be careful what I say
around wicked people."

2 So I kept very quiet.
I didn't even say anything good,
but I became even more upset.

3 I became very angry inside,
and as I thought about it, my anger burned.
So I spoke:

4 "LORD, tell me when the end will come
and how long I will live.
Let me know how long I have.

5 You have given me only a short life;
my lifetime is like nothing to you.
Everyone's life is only a breath. *Selah*

6 People are like shadows moving about.
All their work is for nothing;
they collect things but don't know who will get them.

## Proverbs 13:1–3

13 Wise children take their parents' advice,
but whoever makes fun of wisdom
won't listen to correction.

2 People will be rewarded for what they say,
but those who can't be trusted want only violence.

3 Those who are careful about what they say protect their lives,
but whoever speaks without thinking will be ruined.

## Luke 5:17–39

### *Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man*

17 One day as Jesus was teaching the people, the Pharisees and teachers of the law from every town in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were there. The Lord was giving Jesus the power to heal people. 18 Just then, some men were carrying on a mat a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and put him down before Jesus. 19 But because there were so many people there, they could not find a way in. So they went up on the roof and lowered the man on his mat through the ceiling into the middle of the crowd right before Jesus. 20 Seeing their faith, Jesus said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

21 The Jewish teachers of the law and the Pharisees thought to themselves, "Who is this man who is speaking as if he were God? Only God can forgive sins."

22 But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, "Why are you thinking these things? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? 24 But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to

forgive sins." So Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, stand up, take your mat, and go home."

25At once the man stood up before them, picked up his mat, and went home, praising God. 26All the people were fully amazed and began to praise God. They were filled with much respect and said, "Today we have seen amazing things!"

## *Levi Follows Jesus*

27After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax collector's booth. Jesus said to him, "Follow me!" 28So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

29Then Levi gave a big dinner for Jesus at his house. Many tax collectors and other people were eating there, too. 30But the Pharisees and the men who taught the law for the Pharisees began to complain to Jesus' followers, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick. 32I have not come to invite good people but sinners to change their hearts and lives."

## *Jesus Answers a Question*

33They said to Jesus, "John's followers often fast[n] for a certain time and pray, just as the Pharisees do. But your followers eat and drink all the time."

34Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is still with them. 35But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

36Jesus told them this story: "No one takes cloth off a new coat to cover a hole in an old coat. Otherwise, he ruins the new coat, and the cloth from the new coat will not be the same as the old cloth. 37Also, no one ever pours new wine into old leather bags. Otherwise, the new wine will break the bags, the wine will spill out, and the leather bags will be ruined. 38New wine must be put into new leather bags. 39No one after drinking old wine wants new wine, because he says, 'The old wine is better.'"

# April 1

## The Best Way to Face Life

*Everyone's life is only a breath.*

Psalm 39:11

In a life marked by doctor appointments, dentist appointments, and school appointments, there is one appointment that none of us will miss, the appointment with death. "Everyone must die once and then be judged" (Hebrews 9:27). Oh, how we'd like to change that verse. Just a word or two would suffice. "*Nearly everyone* must die ..." or "*Everyone but me* must die ..." or "*Everyone who forgets to eat right and take vitamins* must die ..." But those are not God's words. In his plan everyone must die, even those who eat right and take their vitamins.

Exercise may buy us a few more heartbeats. Medicine may grant us a few more breaths. But in the end, there is an end. And the best way to face life is to be honest about death.

from *Traveling Light*

### Deuteronomy 25:1—26:19

25 If two people have an argument and go to court, the judges
will decide the case. They will declare one person right and the
other guilty. 2If the guilty person has to be punished with a
beating, the judge will make that person lie down and be beaten
in front of him. The number of lashes should match the crime.
3But don't hit a person more than forty times, because more
than that would disgrace him before others.

4When an ox is working in the grain, do not cover its mouth
to keep it from eating.

5If two brothers are living together, and one of them dies
without having a son, his widow must not marry someone
outside her husband's family. Her husband's brother must
marry her, which is his duty to her as a brother-in-law. 6The first
son she has counts as the son of the dead brother so that his
name will not be forgotten in Israel.

7But if a man does not want to marry his brother's widow,
she should go to the elders at the town gate. She should say,
"My brother-in-law will not carry on his brother's name in
Israel. He refuses to do his duty for me."
8Then the elders of the town must call for the man and talk
to him. But if he is stubborn and says, "I don't want to marry
her," 9the woman must go up to him in front of the leaders. She
must take off one of his sandals and spit in his face and say,
"This is for the man who won't continue his brother's family!"
10Then that man's family shall be known in Israel as the Family
of the Unsandaled.
11If two men are fighting and one man's wife comes to save
her husband from his attacker, grabbing the attacker by his sex
organs, 12you must cut off her hand. Show her no mercy.
13Don't carry two sets of weights with you, one heavy and
one light. 14Don't have two different sets of measures in your
house, one large and one small. 15You must have true and
honest weights and measures so that you will live a long time in
the land the LORD your God is giving you. 16The LORD your God
hates anyone who is dishonest and uses dishonest measures.
17Remember what the Amalekites did to you when you came
out of Egypt. 18When you were tired and worn out, they met you
on the road and attacked all those lagging behind. They were
not afraid of God. 19When the LORD your God gives you rest from
all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you as your
own, you shall destroy any memory of the Amalekites on the
earth. Do not forget!

## *The First Harvest*

26 When you go into the land the LORD your God is giving you as
your own, to take it over and live in it, 2you must take some of
the first harvest of crops that grow from the land the LORD your
God is giving you. Put the food in a basket and go to the place
where the LORD your God will choose to be worshiped. 3Say to
the priest on duty at that time, "Today I declare before the LORD
your God that I have come into the land the LORD promised our
ancestors that he would give us." 4The priest will take your
basket and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God.
5Then you shall announce before the LORD your God: "My father
was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with only a
few people, but they became a great, powerful, and large nation
there. 6But the Egyptians were cruel to us, making us suffer and
work very hard. 7So we prayed to the LORD, the God of our
ancestors, and he heard us. When he saw our trouble, hard
work, and suffering, 8the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his
great power and strength, using great terrors, signs, and
miracles. 9Then he brought us to this place and gave us this

fertile land. [10]Now I bring part of the first harvest from this land that you, LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. [11]Then you and the Levites and foreigners among you should rejoice, because the LORD your God has given good things to you and your family.

[12]Bring a tenth of all your harvest the third year (the year to give a tenth of your harvest). Give it to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows so that they may eat in your towns and be full. [13]Then say to the LORD your God, "I have taken out of my house the part of my harvest that belongs to God, and I have given it to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. I have done everything you commanded me; I have not broken your commands, and I have not forgotten any of them. [14]I have not eaten any of the holy part while I was in sorrow. I have not removed any of it while I was unclean, and I have not offered it for dead people. I have obeyed you, the LORD my God, and have done everything you commanded me. [15]So look down from heaven, your holy home. Bless your people Israel and bless the land you have given us, which you promised to our ancestors—a fertile land."

### *Obey the LORD's Commands*

[16]Today the LORD your God commands you to obey all these rules and laws; be careful to obey them with your whole being. [17]Today you have said that the LORD is your God, and you have promised to do what he wants you to do—to keep his rules, commands, and laws. You have said you will obey him. [18]And today the LORD has said that you are his very own people, as he has promised you. But you must obey his commands. [19]He will make you greater than all the other nations he made. He will give you praise, fame, and honor, and you will be a holy people to the LORD your God, as he has said.

## Psalm 39:7–11

[7]"So, Lord, what hope do I have?
You are my hope.

[8]Save me from all my sins.
Don't let wicked fools make fun of me.

9 I am quiet; I do not open my mouth,
because you are the one who has done this.

10 Quit punishing me;
your beating is about to kill me.

11 You correct and punish people for their sins;
like a moth, you destroy what they love.
Everyone's life is only a breath. *Selah*

## Proverbs 13:4–6

4 The lazy will not get what they want,
but those who work hard will.

5 Good people hate what is false,
but the wicked do shameful and disgraceful things.

6 Doing what is right protects the honest person,
but doing evil ruins the sinner.

## Luke 6:1–26

### *Jesus Is Lord over the Sabbath*

6 One Sabbath day Jesus was walking through some fields of grain. His followers picked the heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. 2 Some Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?"

3 Jesus answered, "Have you not read what David did when he and those with him were hungry? 4 He went into God's house and took and ate the holy bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he gave some to the people who were with him." 5 Then Jesus said to the Pharisees, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day."

## *Jesus Heals a Man's Hand*

6On another Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue and
was teaching, and a man with a crippled right hand was there.
7The teachers of the law and the Pharisees were watching
closely to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath day so they
could accuse him. 8But he knew what they were thinking, and
he said to the man with the crippled hand, "Stand up here in
the middle of everyone." The man got up and stood there. 9Then
Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath
day: to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to destroy it?"
10Jesus looked around at all of them and said to the man, "Hold
out your hand." The man held out his hand, and it was healed.

11But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were very
angry and discussed with each other what they could do to
Jesus.

## *Jesus Chooses His Apostles*

12At that time Jesus went off to a mountain to pray, and he
spent the night praying to God. 13The next morning, Jesus
called his followers to him and chose twelve of them, whom he
named apostles: 14Simon (Jesus named him Peter), his brother
Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, 15Matthew, Thomas,
James son of Alphaeus, Simon (called the Zealot), 16Judas son of
James, and Judas Iscariot, who later turned Jesus over to his
enemies.

## *Jesus Teaches and Heals*

17Jesus and the apostles came down from the mountain, and
he stood on level ground. A large group of his followers was
there, as well as many people from all around Judea, Jerusalem,
and the seacoast cities of Tyre and Sidon. 18They all came to
hear Jesus teach and to be healed of their sicknesses, and he
healed those who were troubled by evil spirits. 19All the people
were trying to touch Jesus, because power was coming from
him and healing them all.

20Jesus looked at his followers and said,

"You people who are poor are blessed,
because the kingdom of God belongs to you.

21You people who are now hungry are blessed,
because you will be satisfied.

You people who are now crying are blessed,
because you will laugh with joy.

22“People will hate you, shut you out, insult you, and say you
are evil because you follow the Son of Man. But when they do,
you will be blessed. 23Be full of joy at that time, because you
have a great reward in heaven. Their ancestors did the same
things to the prophets.

24“But how terrible it will be for you who are rich,
because you have had your easy life.

25How terrible it will be for you who are full now,
because you will be hungry.

How terrible it will be for you who are laughing now,
because you will be sad and cry.

26“How terrible when everyone says only good things about
you, because their ancestors said the same things about the
false prophets.

# April 2

## Kindness Makes the Coffee

*"He is kind even to people who are ungrateful and full of sin."*

Luke 6:35

How often do we thank God for his kindness? Not often enough. But does our ingratitude restrict his kindness? No. "Because he is kind even to people who are ungrateful and full of sin."

In the original language, the word for *kindness* carries an added idea the English word does not. Chiefly it refers to an act of grace. But it also refers to a deed or person who is "useful, serviceable, adapted to its purpose." *Kindness* was even employed to describe food that was tasty as well as healthy. Sounds odd to our ears. "Hey, honey, what a great meal. The salad is especially *kind* tonight."

But the usage makes sense. Isn't kindness good *and* good for you? Pleasant *and* practical? Kindness not only says "good morning," kindness makes the coffee.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Deuteronomy 27:1—28:68

### *The Law Written on Stones*

27 Then Moses, along with the elders of Israel, commanded the
people, saying, "Keep all the commands I have given you today.
2 Soon you will cross the Jordan River to go into the land the
LORD your God is giving you. On that day set up some large
stones and cover them with plaster. 3 When you cross over, write
all the words of these teachings on them. Then you may enter
the land the LORD your God is giving you, a fertile land, just as
the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised. 4 After you have
crossed the Jordan River, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as
I command you today, and cover them with plaster. 5 Build an
altar of stones there to the LORD your God, but don't use any

iron tool to cut the stones; [6]build the altar of the LORD your God
with stones from the field. Offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD
your God, [7]and offer fellowship offerings there, and eat them
and rejoice before the LORD your God. [8]Then write clearly all the
words of these teachings on the stones."

## *Curses of the Law*

[9]Then Moses and the Levites who were priests spoke to all
Israel and said, "Be quiet, Israel. Listen! Today you have
become the people of the LORD your God. [10]Obey the LORD your
God, and keep his commands and laws that I give you today."

[11]That day Moses also gave the people this command:

[12]When you cross the Jordan River, these tribes must stand
on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah,
Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. [13]And these tribes must stand
on Mount Ebal to announce the curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher,
Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

[14]The Levites will say to all the people of Israel in a loud
voice:

[15]"Anyone will be cursed who makes an idol or statue and
secretly sets it up, because the LORD hates the idols people
make."

Then all the people will say, "Amen!"

[16]"Anyone will be cursed who dishonors his father or
mother."

Then all the people will say, "Amen!"

[17]"Anyone will be cursed who moves the stone that marks a
neighbor's border."

Then all the people will say, "Amen!"

[18]"Anyone will be cursed who sends a blind person down the
wrong road."

Then all the people will say, "Amen!"

[19]"Anyone will be cursed who is unfair to foreigners,
orphans, or widows."

Then all the people will say, "Amen!"

[20]"A man will be cursed who has sexual relations with his
father's wife, because it is a dishonor to his father."

Then all the people will say, "Amen!"

[21]"Anyone will be cursed who has sexual relations with an
animal."

Then all the people will say, "Amen!"

[22]"A man will be cursed who has sexual relations with his
sister, whether she is his father's daughter or his mother's
daughter."

Then all the people will say, "Amen!"

[23]"A man will be cursed who has sexual relations with his
mother-in-law."

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

24“Anyone will be cursed who kills a neighbor secretly.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

25“Anyone will be cursed who takes money to murder an innocent person.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

26“Anyone will be cursed who does not agree with the words of these teachings and does not obey them.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

## *Blessings for Obeying*

28 You must completely obey the LORD your God, and you must carefully follow all his commands I am giving you today. Then the LORD your God will make you greater than any other nation on earth. 2Obey the LORD your God so that all these blessings will come and stay with you:

3You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

4Your children will be blessed, as well as your crops; your herds will be blessed with calves and your flocks with lambs.

5Your basket and your kitchen will be blessed.

6You will be blessed when you come in and when you go out.

7The LORD will help you defeat the enemies that come to fight you. They will attack you from one direction, but they will run from you in seven directions.

8The LORD your God will bless you with full barns, and he will bless everything you do. He will bless the land he is giving you.

9The LORD will make you his holy people, as he promised. But you must obey his commands and do what he wants you to do. 10Then everyone on earth will see that you are the LORD’s people, and they will be afraid of you. 11The LORD will make you rich: You will have many children, your animals will have many young, and your land will give good crops. It is the land that the LORD promised your ancestors he would give to you.

12The LORD will open up his heavenly storehouse so that the skies send rain on your land at the right time, and he will bless everything you do. You will lend to other nations, but you will not need to borrow from them. 13The LORD will make you like the head and not like the tail; you will be on top and not on bottom. But you must obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today, being careful to keep them. 14Do not disobey anything I command you today. Do exactly as I command, and do not follow other gods or serve them.

## *Curses for Disobeying*

15But if you do not obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands and laws I am giving you today, all

these curses will come upon you and stay:
16 You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.
17 Your basket and your kitchen will be cursed.
18 Your children will be cursed, as well as your crops; the
calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks will be cursed.
19 You will be cursed when you go in and when you go out.
20 The LORD will send you curses, confusion, and punishment
in everything you do. You will be destroyed and suddenly ruined
because you did wrong when you left him. 21 The LORD will give
you terrible diseases and destroy you from the land you are
going to take. 22 The LORD will punish you with disease, fever,
swelling, heat, lack of rain, plant diseases, and mildew until you
die. 23 The sky above will be like bronze, and the ground below
will be like iron.[n] 24 The LORD will turn the rain into dust and
sand, which will fall from the skies until you are destroyed.
25 The LORD will help your enemies defeat you. You will attack
them from one direction, but you will run from them in seven
directions. And you will become a thing of horror among all the
kingdoms on earth. 26 Your dead bodies will be food for all the
birds and wild animals, and there will be no one to scare them
away. 27 The LORD will punish you with boils like those the
Egyptians had. You will have bad growths, sores, and itches that
can't be cured. 28 The LORD will give you madness, blindness,
and a confused mind. 29 You will have to feel around in the
daylight like a blind person. You will fail in everything you do.
People will hurt you and steal from you every day, and no one
will save you.
30 You will be engaged to a woman, but another man will
force her to have sexual relations with him. You will build a
house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but
you will not get its grapes. 31 Your ox will be killed before your
eyes, but you will not eat any of it. Your donkey will be taken
away from you, and it will not be brought back. Your sheep will
be given to your enemies, and no one will save you. 32 Your sons
and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will
grow tired looking for them every day, but there will be nothing
you can do. 33 People you don't know will eat the crops your land
and hard work have produced. You will be mistreated and
abused all your life. 34 The things you see will cause you to go
mad. 35 The LORD will give you sore boils on your knees and legs
that cannot be cured, and they will go from the soles of your
feet to the tops of your heads.
36 The LORD will send you and your king away to a nation
neither you nor your ancestors know, where you will serve other
gods made of wood and stone. 37 You will become a hated thing
to the nations where the LORD sends you; they will laugh at you
and make fun of you.
38 You will plant much seed in your field, but your harvest will

be small, because locusts will eat the crop. [39]You will plant vineyards and work hard in them, but you will not pick the grapes or drink the wine, because the worms will eat them. [40]You will have olive trees in all your land, but you will not get any olive oil, because the olives will drop off the trees. [41]You will have sons and daughters, but you will not be able to keep them, because they will be taken captive. [42]Locusts will destroy all your trees and crops.

[43]The foreigners who live among you will get stronger and stronger, and you will get weaker and weaker. [44]Foreigners will lend money to you, but you will not be able to lend to them. They will be like the head, and you will be like the tail.

[45]All these curses will come upon you. They will chase you and catch you and destroy you, because you did not obey the LORD your God and keep the commands and laws he gave you. [46]The curses will be signs and miracles to you and your descendants forever. [47]You had plenty of everything, but you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a pure heart, [48]so you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. You will be hungry, thirsty, naked, and poor, and the LORD will put a load on you until he has destroyed you.

## *The Curse of an Enemy Nation*

[49]The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the world, and it will swoop down like an eagle. You won't understand their language, [50]and they will look mean. They will not respect old people or feel sorry for the young. [51]They will eat the calves from your herds and the harvest of your field, and you will be destroyed. They will not leave you any grain, new wine or oil, or any calves from your herds or lambs from your flocks. You will be ruined. [52]That nation will surround and attack all your cities. You trust in your high, strong walls, but they will fall down. That nation will surround all your cities everywhere in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

[53]Your enemy will surround you. Those people will make you starve so that you will eat your own babies, the bodies of the sons and daughters the LORD your God gave you. [54]Even the most gentle and kind man among you will become cruel to his brother, his wife whom he loves, and his children who are still alive. [55]He will not even give them any of the flesh of his children he is eating, because it will be all he has left. Your enemy will surround you and make you starve in all your cities. [56]The most gentle and kind woman among you, so gentle and kind she would hardly even walk on the ground, will be cruel to her husband whom she loves and to her son and daughter. [57]She will give birth to a baby, but she will plan to eat the baby

and what comes after the birth itself. She will eat them secretly while the enemy surrounds the city. Those people will make you starve in all your cities.

58Be careful to obey everything in these teachings that are written in this book. You must respect the glorious and wonderful name of the LORD your God, 59or the LORD will give terrible diseases to you and your descendants. You will have long and serious diseases, and long and miserable sicknesses. 60He will give you all the diseases of Egypt that you dread, and the diseases will stay with you. 61The LORD will also give you every disease and sickness not written in this Book of the Teachings, until you are destroyed. 62You people may have outnumbered the stars, but only a few of you will be left, because you did not obey the LORD your God. 63Just as the LORD was once happy with you and gave you good things and made you grow in number, so then the LORD will be happy to ruin and destroy you, and you will be removed from the land you are entering to take as your own.

64Then the LORD will scatter you among the nations—from one end of the earth to the other. There you will serve other gods of wood and stone, gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known. 65You will have no rest among those nations and no place that is yours. The LORD will make your mind worried, your sight weak, and your soul sad. 66You will live with danger and be afraid night and day. You will not be sure that you will live. 67In the morning you will say, “I wish it were evening,” and in the evening you will say, “I wish it were morning.” Terror will be in your heart, and the things you have seen will scare you. 68The LORD will send you back to Egypt in ships, even though I, Moses, said you would never go back to Egypt. And there you will try to sell yourselves as slaves to your enemies, but no one will buy you.

## Psalm 39:12–13

12“LORD, hear my prayer,
and listen to my cry.
Do not ignore my tears.

I am like a visitor with you.
Like my ancestors, I’m only here a short time.

13 Leave me alone so I can be happy
before I leave and am no more.”

## Proverbs 13:7–8

7 Some people pretend to be rich but really have nothing.
Others pretend to be poor but really are wealthy.

8 The rich may have to pay a ransom for their lives,
but the poor will face no such danger.

## Luke 6:27–49

### *Love Your Enemies*

27 “But I say to you who are listening, love your enemies. Do
good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray
for those who are cruel to you. 29 If anyone slaps you on one
cheek, offer him the other cheek, too. If someone takes your
coat, do not stop him from taking your shirt. 30 Give to everyone
who asks you, and when someone takes something that is yours,
don’t ask for it back. 31 Do to others what you would want them
to do to you. 32 If you love only the people who love you, what
praise should you get? Even sinners love the people who love
them. 33 If you do good only to those who do good to you, what
praise should you get? Even sinners do that! 34 If you lend things
to people, always hoping to get something back, what praise
should you get? Even sinners lend to other sinners so that they
can get back the same amount! 35 But love your enemies, do
good to them, and lend to them without hoping to get anything
back. Then you will have a great reward, and you will be
children of the Most High God, because he is kind even to
people who are ungrateful and full of sin. 36 Show mercy, just as
your Father shows mercy.

### *Look at Yourselves*

37 “Don’t judge others, and you will not be judged. Don’t
accuse others of being guilty, and you will not be accused of

being guilty. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38Give, and you will receive. You will be given much. Pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you."

39Jesus told them this story: "Can a blind person lead another blind person? No! Both of them will fall into a ditch. 40A student is not better than the teacher, but the student who has been fully trained will be like the teacher.

41"Why do you notice the little piece of dust in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the big piece of wood in your own eye? 42How can you say to your friend, 'Friend, let me take that little piece of dust out of your eye' when you cannot see that big piece of wood in your own eye! You hypocrite! First, take the wood out of your own eye. Then you will see clearly to take the dust out of your friend's eye.

## *Two Kinds of Fruit*

43"A good tree does not produce bad fruit, nor does a bad tree produce good fruit. 44Each tree is known by its own fruit. People don't gather figs from thornbushes, and they don't get grapes from bushes. 45Good people bring good things out of the good they stored in their hearts. But evil people bring evil things out of the evil they stored in their hearts. People speak the things that are in their hearts.

## *Two Kinds of People*

46"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' but do not do what I say? 47I will show you what everyone is like who comes to me and hears my words and obeys. 48That person is like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the floods came, the water tried to wash the house away, but it could not shake it, because the house was built well. 49But the one who hears my words and does not obey is like a man who built his house on the ground without a foundation. When the floods came, the house quickly fell and was completely destroyed."

# April 3

## The Author of Life

*And the son sat up and began to talk. Then Jesus gave him back to his mother.*

Luke 7:15

The mourners didn't cause him to stop. Nor did the large crowd, or even the body of the dead man on the stretcher. It was the woman—the look on her face and the redness in her eyes. He knew immediately what was happening. It was her son who was being carried out, her only son. And if anyone knows the pain that comes from losing your only son, God does.

So he did it; he went into action. "Don't cry," he told the mother. "Arise!" he told the boy. The dead man spoke, the devil ran, and the people were reminded of this truth: For those who know the Author of Life, death is nothing more than Satan's dead-man's-bluff.

from *God Came Near*

Deuteronomy 29:1—30:20

### *The Agreement in Moab*

29 The LORD commanded Moses to make an agreement with the Israelites in Moab in addition to the agreement he had made with them at Mount Sinai. These are the words of that agreement.

2Moses called all the Israelites together and said to them:

You have seen everything the LORD did before your own eyes to the king of Egypt and to the king's leaders and to the whole country. 3With your own eyes you saw the great troubles, signs, and miracles. 4But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands; you don't really understand what you see with your eyes or hear with your ears. 5I led you through the desert for forty years, and during that time neither your clothes nor sandals wore out. 6You ate no bread and drank no wine or beer. This was so you would understand that I am the LORD your God.

7When you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og

king of Bashan came out to fight us, but we defeated them. [8]We captured their land and gave it to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh to be their own.

[9]You must carefully obey everything in this agreement so that you will succeed in everything you do. [10]Today you are all standing here before the LORD your God—your leaders and important men, your elders, officers, and all the other men of Israel, [11]your wives and children and the foreigners who live among you, who chop your wood and carry your water. [12]You are all here to enter into an agreement and a promise with the LORD your God, an agreement the LORD your God is making with you today. [13]This will make you today his own people. He will be your God, as he told you and as he promised your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [14]But I am not just making this agreement and its promises with you [15]who are standing here before the LORD your God today, but also with those who are not here today.

[16]You know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries when we came here. [17]You saw their hateful idols made of wood, stone, silver, and gold. [18]Make sure no man, woman, family group, or tribe among you leaves the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. They would be to you like a plant that grows bitter, poisonous fruit.

[19]These are the kind of people who hear these curses but bless themselves, thinking, "We will be safe even though we continue doing what we want to do." Those people may destroy all of your land, both wet and dry. [20]The LORD will not forgive them. His anger will be like a burning fire against those people, and all the curses written in this book will come on them. The LORD will destroy any memory of them on the earth. [21]He will separate them from all the tribes of Israel for punishment. All the curses of the Agreement that are written in this Book of the Teachings will happen to them.

[22]Your children who will come after you, as well as foreigners from faraway lands, will see the disasters that come to this land and the diseases the LORD will send on it. They will say, [23]"The land is nothing but burning cinders and salt. Nothing is planted, nothing grows, and nothing blooms. It is like Sodom and Gomorrah, and Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD destroyed because he was very angry." [24]All the other nations will ask, "Why has the LORD done this to the land? Why is he so angry?"

[25]And the answer will be, "It is because the people broke the Agreement of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. [26]They went and served other gods and bowed down to gods they did not even know. The LORD did not allow that, [27]so he became very angry at the land and brought all the curses on it that are

written in this book. 28Since the LORD became angry and furious with them, he took them out of their land and put them in another land where they are today.”

29There are some things the LORD our God has kept secret, but there are some things he has let us know. These things belong to us and our children forever so that we will do everything in these teachings.

## *The Israelites Will Return*

30 When all these blessings and curses I have described happen to you, and the LORD your God has sent you away to other nations, think about these things. 2Then you and your children will return to the LORD your God, and you will obey him with your whole being in everything I am commanding you today. 3Then the LORD your God will give you back your freedom. He will feel sorry for you, and he will bring you back again from the nations where he scattered you. 4He may send you to the ends of the earth, but he will gather you and bring you back from there, 5back to the land that belonged to your ancestors. It will be yours. He will give you success, and there will be more of you than there were of your ancestors. 6The LORD your God will prepare you and your descendants to love him with your whole being so that you will live. 7The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies, who hate you and are cruel to you. 8And you will again obey the LORD, keeping all his commands that I give you today. 9The LORD your God will make you successful in everything you do. You will have many children, your cattle will have many calves, and your fields will produce good crops, because the LORD will again be happy with you, just as he was with your ancestors. 10But you must obey the LORD your God by keeping all his commands and rules that are written in this Book of the Teachings. You must return to the LORD your God with your whole being.

## *Choose Life or Death*

11This command I give you today is not too hard for you; it is not beyond what you can do. 12It is not up in heaven. You do not have to ask, “Who will go up to heaven and get it for us so we can obey it and keep it?” 13It is not on the other side of the sea. You do not have to ask, “Who will go across the sea and get it? Who will tell it to us so we can keep it?” 14No, the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

15Look, today I offer you life and success, death and destruction. 16I command you today to love the LORD your God, to do what he wants you to do, and to keep his commands, his

rules, and his laws. Then you will live and grow in number, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to take as your own.

17But if you turn away from the LORD and do not obey him, if you are led to bow and serve other gods, 18I tell you today that you will surely be destroyed. And you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan River to enter and take as your own.

19Today I ask heaven and earth to be witnesses. I am offering you life or death, blessings or curses. Now, choose life! Then you and your children may live. 20To choose life is to love the LORD your God, obey him, and stay close to him. He is your life, and he will let you live many years in the land, the land he promised to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## Psalm 40:1–5

### *Praise and Prayer for Help*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

40 I waited patiently for the LORD.He turned to me and heard my cry.

2He lifted me out of the pit of destruction,
out of the sticky mud.

He stood me on a rock
and made my feet steady.

3He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.

Many people will see this and worship him.
Then they will trust the LORD.

4Happy is the person
who trusts the LORD,

who doesn't turn to those who are proud
or to those who worship false gods.

5 LORD my God, you have done many miracles.
Your plans for us are many.

If I tried to tell them all,
there would be too many to count.

## Proverbs 13:9–10

9 Good people can look forward to a bright future,
but the future of the wicked is like a flame going out.

10 Pride only leads to arguments,
but those who take advice are wise.

## Luke 7:1–35

### *Jesus Heals a Soldier's Servant*

7 When Jesus finished saying all these things to the people, he
went to Capernaum. 2 There was an army officer who had a
servant who was very important to him. The servant was so sick
he was nearly dead. 3 When the officer heard about Jesus, he
sent some Jewish elders to him to ask Jesus to come and heal
his servant. 4 The men went to Jesus and begged him, saying,
"This officer is worthy of your help. 5 He loves our people, and
he built us a synagogue."
6 So Jesus went with the men. He was getting near the
officer's house when the officer sent friends to say, "Lord, don't
trouble yourself, because I am not worthy to have you come into
my house. 7 That is why I did not come to you myself. But you
only need to command it, and my servant will be healed. 8 I, too,
am a man under the authority of others, and I have soldiers
under my command. I tell one soldier, 'Go,' and he goes. I tell
another soldier, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do

this,’ and my servant does it.”
9When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, “I tell you, this is the greatest faith I have found anywhere, even in Israel.”
10Those who had been sent to Jesus went back to the house where they found the servant in good health.

## *Jesus Brings a Man Back to Life*

11Soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his followers and a large crowd traveled with him. 12When he came near the town gate, he saw a funeral. A mother, who was a widow, had lost her only son. A large crowd from the town was with the mother while her son was being carried out. 13When the Lord saw her, he felt very sorry for her and said, “Don’t cry.” 14He went up and touched the coffin, and the people who were carrying it stopped. Jesus said, “Young man, I tell you, get up!” 15And the son sat up and began to talk. Then Jesus gave him back to his mother.
16All the people were amazed and began praising God, saying, “A great prophet has come to us! God has come to help his people.”
17This news about Jesus spread through all Judea and into all the places around there.

## *John Asks a Question*

18John’s followers told him about all these things. He called for two of his followers 19and sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?”
20When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you with this question: ‘Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?’”
21At that time, Jesus healed many people of their sicknesses, diseases, and evil spirits, and he gave sight to many blind people. 22Then Jesus answered John’s followers, “Go tell John what you saw and heard here. The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor. 23Those who do not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed!”
24When John’s followers left, Jesus began talking to the people about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed[n] blown by the wind? 25What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, people who have fine clothes and much wealth live in kings’ palaces. 26But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, and I tell you, John is more than a

prophet. [27]This was written about him:

‘I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare the way for you.’

Malachi 3:1

[28]I tell you, John is greater than any other person ever born, but even the least important person in the kingdom of God is greater than John.”

[29](When the people, including the tax collectors, heard this, they all agreed that God’s teaching was good, because they had been baptized by John. [30]But the Pharisees and experts on the law refused to accept God’s plan for themselves; they did not let John baptize them.)

[31]Then Jesus said, “What shall I say about the people of this time? What are they like? [32]They are like children sitting in the marketplace, calling to one another and saying,

‘We played music for you, but you did not dance;
we sang a sad song, but you did not cry.’

[33]John the Baptist came and did not eat bread or drink wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon in him.’ [34]The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! He eats too much and drinks too much wine, and he is a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ [35]But wisdom is proved to be right by what it does.”

# April 4

## God Is in Your Corner

*"The LORD himself will go before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forget you."*

Deuteronomy 31:8

When I was seven years old, I ran away from home. I'd had enough of my father's rules and decided I could make it on my own, thank you very much. With my clothes in a paper bag, I stormed out the back gate and marched down the alley. [But] I didn't go far. I got to the end of the alley and remembered I was hungry, so I went back home.

Though the rebellion was brief, it was rebellion nonetheless. And had you stopped me on that prodigal path … I just might have told you how I felt. I just might have said, "I don't need a father. I'm too big for the rules of my family."

I didn't hear the rooster crow like Peter did. I didn't feel the fish belch like Jonah did. I didn't get a robe and a ring and sandals like the prodigal did. But I learned from my father on earth what those three learned from their Father in heaven. Our God is no fair-weather Father. He's not into this love-'em-and-leave-'em stuff. I can count on him to be in my corner no matter how I perform. You can, too.

from *The Great House of God*

### Deuteronomy 31:1—32:52

#### *Joshua Takes Moses' Place*

31 Then Moses went and spoke these words to all the Israelites:
2 "I am now one hundred twenty years old, and I cannot lead you
anymore. The LORD told me I would not cross the Jordan River;
3 the LORD your God will lead you across himself. He will destroy
those nations for you, and you will take over their land. Joshua
will also lead you across, as the LORD has said. 4 The LORD will do

to those nations what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, when he destroyed them and their land. 5The LORD will give those nations to you; do to them everything I told you. 6Be strong and brave. Don't be afraid of them and don't be frightened, because the LORD your God will go with you. He will not leave you or forget you."

7Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in front of the people, "Be strong and brave, because you will lead these people into the land the LORD promised to give their ancestors, and help them take it as their own. 8The LORD himself will go before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forget you. Don't be afraid and don't worry."

## *Moses Writes the Teachings*

9So Moses wrote down these teachings and gave them to the priests and all the elders of Israel. (The priests are the sons of Levi, who carry the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD.) 10–11Then Moses commanded them: "Read these teachings for all Israel to hear at the end of every seven years, which is the year to cancel what people owe. Do it during the Feast of Shelters, when all the Israelites will come to appear before the LORD your God and stand at the place he will choose. 12Gather all the people: the men, women, children, and foreigners living in your towns so that they can listen and learn to respect the LORD your God and carefully obey everything in this law. 13Since their children do not know this law, they must hear it. They must learn to respect the LORD your God for as long as they live in the land you are crossing the Jordan River to take for your own."

## *The Lord Calls Moses and Joshua*

14The LORD said to Moses, "Soon you will die. Get Joshua and come to the Meeting Tent so that I may command him." So Moses and Joshua went to the Meeting Tent.

15The LORD appeared at the Meeting Tent in a cloud; the cloud stood over the entrance of the Tent. 16And the LORD said to Moses, "You will soon die. Then these people will not be loyal to me but will worship the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will leave me, breaking the Agreement I made with them. 17Then I will become very angry at them, and I will leave them. I will turn away from them, and they will be destroyed. Many terrible things will happen to them. Then they will say, 'It is because God is not with us that these terrible things are happening.' 18I will surely turn away from them then, because they have done wrong and have turned to other gods.

19"Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites. Then have them sing it, because it will be my witness against

them. 20When I bring them into the land I promised to their ancestors, a fertile land, they will eat as much as they want and get fat. Then they will turn to other gods and serve them. They will reject me and break my Agreement. 21Then when many troubles and terrible things happen to them, this song will testify against them, because the song will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they plan to do, even before I take them into the land I promised them." 22So Moses wrote down the song that day, and he taught it to the Israelites.

23Then the LORD gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: "Be strong and brave, because you will lead the people of Israel to the land I promised them, and I will be with you."

24After Moses finished writing all the words of the teachings in a book, 25he gave a command to the Levites, who carried the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD. 26He said, "Take this Book of the Teachings and put it beside the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD your God. It must stay there as a witness against you. 27I know how stubborn and disobedient you are. You have disobeyed the LORD while I am alive and with you, and you will disobey even more after I die! 28Gather all the elders of your tribes and all your officers to me so that I may say these things for them to hear, and so that I may ask heaven and earth to testify against them. 29I know that after I die you will become completely evil. You will turn away from the commands I have given you. Terrible things will happen to you in the future when you do what the LORD says is evil, and you will make him angry with the idols you have made."

## *Moses' Song*

30And Moses spoke this whole song for all the people of Israel to hear:

32 Hear, heavens, and I will speak.
Listen, earth, to what I say.

2My teaching will drop like rain;
my words will fall like dew.

They will be like showers on the grass;
they will pour down like rain on young plants.

3I will announce the name of the LORD.
Praise God because he is great!

4 He is like a rock; what he does is perfect,
and he is always fair.

He is a faithful God who does no wrong,
who is right and fair.

5 They have done evil against him.
To their shame they are no longer his children;
they are an evil and lying people.

6 This is not the way to repay the LORD,
you foolish and unwise people.

He is your Father and Maker,
who made you and formed you.

7 Remember the old days.
Think of the years already passed.

Ask your father and he will tell you;
ask your elders and they will inform you.

8 God Most High gave the nations their lands,
dividing up the human race.

He set up borders for the people
and even numbered the Israelites.

9 The LORD took his people as his share,
the people of Jacob as his very own.

10 He found them in a desert,
a windy, empty land.

He surrounded them and brought them up,
guarding them as those he loved very much.

[11]He was like an eagle building its nest
that flutters over its young.

It spreads its wings to catch them
and carries them on its feathers.

[12]The LORD alone led them,
and there was no foreign god helping him.

[13]The LORD brought them to the heights of the land
and fed them the fruit of the fields.

He gave them honey from the rocks,
bringing oil from the solid rock.

[14]There were milk curds from the cows and milk from the flock;
there were fat sheep and goats.

There were sheep and goats from Bashan
and the best of the wheat.

You drank the juice of grapes.

[15]Israel grew fat and kicked;
they were fat and full and firm.

They left the God who made them
and rejected the Rock who saved them.

[16]They made God jealous with foreign gods
and angry with hateful idols.

[17]They made sacrifices to demons, not God,
to gods they had never known,
new gods from nearby,

gods your ancestors did not fear.

18 You left God who is the Rock, your Father,
and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

19 The LORD saw this and rejected them;
his sons and daughters had made him angry.

20 He said, “I will turn away from them
and see what will happen to them.

They are evil people,
unfaithful children.

21 They used things that are not gods to make me jealous
and worthless idols to make me angry.

So I will use those who are not a nation to make them jealous;
I will use a nation that does not understand to make them angry.

22 My anger has started a fire
that burns down to the place of the dead.

It will burn up the ground and its crops,
and it will set fire to the base of the mountains.

23 “I will pile troubles upon them
and shoot my arrows at them.

24 They will be starved and sick,
destroyed by terrible diseases.

I will send them vicious animals
and gliding, poisonous snakes.

25 In the streets the sword will kill;
in their homes there will be terror.

Young men and women will die,
and so will babies and gray-haired men.

26 I will scatter them as I said,
and no one will remember them.

27 But I didn't want their enemy to brag;
their enemy might misunderstand

and say, 'We have won!
The LORD has done none of this.'"

28 Israel has no sense;
they do not understand.

29 I wish they were wise and understood this;
I wish they could see what will happen to them.

30 One person cannot chase a thousand people,
and two people cannot fight ten thousand

unless their Rock has sold them,
unless the LORD has given them up.

31 The rock of these people is not like our Rock;
our enemies agree to that.

32 Their vine comes from Sodom,
and their fields are like Gomorrah.

Their grapes are full of poison;
their bunches of grapes are bitter.

[33]Their wine is like snake poison,
    like the deadly poison of cobras.

[34]“I have been saving this,
    and I have it locked in my storehouses.

[35]I will punish those who do wrong; I will repay them.
    Soon their foot will slip,

because their day of trouble is near,
    and their punishment will come quickly.”

[36]The LORD will defend his people
    and have mercy on his servants.

He will see that their strength is gone,
    that nobody is left, slaves or free.

[37]Then he will say, “Where are their gods?
    Where is the rock they trusted?

[38]Who ate the fat from their sacrifices,
    and who drank the wine of their drink offerings?

Let those gods come to help you!
    Let them protect you!

[39]“Now you will see that I am the one God!
    There is no god but me.

I send life and death;
    I can hurt, and I can heal.
    No one can escape from me.

[40]I raise my hand toward heaven and make this promise:
    As surely as I live forever,

41 I will sharpen my flashing sword,
and I will take it in my hand to judge.

I will punish my enemies
and pay back those who hate me.

42 My arrows will be covered with their blood;
my sword will eat their flesh.

The blood will flow from those who are killed and the captives.
The heads of the enemy leaders will be cut off.”

43 Be happy, nations, with his people,
because he will repay you for the blood of his servants.

He will punish his enemies,
and he will remove the sin of his land and people.

44 Moses came with Joshua son of Nun, and they spoke all the words of this song for the people to hear. 45 When Moses finished speaking these words to all Israel, 46 he said to them: “Pay careful attention to all the words I have said to you today, and command your children to obey carefully everything in these teachings. 47 These should not be unimportant words for you, but rather they mean life for you! By these words you will live a long time in the land you are crossing the Jordan River to take as your own.”

## *Moses Goes Up to Mount Nebo*

48 The LORD spoke to Moses again that same day and said, 49 “Go up the Abarim Mountains, to Mount Nebo in the country of Moab, across from Jericho. Look at the land of Canaan that I am giving to the Israelites as their own. 50 On that mountain that you climb, you will die and join your ancestors, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and joined his ancestors. 51 You both sinned against me at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin, and you did not honor me as holy there among the Israelites. 52 So now you will only look at the land from far away. You will not enter the land I am giving the people of Israel.”

## Psalm 40:6–10

6 You do not want sacrifices and offerings.
But you have made a hole in my ear
to show that my body and life are yours.

You do not ask for burnt offerings
and sacrifices to take away sins.

7 Then I said, “Look, I have come.
It is written about me in the book.

8 My God, I want to do what you want.
Your teachings are in my heart.”

9 I will tell about your goodness in the great meeting of your people.
LORD, you know my lips are not silent.

10 I do not hide your goodness in my heart;
I speak about your loyalty and salvation.

I do not hide your love and truth
from the people in the great meeting.

## Proverbs 13:11–12

11 Money that comes easily disappears quickly,
but money that is gathered little by little will grow.

12 It is sad not to get what you hoped for.
But wishes that come true are like eating fruit from the

tree of life.

## Luke 7:36–50

### *A Woman Washes Jesus' Feet*

36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, so Jesus
went into the Pharisee's house and sat at the table. 37 A sinful
woman in the town learned that Jesus was eating at the
Pharisee's house. So she brought an alabaster jar of perfume
38 and stood behind Jesus at his feet, crying. She began to wash
his feet with her tears, and she dried them with her hair, kissing
them many times and rubbing them with the perfume. 39 When
the Pharisee who asked Jesus to come to his house saw this, he
thought to himself, "If Jesus were a prophet, he would know
that the woman touching him is a sinner!"

40 Jesus said to the Pharisee, "Simon, I have something to say
to you."

Simon said, "Teacher, tell me."

41 Jesus said, "Two people owed money to the same banker.
One owed five hundred coins[n] and the other owed fifty. 42 They
had no money to pay what they owed, but the banker told both
of them they did not have to pay him. Which person will love the
banker more?"

43 Simon, the Pharisee, answered, "I think it would be the one
who owed him the most money."

Jesus said to Simon, "You are right." 44 Then Jesus turned
toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?
When I came into your house, you gave me no water for my
feet, but she washed my feet with her tears and dried them with
her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss of greeting, but she has been
kissing my feet since I came in. 46 You did not put oil on my
head, but she poured perfume on my feet. 47 I tell you that her
many sins are forgiven, so she showed great love. But the
person who is forgiven only a little will love only a little."

48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 The people sitting at the table began to say among
themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Jesus said to the woman, "Because you believed, you are
saved from your sins. Go in peace."

# April 5

## Our Problem

*My sins have caught me so that I cannot see a way to escape. I have more sins than hairs on my head.*

Psalm 40:12

"The payment for sin is death. But God gives us the free gift of life forever in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). We have a problem: We are not holy, and "anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

Our deeds are ugly. Our actions are harsh. We don't do what we want to do, we don't like what we do, and what's worse—yes, there is something worse—we can't change.

We try, oh, how we try. But "Can a leopard change his spots? In the same way, Jerusalem, you cannot change and do good, because you are accustomed to doing evil" (Jeremiah 13:23).

We, like Adam, were under a curse, but Jesus "changed places with us and put himself under that curse" (Galatians 3:13).

The sinless One took on the face of a sinner so that we sinners could take on the face of a saint.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### Deuteronomy 33:1—34:12

### *Moses Blesses the People*

33 Moses, the man of God, gave this blessing to the Israelites
before he died. 2He said:

"The LORD came from Mount Sinai
and rose like the sun from Edom;

he showed his greatness from Mount Paran.

He came with thousands of angels
from the southern mountains.

3 The LORD surely loves his people
and takes care of all those who belong to him.

They bow down at his feet,
and they are taught by him.

4 Moses gave us the teachings
that belong to the people of Jacob.

5 The LORD became king of Israel
when the leaders of the people gathered,
when the tribes of Israel came together.

6 "Let the people of Reuben live and not die,
but let the people be few."

7 Moses said this about the people of Judah:

"LORD, listen to Judah's prayer;
bring them back to their people.

They defend themselves with their hands.
Help them fight their enemies!"

8 Moses said this about the people of Levi:

"LORD, your Thummim and Urim belong
to Levi, whom you love.

LORD, you tested him at Massah

and argued with him at the waters of Meribah.

9He said about his father and mother,
'I don't care about them.'

He did not treat his brothers as favorites
or give special favors to his children,

but he protected your word
and guarded your agreement.

10He teaches your laws to the people of Jacob
and your teachings to the people of Israel.

He burns incense before you
and makes whole burnt offerings on your altar.

11LORD, make them strong;
be pleased with the work they do.

Defeat those who attack them,
and don't let their enemies rise up again."

12Moses said this about the people of Benjamin:

"The LORD's loved ones will lie down in safety,
because he protects them all day long.
The ones he loves rest with him."

13Moses said this about the people of Joseph:

"May the LORD bless their land with wonderful dew from heaven,
with water from the springs below,

14 with the best fruits that the sun brings,
and with the best fruits that the moon brings.

15 Let the old mountains give the finest crops,
and let the everlasting hills give the best fruits.

16 Let the full earth give the best fruits,
and let the LORD who lived in the burning bush be pleased.

May these blessings rest on the head of Joseph,
on the forehead of the one who was blessed among his brothers.

17 Joseph has the majesty of a firstborn bull;
he is as strong as a wild ox.

He will stab other nations,
even those nations far away.

These are the ten thousands of Ephraim,
and these are the thousands of Manasseh.”

18 Moses said this about the people of Zebulun:
“Be happy when you go out, Zebulun,
and be happy in your tents, Issachar.

19 They will call the people to the mountain,
and there they will offer the right sacrifices.

They will do well from all that is in the sea,
and they will do well from the treasures hidden in the sand on the shore.”

20 Moses said this about the people of Gad:
“Praise God who gives Gad more land!
Gad lives there like a lion,
who tears off arms and heads.

21 They chose the best land for themselves.
They received a large share, like that given to an officer.

When the leaders of the people gathered,
the people of Gad did what the LORD said was right,
and they judged Israel fairly.”

22 Moses said this about the people of Dan:
“Dan is like a lion’s cub,
who jumps out of Bashan.”

23 Moses said this about the people of Naphtali:
“Naphtali enjoys special kindnesses,
and they are full of the LORD’s blessings.
Take as your own the west and south.”

24 Moses said this about the people of Asher:
“Asher is the most blessed of the sons;
let him be his brothers’ favorite.
Let him bathe his feet in olive oil.

25 Your gates will have locks of iron and bronze,
and you will be strong as long as you live.

26 “There is no one like the God of Israel,
who rides through the skies to help you,
who rides on the clouds in his majesty.

27 The everlasting God is your place of safety,
and his arms will hold you up forever.

He will force your enemy out ahead of you,
saying, ‘Destroy the enemy!’

28 The people of Israel will lie down in safety.
Jacob’s spring is theirs alone.

Theirs is a land full of grain and new wine,
where the skies drop their dew.

29 Israel, you are blessed!
No one else is like you,
because you are a people saved by the LORD.

He is your shield and helper,
your glorious sword.

Your enemies will be afraid of you,
and you will walk all over their holy places."

## *Moses Dies*

34 Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to
the top of Mount Pisgah, across from Jericho. From there the
LORD showed him all the land from Gilead to Dan, 2 all of
Naphtali and the lands of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of
Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, 3 as well as the southern
desert and the whole Valley of Jericho up to Zoar. (Jericho is
called the city of palm trees.) 4 Then the LORD said to Moses,
"This is the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when
I said to them, 'I will give this land to your descendants.' I have
let you look at it, Moses, but you will not cross over there."

5 Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in Moab, as
the LORD had said. 6 He buried Moses in Moab in the valley
opposite Beth Peor, but even today no one knows where his
grave is. 7 Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he
died. His eyes were not weak, and he was still strong. 8 The
Israelites cried for Moses for thirty days, staying in the plains of
Moab until the time of sadness was over.

9 Joshua son of Nun was then filled with wisdom, because
Moses had put his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to
Joshua, and they did what the LORD had commanded Moses.

10 There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses.
The LORD knew Moses face to face 11 and sent him to do signs
and miracles in Egypt—to the king, to all his officers, and to the
whole land of Egypt. 12 Moses had great power, and he did great
and wonderful things for all the Israelites to see.

## Psalm 40:11–17

[11]LORD, do not hold back your mercy from me;
let your love and truth always protect me.

[12]Troubles have surrounded me;
there are too many to count.

My sins have caught me
so that I cannot see a way to escape.

I have more sins than hairs on my head,
and I have lost my courage.

[13]Please, LORD, save me.
Hurry, LORD, to help me.

[14]People are trying to kill me.
Shame them and disgrace them.

People want to hurt me.
Let them run away in disgrace.

[15]People are making fun of me.
Let them be shamed into silence.

[16]But let those who follow you
be happy and glad.

They love you for saving them.
May they always say, “Praise the LORD!”

[17]Lord, because I am poor and helpless,
please remember me.

You are my helper and savior.

My God, do not wait.

## Proverbs 13:13–14

13 Those who reject what they are taught will pay for it,
but those who obey what they are told will be rewarded.

14 The teaching of a wise person gives life.
It is like a fountain that can save people from death.

## Luke 8:1–25

### *The Group with Jesus*

8 After this, while Jesus was traveling through some cities and small towns, he preached and told the Good News about God's kingdom. The twelve apostles were with him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of sicknesses and evil spirits: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; 3 Joanna, the wife of Cuza (the manager of Herod's house); Susanna; and many others. These women used their own money to help Jesus and his apostles.

### *A Story About Planting Seed*

4 When a great crowd was gathered, and people were coming to Jesus from every town, he told them this story:

5 "A farmer went out to plant his seed. While he was planting, some seed fell by the road. People walked on the seed, and the birds ate it up. 6 Some seed fell on rock, and when it began to grow, it died because it had no water. 7 Some seed fell among thorny weeds, but the weeds grew up with it and choked the good plants. 8 And some seed fell on good ground and grew and made a hundred times more."

As Jesus finished the story, he called out, "Let those with ears use them and listen!"

9 Jesus' followers asked him what this story meant.

10 Jesus said, "You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of God. But I use stories to speak to other

people so that:

‘They will look, but they may not see.
They will listen, but they may not understand.’

Isaiah 6:9

11“This is what the story means: The seed is God’s message.
12The seed that fell beside the road is like the people who hear
God’s teaching, but the devil comes and takes it away from
them so they cannot believe it and be saved. 13The seed that fell
on rock is like those who hear God’s teaching and accept it
gladly, but they don’t allow the teaching to go deep into their
lives. They believe for a while, but when trouble comes, they
give up. 14The seed that fell among the thorny weeds is like
those who hear God’s teaching, but they let the worries, riches,
and pleasures of this life keep them from growing and
producing good fruit. 15And the seed that fell on the good
ground is like those who hear God’s teaching with good, honest
hearts and obey it and patiently produce good fruit.

## *Use What You Have*

16“No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a bowl or hides
it under a bed. Instead, the person puts it on a lampstand so
those who come in will see the light. 17Everything that is hidden
will become clear, and every secret thing will be made known.
18So be careful how you listen. Those who have understanding
will be given more. But those who do not have understanding,
even what they think they have will be taken away from them.”

## *Jesus’ True Family*

19Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but there was
such a crowd they could not get to him. 20Someone said to
Jesus, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside,
wanting to see you.”
21Jesus answered them, “My mother and my brothers are
those who listen to God’s teaching and obey it!”

## *Jesus Calms a Storm*

22One day Jesus and his followers got into a boat, and he said
to them, “Let’s go across the lake.” And so they started across.
23While they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep. A very strong wind
blew up on the lake, causing the boat to fill with water, and they
were in danger.
24The followers went to Jesus and woke him, saying,

“Master! Master! We will drown!”

Jesus got up and gave a command to the wind and the waves. They stopped, and it became calm. [25]Jesus said to his followers, “Where is your faith?”

The followers were afraid and amazed and said to each other, “Who is this that commands even the wind and the water, and they obey him?”

# April 6

## Never Alone

*"Don't be afraid, because the* LORD *your God will be with you everywhere you go."*

Joshua 1:9

The Lord is with us. And, since the Lord is near, everything is different. Everything! You may be facing death, but you aren't facing death alone; the Lord is with you. You may be facing unemployment, but you aren't facing unemployment alone; the Lord is with you. You may be facing marital struggles, but you aren't facing them alone; the Lord is with you. You may be facing debt, but you aren't facing debt alone; the Lord is with you.

Underline these words: *You are not alone.*

Your family may turn against you, but God won't. Your friends may betray you, but God won't. You may feel alone in the wilderness, but you are not. He is with you.

from *Traveling Light*

### Joshua 1:1—2:24

### *God's Command to Joshua*

1 After Moses, the servant of the LORD, died, the LORD spoke to
Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. 2The LORD said, "My
servant Moses is dead. Now you and all these people go across
the Jordan River into the land I am giving to the Israelites. 3I
promised Moses I would give you this land, so I will give you
every place you go in the land. 4All the land from the desert in
the south to Lebanon in the north will be yours. All the land
from the great river, the Euphrates, in the east, to the
Mediterranean Sea in the west will be yours, too, including the
land of the Hittites. 5No one will be able to defeat you all your
life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not

leave you or forget you.

6 “Joshua, be strong and brave! You must lead these people so
they can take the land that I promised their fathers I would give
them. 7 Be strong and brave. Be sure to obey all the teachings
my servant Moses gave you. If you follow them exactly, you will
be successful in everything you do. 8 Always remember what is
written in the Book of the Teachings. Study it day and night to
be sure to obey everything that is written there. If you do this,
you will be wise and successful in everything. 9 Remember that I
commanded you to be strong and brave. Don’t be afraid,
because the LORD your God will be with you everywhere you go.”

## *Joshua’s Orders to the People*

10 Then Joshua gave orders to the officers of the people:
11 “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your supplies
ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan River and
take the land the LORD your God is giving you.’”

12 Then Joshua said to the people of Reuben, Gad, and East
Manasseh, 13 “Remember what Moses, the servant of the LORD,
told you. He said the LORD your God would give you rest and
would give you this land. 14 Now the LORD has given you this land
east of the Jordan River. Your wives, children, and animals may
stay here, but your fighting men must dress for war and cross
the Jordan River ahead of your brothers to help them. 15 The
LORD has given you a place to rest and will do the same for your
brothers. But you must help them until they take the land the
LORD their God is giving them. Then you may return to your own
land east of the Jordan River, the land that Moses, the servant
of the LORD, gave you.”

16 Then the people answered Joshua, “Anything you command
us to do, we will do. Any place you send us, we will go. 17 Just as
we fully obeyed Moses, we will obey you. We ask only that the
LORD your God be with you just as he was with Moses.
18 Whoever refuses to obey your commands or turns against you
will be put to death. Just be strong and brave!”

## *Spies Sent to Jericho*

2 Joshua son of Nun secretly sent out two spies from Acacia and
said to them, “Go and look at the land, particularly at the city of
Jericho.”

So the men went to Jericho and stayed at the house of a
prostitute named Rahab.

2 Someone told the king of Jericho, “Some men from Israel
have come here tonight to spy out the land.”

3 So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: “Bring
out the men who came to you and entered your house. They

have come to spy out our whole land."

4But the woman had hidden the two men. She said, "They did come here, but I didn't know where they came from. 5In the evening, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know where they went, but if you go quickly, maybe you can catch them." 6(The woman had taken the men up to the roof[n] and had hidden them there under stalks of flax that she had spread out.) 7So the king's men went out looking for the spies on the road that leads to the crossings of the Jordan River. The city gate was closed just after the king's men left the city.

8Before the spies went to sleep for the night, Rahab went up to the roof. 9She said to them, "I know the LORD has given this land to your people. You frighten us very much. Everyone living in this land is terribly afraid of you 10because we have heard how the LORD dried up the Red Sea when you came out of Egypt. We have heard how you destroyed Sihon and Og, two Amorite kings who lived east of the Jordan. 11When we heard this, we were very frightened. Now our men are afraid to fight you because the LORD your God rules the heavens above and the earth below! 12So now, promise me before the LORD that you will show kindness to my family just as I showed kindness to you. Give me some proof that you will do this. 13Allow my father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all of their families to live. Save us from death."

14The men agreed and said, "It will be our lives for your lives if you don't tell anyone what we are doing. When the LORD gives us the land, we will be kind and true to you."

15The house Rahab lived in was built on the city wall, so she used a rope to let the men down through a window. 16She said to them, "Go into the hills so the king's men will not find you. Hide there for three days. After the king's men return, you may go on your way."

17The men said to her, "You must do as we say. If not, we cannot be responsible for keeping this oath you have made us swear. 18When we return to this land, you must tie this red rope in the window through which you let us down. Bring your father, mother, brothers, and all your family into your house. 19If anyone leaves your house and is killed, it is his own fault. We cannot be responsible for him. If anyone in your house is hurt, we will be responsible. 20But if you tell anyone about this, we will be free from the oath you made us swear."

21Rahab answered, "I agree to this." So she sent them away, and they left. Then she tied the red rope in the window.

22The men left and went into the hills where they stayed for three days. The king's men looked for them all along the road, but after three days, they returned to the city without finding them. 23Then the two men started back. They left the hills and crossed the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him

everything that had happened to them. 24They said, “The LORD surely has given us all of the land. All the people in that land are terribly afraid of us.”

## Psalm 41:1–13

### *A Prayer in Time of Sickness*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

41 Happy are those who think about the poor.
When trouble comes, the LORD will save them.

2The LORD will protect them and spare their life
and will bless them in the land.
He will not let their enemies take them.

3The LORD will give them strength when they are sick,
and he will make them well again.

4I said, “LORD, have mercy on me.
Heal me, because I have sinned against you.”

5My enemies are saying evil things about me.
They say, “When will he die and be forgotten?”

6Some people come to see me,
but they lie.

They just come to get bad news.
Then they go and gossip.

7All my enemies whisper about me
and think the worst about me.

[8]They say, “He has a terrible disease.
He will never get out of bed again.”

[9]My best and truest friend, who ate at my table,
has even turned against me.

[10]LORD, have mercy on me.
Give me strength so I can pay them back.

[11]Because my enemies do not defeat me,
I know you are pleased with me.

[12]Because I am innocent, you support me
and will let me be with you forever.

[13]Praise the LORD, the God of Israel.
He has always been,
and he will always be.
Amen and amen.

## Proverbs 13:15–16

[15]People with good understanding will be well liked,
but the lives of those who are not trustworthy are hard.

[16]Every wise person acts with good sense,
but fools show how foolish they are.

## Luke 8:26–56

### *A Man with Demons Inside Him*

[26]Jesus and his followers sailed across the lake from Galilee

to the area of the Gerasene[n] people. 27When Jesus got out on the land, a man from the town who had demons inside him came to Jesus. For a long time he had worn no clothes and had lived in the burial caves, not in a house. 28When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him. He said with a loud voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” 29He said this because Jesus was commanding the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had taken hold of him. Though he had been kept under guard and chained hand and foot, he had broken his chains and had been forced by the demon out into a lonely place.

30Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

He answered, “Legion,”[n] because many demons were in him. 31The demons begged Jesus not to send them into eternal darkness.[n] 32A large herd of pigs was feeding on a hill, and the demons begged Jesus to allow them to go into the pigs. So Jesus allowed them to do this. 33When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd ran down the hill into the lake and was drowned.

34When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and told about this in the town and the countryside. 35And people went to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man sitting at Jesus’ feet, clothed and in his right mind, because the demons were gone. But the people were frightened. 36The people who saw this happen told the others how Jesus had made the man well. 37All the people of the Gerasene country asked Jesus to leave, because they were all very afraid. So Jesus got into the boat and went back to Galilee.

38The man whom Jesus had healed begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39“Go back home and tell people how much God has done for you.” So the man went all over town telling how much Jesus had done for him.

## *Jesus Gives Life to a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman*

40When Jesus got back to Galilee, a crowd welcomed him, because everyone was waiting for him. 41A man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, came to Jesus and fell at his feet, begging him to come to his house. 42Jairus’ only daughter, about twelve years old, was dying.

While Jesus was on his way to Jairus’ house, the people were crowding all around him. 43A woman was in the crowd who had been bleeding for twelve years,[n] but no one was able to heal her. 44She came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his coat, and instantly her bleeding stopped. 45Then Jesus said, “Who touched me?”

When all the people said they had not touched him, Peter said, “Master, the people are all around you and are pushing against you.”

46But Jesus said, “Someone did touch me, because I felt power go out from me.” 47When the woman saw she could not hide, she came forward, shaking, and fell down before Jesus. While all the people listened, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. 48Jesus said to her, “Dear woman, you are made well because you believed. Go in peace.”

49While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of the synagogue leader and said to him, “Your daughter is dead. Don’t bother the teacher anymore.”

50When Jesus heard this, he said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid. Just believe, and your daughter will be well.”

51When Jesus went to the house, he let only Peter, John, James, and the girl’s father and mother go inside with him. 52All the people were crying and feeling sad because the girl was dead, but Jesus said, “Stop crying. She is not dead, only asleep.”

53The people laughed at Jesus because they knew the girl was dead. 54But Jesus took hold of her hand and called to her, “My child, stand up!” 55Her spirit came back into her, and she stood up at once. Then Jesus ordered that she be given something to eat. 56The girl’s parents were amazed, but Jesus told them not to tell anyone what had happened.

# April 7

# A Cleared Calendar

*I thirst for the living God. When can I go to meet with him?*

Psalm 42:2

HOW long has it been since you let God have you? I mean really *have* you? How long since you gave him a portion of undiluted, uninterrupted time listening for his voice? Apparently, Jesus did. He made a deliberate effort to spend time with God.

Spend much time reading about the listening life of Jesus and a distinct pattern emerges. He spent regular time with God, praying and listening. Mark says, "Early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus woke and left the house. He went to a lonely place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35) …

Let me ask the obvious. If Jesus, the Son of God, the sinless Savior of humankind, thought it worthwhile to clear his calendar to pray, wouldn't we be wise to do the same?

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Joshua 3:1—5:1

### *Crossing the Jordan*

3 Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left
Acacia. They traveled to the Jordan River and camped there
before crossing it. 2After three days the officers went through
the camp 3and gave orders to the people: "When you see the
priests and Levites carrying the Ark of the Agreement with the
LORD your God, leave where you are and follow it. 4That way you
will know which way to go since you have never been here
before. But do not follow too closely. Stay about a thousand
yards behind the Ark."

5Then Joshua told the people, "Make yourselves holy,
because tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

6Joshua said to the priests, "Take the Ark of the Agreement

and go ahead of the people." So the priests lifted the Ark and carried it ahead of the people.

7Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you great in the opinion of all the Israelites so the people will know I am with you just as I was with Moses. 8Tell the priests who carry the Ark of the Agreement to go to the edge of the Jordan River and stand in the water."

9Then Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. 10Here is proof that the living God is with you and that he will force out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. 11The Ark of the Agreement with the Lord of the whole world will go ahead of you into the Jordan River. 12Now choose twelve men from among you, one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. 13The priests will carry the Ark of the LORD, the Master of the whole world, into the Jordan ahead of you. When they step into the water, it will stop. The river will stop flowing and will stand up in a heap."

14So the people left the place where they had camped, and they followed the priests who carried the Ark of the Agreement across the Jordan River. 15During harvest the Jordan overflows its banks. When the priests carrying the Ark came to the edge of the river and stepped into the water, 16the water upstream stopped flowing. It stood up in a heap a great distance away at Adam, a town near Zarethan. The water flowing down to the Sea of Arabah (the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed the river near Jericho. 17The priests carried the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD to the middle of the river and stood there on dry ground. They waited there while all the people of Israel walked across the Jordan River on dry land.

## *Rocks to Remind the People*

4 After all the people had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 2"Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe. 3Tell them to get twelve rocks from the middle of the river, from where the priests stood. Carry the rocks and put them down where you stay tonight."

4So Joshua chose one man from each tribe. Then he called the twelve men together 5and said to them, "Go out into the river where the Ark of the LORD your God is. Each of you bring back one rock, one for each tribe of Israel, and carry it on your shoulder. 6They will be a sign among you. In the future your children will ask you, 'What do these rocks mean?' 7Tell them the water stopped flowing in the Jordan when the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD crossed the river. These rocks will always remind the Israelites of this."

8So the Israelites obeyed Joshua and carried twelve rocks

from the middle of the Jordan River, one rock for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded Joshua. They carried the rocks with them and put them down where they made their camp. 9Joshua also put twelve rocks in the middle of the Jordan River where the priests had stood while carrying the Ark of the Agreement. These rocks are still there today.

10The priests carrying the Ark continued standing in the middle of the river until everything was done that the LORD had commanded Joshua to tell the people, just as Moses had told Joshua. The people hurried across the river. 11After they finished crossing the river, the priests carried the Ark of the LORD to the other side as the people watched. 12The men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh obeyed what Moses had told them. They were dressed for war, and they crossed the river ahead of the other people. 13About forty thousand soldiers prepared for war passed before the LORD as they marched across the river, going toward the plains of Jericho.

14That day the LORD made Joshua great in the opinion of all the Israelites. They respected Joshua all his life, just as they had respected Moses.

15Then the LORD said to Joshua, 16"Command the priests to bring the Ark of the Agreement out of the river."

17So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan."

18Then the priests carried the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD out of the river. As soon as their feet touched dry land, the water began flowing again. The river again overflowed its banks, just as it had before they crossed.

19The people crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month and camped at Gilgal, east of Jericho. 20They carried with them the twelve rocks taken from the Jordan, and Joshua set them up at Gilgal. 21Then he spoke to the Israelites: "In the future your children will ask you, 'What do these rocks mean?' 22Tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan River on dry land. 23The LORD your God caused the water to stop flowing until you finished crossing it, just as the LORD did to the Red Sea. He stopped the water until we crossed it. 24The LORD did this so all people would know he has great power and so you would always respect the LORD your God.'"

5 All the kings of the Amorites west of the Jordan and the Canaanite kings living by the Mediterranean Sea heard that the LORD dried up the Jordan River until the Israelites had crossed it. After that they were scared and too afraid to face the Israelites.

## Psalm 42:1–4

# Book 2

## *Wishing to Be Near God*

**For the director of music. A maskil of the sons of Korah.**

42 As a deer thirsts for streams of water,so I thirst for you, God.

2I thirst for the living God.
When can I go to meet with him?

3Day and night, my tears have been my food.

People are always saying,
"Where is your God?"

4When I remember these things,
I speak with a broken heart.

I used to walk with the crowd
and lead them to God's Temple
with songs of praise.

## Proverbs 13:17–18

17A wicked messenger brings nothing but trouble,
but a trustworthy one makes everything right.

18A person who refuses correction will end up poor and disgraced,
but the one who accepts correction will be honored.

# Luke 9:1–17

## *Jesus Sends Out the Apostles*

9 Jesus called the twelve apostles together and gave them
power and authority over all demons and the ability to heal
sicknesses. 2He sent the apostles out to tell about God's
kingdom and to heal the sick. 3He said to them, "Take nothing
for your trip, neither a walking stick, bag, bread, money, or
extra clothes. 4When you enter a house, stay there until it is
time to leave. 5If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off
of your feet[n] as you leave the town, as a warning to them."
6So the apostles went out and traveled through all the towns,
preaching the Good News and healing people everywhere.

## *Herod Is Confused About Jesus*

7Herod, the governor, heard about all the things that were
happening and was confused, because some people said, "John
the Baptist has risen from the dead." 8Others said, "Elijah has
come to us." And still others said, "One of the prophets who
lived long ago has risen from the dead." 9Herod said, "I cut off
John's head, so who is this man I hear such things about?" And
Herod kept trying to see Jesus.

## *More than Five Thousand Fed*

10When the apostles returned, they told Jesus everything
they had done. Then Jesus took them with him to a town called
Bethsaida where they could be alone together. 11But the people
learned where Jesus went and followed him. He welcomed them
and talked with them about God's kingdom and healed those
who needed to be healed.
12Late in the afternoon, the twelve apostles came to Jesus
and said, "Send the people away. They need to go to the towns
and countryside around here and find places to sleep and
something to eat, because no one lives in this place."
13But Jesus said to them, "You give them something to eat."
They said, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish,
unless we go buy food for all these people." 14(There were
about five thousand men there.)
Jesus said to his followers, "Tell the people to sit in groups of
about fifty people."
15So the followers did this, and all the people sat down.

[16]Then Jesus took the five loaves of bread and two fish, and looking up to heaven, he thanked God for the food. Then he divided the food and gave it to the followers to give to the people. [17]They all ate and were satisfied, and what was left over was gathered up, filling twelve baskets.

# April 8

# A Useful Vessel

*“Those who give up their lives for me will have true life.”*

Luke 9:24

when you’re full of yourself, God can’t fill you. But when you empty yourself, God has a useful vessel. Your Bible overflows with examples of those who did.

In his Gospel, Matthew mentions his own name only twice. Both times he calls himself a tax collector. In his list of apostles, he assigns himself the eighth spot.

John doesn’t even mention his name in his Gospel. The twenty appearances of “John” all refer to the Baptist. John the apostle simply calls himself “the other follower” or the “follower whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2–3).

Luke wrote two of the most important books in the Bible but never once penned his own name.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Joshua 5:2—6:27

### *The Israelites Are Circumcised*

2 At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make knives from flint
stones and circumcise the Israelites.” 3 So Joshua made knives
from flint stones and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath
Haaraloth.
4 This is why Joshua circumcised the men: After the Israelites
left Egypt, all the men old enough to serve in the army died in
the desert on the way out of Egypt. 5 The men who had come out
of Egypt had been circumcised, but none of those who were
born in the desert on the trip from Egypt had been circumcised.
6 The Israelites had moved about in the desert for forty years.
During that time all the fighting men who had left Egypt had
died because they had not obeyed the LORD. So the LORD swore

they would not see the land he had promised their ancestors to give them, a fertile land. 7Their sons took their places. But none of the sons born on the trip from Egypt had been circumcised, so Joshua circumcised them. 8After all the Israelites had been circumcised, they stayed in camp until they were healed.

9Then the LORD said to Joshua, "As slaves in Egypt you were ashamed, but today I have removed that shame." So Joshua named that place Gilgal, which it is still named today.

10The people of Israel were camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho. It was there, on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, they celebrated the Passover Feast. 11The day after the Passover, the people ate food grown on that land: bread made without yeast and roasted grain. 12The day they ate this food, the manna stopped coming. The Israelites no longer got the manna from heaven. They ate the food grown in the land of Canaan that year.

13Joshua was near Jericho when he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and asked, "Are you a friend or an enemy?"

14The man answered, "I am neither. I have come as the commander of the LORD's army."

Then Joshua bowed facedown on the ground and asked, "Does my master have a command for me, his servant?"

15The commander of the LORD's army answered, "Take off your sandals, because the place where you are standing is holy." So Joshua did.

## *The Fall of Jericho*

6 The people of Jericho were afraid because the Israelites were near. They closed the city gates and guarded them. No one went into the city, and no one came out.

2Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Look, I have given you Jericho, its king, and all its fighting men. 3March around the city with your army once a day for six days. 4Have seven priests carry trumpets made from horns of male sheep and have them march in front of the Ark. On the seventh day march around the city seven times and have the priests blow the trumpets as they march. 5They will make one long blast on the trumpets. When you hear that sound, have all the people give a loud shout. Then the walls of the city will fall so the people can go straight into the city."

6So Joshua son of Nun called the priests together and said to them, "Carry the Ark of the Agreement. Tell seven priests to carry trumpets and march in front of it." 7Then Joshua ordered the people, "Now go! March around the city. The soldiers with weapons should march in front of the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD."

[8]When Joshua finished speaking to the people, the seven
priests began marching before the LORD. They carried the seven
trumpets and blew them as they marched. The priests carrying
the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD followed them. [9]Soldiers
with weapons marched in front of the priests, and armed men
walked behind the Ark. The priests were blowing their
trumpets. [10]But Joshua had told the people not to give a war
cry. He said, “Don’t shout. Don’t say a word until the day I tell
you. Then shout.” [11]So Joshua had the Ark of the LORD carried
around the city one time. Then they went back to camp for the
night.

[12]Early the next morning Joshua got up, and the priests
carried the Ark of the LORD again. [13]The seven priests carried
the seven trumpets and marched in front of the Ark of the LORD,
blowing their trumpets. Soldiers with weapons marched in front
of them, and other soldiers walked behind the Ark of the LORD.
All this time the priests were blowing their trumpets. [14]So on
the second day they marched around the city one time and then
went back to camp. They did this every day for six days.

[15]On the seventh day they got up at dawn and marched
around the city, just as they had on the days before. But on that
day they marched around the city seven times. [16]The seventh
time around the priests blew their trumpets. Then Joshua gave
the command: “Now, shout! The LORD has given you this city!
[17]The city and everything in it are to be destroyed as an offering
to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and everyone in her
house should remain alive. They must not be killed, because
Rahab hid the two spies we sent out. [18]Don’t take any of the
things that are to be destroyed as an offering to the LORD. If you
take them and bring them into our camp, you yourselves will be
destroyed, and you will bring trouble to all of Israel. [19]All the
silver and gold and things made from bronze and iron belong to
the LORD and must be saved for him.”

[20]When the priests blew the trumpets, the people shouted. At
the sound of the trumpets and the people’s shout, the walls fell,
and everyone ran straight into the city. So the Israelites
defeated that city. [21]They completely destroyed with the sword
every living thing in the city—men and women, young and old,
cattle, sheep, and donkeys.

[22]Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land,
“Go into the prostitute’s house. Bring her out and bring out
those who are with her, because of the promise you made to
her.” [23]So the two men went into the house and brought out
Rahab, her father, mother, brothers, and all those with her. They
put all of her family in a safe place outside the camp of Israel.

[24]Then Israel burned the whole city and everything in it, but
they did not burn the things made from silver, gold, bronze, and
iron. These were saved for the LORD. [25]Joshua saved Rahab the

prostitute, her family, and all who were with her, because Rahab had helped the men he had sent to spy out Jericho. Rahab still lives among the Israelites today.

[26]Then Joshua made this oath:

"Anyone who tries to rebuild this city of Jericho
will be cursed by the LORD.

The one who lays the foundation of this city
will lose his oldest son,

and the one who sets up the gates
will lose his youngest son."

[27]So the LORD was with Joshua, and Joshua became famous through all the land.

## Psalm 42:5–11

[5]Why am I so sad?
Why am I so upset?

I should put my hope in God
and keep praising him,
my Savior and [6]my God.
I am very sad.
So I remember you where the Jordan River begins,

near the peaks of Hermon and Mount Mizar.

[7]Troubles have come again and again, sounding like waterfalls.
Your waves are crashing all around me.

[8]The LORD shows his true love every day.
At night I have a song,
and I pray to my living God.

[9]I say to God, my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?

Why am I sad
and troubled by my enemies?”

[10]My enemies’ insults make me feel
as if my bones were broken.

They are always saying,
“Where is your God?”

[11]Why am I so sad?
Why am I so upset?

I should put my hope in God
and keep praising him,
my Savior and my God.

## Proverbs 13:19–21

[19]It is so good when wishes come true,
but fools hate to stop doing evil.

[20]Spend time with the wise and you will become wise,
but the friends of fools will suffer.

[21]Trouble always comes to sinners,
but good people enjoy success.

## Luke 9:18–36

### *Jesus Is the Christ*

18 One time when Jesus was praying alone, his followers were
with him, and he asked them, “Who do the people say I am?”
19 They answered, “Some say you are John the Baptist. Others
say you are Elijah.[n] And others say you are one of the prophets
from long ago who has come back to life.”
20 Then Jesus asked, “But who do you say I am?”
Peter answered, “You are the Christ from God.”
21 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone, saying, 22 “The Son of
Man must suffer many things. He will be rejected by the Jewish
elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He will
be killed and after three days will be raised from the dead.”
23 Jesus said to all of them, “If people want to follow me, they
must give up the things they want. They must be willing to give
up their lives daily to follow me. 24 Those who want to save their
lives will give up true life. But those who give up their lives for
me will have true life. 25 It is worthless to have the whole world
if they themselves are destroyed or lost. 26 If people are
ashamed of me and my teaching, then the Son of Man will be
ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and with the glory
of the Father and the holy angels. 27 I tell you the truth, some
people standing here will see the kingdom of God before they
die.”

## *Jesus Talks with Moses and Elijah*

28 About eight days after Jesus said these things, he took
Peter, John, and James and went up on a mountain to pray.
29 While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed,
and his clothes became shining white. 30 Then two men, Moses
and Elijah,[n] were talking with Jesus. 31 They appeared in
heavenly glory, talking about his departure which he would soon
bring about in Jerusalem. 32 Peter and the others were very
sleepy, but when they awoke fully, they saw the glory of Jesus
and the two men standing with him. 33 When Moses and Elijah
were about to leave, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that
we are here. Let us make three tents—one for you, one for
Moses, and one for Elijah.” (Peter did not know what he was
talking about.)
34 While he was saying these things, a cloud came and
covered them, and they became afraid as the cloud covered
them. 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son,
whom I have chosen. Listen to him!”
36 When the voice finished speaking, only Jesus was there.
Peter, John, and James said nothing and told no one at that time
what they had seen.

# April 9

## The Pot of Prayer

*I will go to the altar of God, to God who is my joy and happiness.*

Psalm 43:4

Let's say a stress stirrer comes your way. The doctor decides you need an operation. She detects a lump and thinks it best that you have it removed. So there you are, walking out of her office. You've just been handed this cup of anxiety. What are you going to do with it? You can place it in one of two pots.

You can dump your bad news in the vat of worry and pull out the spoon. Turn on the fire.

Stew on it. Stir it. Mope for a while. Brood for a time. Won't be long before you'll have a delightful pot of pessimism.

How about a different idea? The pot of prayer. Before the door of the doctor's office closes, give the problem to God. "I receive your lordship. Nothing comes to me that hasn't passed through you." In addition, stir in a healthy helping of gratitude.

Your part is prayer and gratitude. God's part? Peace and protection.

from *Come Thirsty*

## Joshua 7:1—8:35

### *The Sin of Achan*

7 But the Israelites did not obey the LORD. There was a man from the tribe of Judah named Achan. (He was the son of Carmi and grandson of Zabdi, who was the son of Zerah.) Because Achan kept some of the things that were to be given to the LORD, the LORD became very angry at the Israelites.

2 Joshua sent some men from Jericho to Ai, which was near Beth Aven, east of Bethel. He told them, "Go to Ai and spy out the area." So the men went to spy on Ai.

3 Later they came back to Joshua and said, “There are only a
few people in Ai, so we will not need all our people to defeat
them. Send only two or three thousand men to fight. There is no
need to send all of our people.” 4 So about three thousand men
went up to Ai, but the people of Ai beat them badly. 5 The people
of Ai killed about thirty-six Israelites and then chased the rest
from the city gate all the way down to the canyon, killing them
as they went down the hill. When the Israelites saw this, they
lost their courage.

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes in sorrow. He bowed facedown
on the ground before the Ark of the LORD and stayed there until
evening. The leaders of Israel did the same thing. They also
threw dirt on their heads to show their sorrow. 7 Then Joshua
said, “Lord God, you brought our people across the Jordan River.
Why did you bring us this far and then let the Amorites destroy
us? We would have been happy to stay on the other side of the
Jordan. 8 Lord, there is nothing I can say now. Israel has been
beaten by the enemy. 9 The Canaanites and all the other people
in this country will hear about this and will surround and kill us
all! Then what will you do for your own great name?”

10 The LORD said to Joshua, “Stand up! Why are you down on
your face? 11 The Israelites have sinned; they have broken the
agreement I commanded them to obey. They took some of the
things I commanded them to destroy. They have stolen and lied
and have taken those things for themselves. 12 That is why the
Israelites cannot face their enemies. They turn away from the
fight and run, because I have commanded that they be
destroyed. I will not help you anymore unless you destroy
everything as I commanded you.

13 “Now go! Make the people holy. Tell them, ‘Set yourselves
apart to the LORD for tomorrow. The LORD, the God of Israel, says
some of you are keeping things he commanded you to destroy.
You will never defeat your enemies until you throw away those
things.

14 “‘Tomorrow morning you must be present with your tribes.
The LORD will choose one tribe to stand alone before him. Then
the LORD will choose one family group from that tribe to stand
before him. Then the LORD will choose one family from that
family group to stand before him, person by person. 15 The one
who is keeping what should have been destroyed will himself be
destroyed by fire. Everything he owns will be destroyed with
him. He has broken the agreement with the LORD and has done a
disgraceful thing among the people of Israel!’”

16 Early the next morning Joshua led all of Israel to present
themselves in their tribes, and the LORD chose the tribe of
Judah. 17 So the family groups of Judah presented themselves,
and the LORD then chose the family group of Zerah. When all the
families of Zerah presented themselves, the family of Zabdi was
chosen. 18 And Joshua told all the men in that family to present

themselves. The LORD chose Achan son of Carmi. (Carmi was the son of Zabdi, who was the son of Zerah.)

19Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, tell the truth. Confess to the LORD, the God of Israel. Tell me what you did, and don’t try to hide anything from me.”

20Achan answered, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I did: 21Among the things I saw was a beautiful coat from Babylonia and about five pounds of silver and more than one and one-fourth pounds of gold. I wanted these things very much for myself, so I took them. You will find them buried in the ground under my tent, with the silver underneath.”

22So Joshua sent men who ran to the tent and found the things hidden there, with the silver. 23The men brought them out of the tent, took them to Joshua and all the Israelites, and spread them out on the ground before the LORD. 24Then Joshua and all the people led Achan son of Zerah to the Valley of Trouble. They also took the silver, the coat, the gold, Achan’s sons, daughters, cattle, donkeys, sheep, tent, and everything he owned. 25Joshua said, “I don’t know why you caused so much trouble for us, but now the LORD will bring trouble to you.” Then all the people threw stones at Achan and his family until they died. Then the people burned them. 26They piled rocks over Achan’s body, and they are still there today. That is why it is called the Valley of Trouble. After this the LORD was no longer angry.

## *Ai Is Destroyed*

8 Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Don’t be afraid or give up. Lead all your fighting men to Ai. I will help you defeat the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. 2You will do to Ai and its king what you did to Jericho and its king. Only this time you may take all the wealth and keep it for yourselves. Now tell some of your soldiers to set up an ambush behind the city.”

3So Joshua led his whole army toward Ai. Then he chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night. 4Joshua gave them these orders: “Listen carefully. You must set up an ambush behind the city. Don’t go far from it, but continue to watch and be ready. 5I and the men who are with me will march toward the city, and the men in the city will come out to fight us, just as they did before. Then we will turn and run away from them. 6They will chase us away from the city, thinking we are running away from them as we did before. When we run away, 7come out from your ambush and take the city. The LORD your God will give you the power to win. 8After you take the city, burn it. See to it! You have your orders.”

9Then Joshua sent them to wait in ambush between Bethel

and Ai, to the west of Ai. But Joshua stayed the night with his people.

10 Early the next morning Joshua gathered his men together.
He and the older leaders of Israel led them up to Ai. 11 All of the
soldiers who were with Joshua marched up to Ai and stopped in
front of the city and made camp north of it. There was a valley
between them and the city. 12 Then Joshua chose about five
thousand men and set them in ambush in the area west of the
city between Bethel and Ai. 13 So the people took their positions;
the main camp was north of the city, and the other men were
hiding to the west. That night Joshua went down into the valley.

14 Now when the king of Ai saw the army of Israel, he and his
people got up early the next morning and hurried out to fight
them. They went out to a place east of the city, but the king did
not know soldiers were waiting in ambush behind the city.
15 Joshua and all the men of Israel let the army of Ai push them
back. Then they ran toward the desert. 16 The men in Ai were
called to chase Joshua and his men, so they left the city and
went after them. 17 All the men of Ai and Bethel chased the army
of Israel. The city was left open; not a man stayed to protect it.

18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Hold your spear toward Ai,
because I will give you that city." So Joshua held his spear
toward the city of Ai. 19 When the Israelites who were in ambush
saw this, they quickly came out of their hiding place and
hurried toward the city. They entered the city, took control of it,
and quickly set it on fire.

20 When the men of Ai looked back, they saw smoke rising
from their city. At the same time the Israelites stopped running
and turned against the men of Ai, who could not escape in any
direction. 21 When Joshua and all his men saw that the army had
taken control of the city and saw the smoke rising from it, they
stopped running and turned to fight the men of Ai. 22 The men
who were in ambush also came out of the city to help with the
fight. So the men of Ai were caught between the armies of
Israel. None of the enemy escaped. The Israelites fought until
not one of the men of Ai was left alive, except 23 the king of Ai,
and they brought him to Joshua.

## *A Review of the Fighting*

24 During the fighting the army of Israel chased the men of Ai
into the fields and desert and killed all of them. Then they went
back to Ai and killed everyone there. 25 All the people of Ai died
that day, twelve thousand men and women. 26 Joshua had held
his spear toward Ai, as a sign to destroy the city, and did not
draw it back until all the people of Ai were destroyed. 27 The
people of Israel kept for themselves the animals and the other
things the people of Ai had owned, as the LORD had commanded

Joshua to do.

28 Then Joshua burned the city of Ai and made it a pile of
ruins. And it is still like that today. 29 Joshua hanged the king of
Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset Joshua
told his men to take the king's body down from the tree and to
throw it down at the city gate. Then they covered it with a pile
of rocks, which is still there today.

30 Joshua built an altar for the LORD, the God of Israel, on
Mount Ebal, as 31 Moses, the LORD's servant, had commanded.
Joshua built the altar as it was explained in the Book of the
Teachings of Moses. It was made from uncut stones; no tool was
ever used on them. On that altar the Israelites offered burnt
offerings to the LORD and fellowship offerings. 32 There Joshua
wrote the teachings of Moses on stones for all the people of
Israel to see. 33 The elders, officers, judges, and all the Israelites
were there; Israelites and non-Israelites were all standing
around the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD in front of the
priests, the Levites who had carried the Ark. Half of the people
stood in front of Mount Ebal, and half stood in front of Mount
Gerizim. This was the way the LORD's servant Moses had earlier
commanded the people to be blessed.

34 Then Joshua read all the words of the teachings, the
blessings and the curses, exactly as they were written in the
Book of the Teachings. 35 All the Israelites were gathered
together—men, women, and children—along with the non-
Israelites who lived among them. Joshua read every command
that Moses had given.

## Psalm 43:1–5

### *A Prayer for Protection*

43 God, defend me. Argue my case against those who don't
follow you.
Save me from liars and those who do evil.

2 God, you are my strength.
Why have you rejected me?

Why am I sad
and troubled by my enemies?

[3]Send me your light and truth
to guide me.

Let them lead me to your holy mountain,
to where you live.

[4]Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God who is my joy and happiness.

I will praise you with a harp,
God, my God.

[5]Why am I so sad?
Why am I so upset?

I should put my hope in God
and keep praising him,
my Savior and my God.

## Proverbs 13:22–23

[22]Good people leave their wealth to their grandchildren,
but a sinner's wealth is stored up for good people.

[23]A poor person's field might produce plenty of food,
but others often steal it away.

## Luke 9:37–62

### *Jesus Heals a Sick Boy*

[37]The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Jesus. [38]A man in the crowd shouted to him, "Teacher, please come and look at my son, because he is my

only child. [39]An evil spirit seizes my son, and suddenly he screams. It causes him to lose control of himself and foam at the mouth. The evil spirit keeps on hurting him and almost never leaves him. [40]I begged your followers to force the evil spirit out, but they could not do it."

[41]Jesus answered, "You people have no faith, and your lives are all wrong. How long must I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."

[42]While the boy was coming, the demon threw him on the ground and made him lose control of himself. But Jesus gave a strong command to the evil spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father. [43]All the people were amazed at the great power of God.

## *Jesus Talks About His Death*

While everyone was wondering about all that Jesus did, he said to his followers, [44]"Don't forget what I tell you now: The Son of Man will be handed over to people." [45]But the followers did not understand what this meant; the meaning was hidden from them so they could not understand. But they were afraid to ask Jesus about it.

## *Who Is the Greatest?*

[46]Jesus' followers began to have an argument about which one of them was the greatest. [47]Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he took a little child and stood the child beside him. [48]Then Jesus said, "Whoever accepts this little child in my name accepts me. And whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me, because whoever is least among you all is really the greatest."

## *Anyone Not Against Us Is for Us*

[49]John answered, "Master, we saw someone using your name to force demons out of people. We told him to stop, because he does not belong to our group."

[50]But Jesus said to him, "Don't stop him, because whoever is not against you is for you."

## *A Town Rejects Jesus*

[51]When the time was coming near for Jesus to depart, he was determined to go to Jerusalem. [52]He sent some messengers ahead of him, who went into a town in Samaria to make everything ready for him. [53]But the people there would not

welcome him, because he was set on going to Jerusalem.
54When James and John, followers of Jesus, saw this, they said,
“Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and destroy
those people?”[n]

55But Jesus turned and scolded them. [And Jesus said, “You
don’t know what kind of spirit you belong to. 56The Son of Man
did not come to destroy the souls of people but to save them.”][n]
Then they went to another town.

## *Following Jesus*

57As they were going along the road, someone said to Jesus,
“I will follow you any place you go.”

58Jesus said to them, “The foxes have holes to live in, and the
birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest his
head.”

59Jesus said to another man, “Follow me!”

But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

60But Jesus said to him, “Let the people who are dead bury
their own dead. You must go and tell about the kingdom of
God.”

61Another man said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me
go and say good-bye to my family.”

62Jesus said, “Anyone who begins to plow a field but keeps
looking back is of no use in the kingdom of God.”

# April 10

# Salvation Celebration

*“Be happy … because your names are written in heaven.”*

Luke 10:20

According to Jesus our decisions have a thermostatic impact on the unseen world. Our actions on the keyboard of earth trigger hammers on the piano strings of heaven. Our obedience pulls the ropes which ring the bells in heaven’s belfries. Let a child call and the ear of the Father inclines … And, most important, let a sinner repent, and every other activity ceases, and every heavenly being celebrates …

We don’t always share such enthusiasm, do we? When you hear of a soul saved, do you drop everything and celebrate? Is your good day made better or your bad day salvaged? We may be pleased—but exuberant? … When a soul is saved, the heart of Jesus becomes the night sky on the Fourth of July, radiant with explosions of cheer.

Can the same be said about us?

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Joshua 9:1—10:43

### *The Gibeonite Trickery*

9 All the kings west of the Jordan River heard about these
things: the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites,
Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. They lived in the mountains
and on the western hills and along the whole Mediterranean
Sea coast. 2So all these kings gathered to fight Joshua and the
Israelites.

3When the people of Gibeon heard how Joshua had defeated
Jericho and Ai, 4they decided to trick the Israelites. They
gathered old sacks and old leather wine bags that were cracked
and mended, and they put them on the backs of their donkeys.

5They put old sandals on their feet and wore old clothes, and
they took some dry, moldy bread. 6Then they went to Joshua in
the camp near Gilgal.

The men said to Joshua and the Israelites, “We have traveled
from a faraway country. Make a peace agreement with us.”

7The Israelites said to these Hivites, “Maybe you live near us.
How can we make a peace agreement with you?”

8The Hivites said to Joshua, “We are your servants.”

But Joshua asked, “Who are you? Where do you come from?”

9The men answered, “We are your servants who have come
from a far country, because we heard of the fame of the LORD
your God. We heard about what he has done and everything he
did in Egypt. 10We heard that he defeated the two kings of the
Amorites from the east side of the Jordan River—Sihon king of
Heshbon and Og king of Bashan who ruled in Ashtaroth. 11So
our elders and our people said to us, ‘Take food for your journey
and go and meet the Israelites. Tell them, “We are your
servants. Make a peace agreement with us.”’

12“Look at our bread. On the day we left home to come to
you it was warm and fresh, but now it is dry and moldy. 13Look
at our leather wine bags. They were new and filled with wine,
but now they are cracked and old. Our clothes and sandals are
worn out from the long journey.”

14The men of Israel tasted the bread, but they did not ask the
LORD what to do. 15So Joshua agreed to make peace with the
Gibeonites and to let them live. And the leaders of the Israelites
swore an oath to keep the agreement.

16Three days after they had made the agreement, the
Israelites learned that the Gibeonites lived nearby. 17So the
Israelites went to where they lived and on the third day came to
their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath Jearim.
18But the Israelites did not attack those cities, because they had
made a promise to them before the LORD, the God of Israel.

All the Israelites grumbled against the leaders. 19But the
leaders answered, “We have given our promise before the LORD,
the God of Israel, so we cannot attack them now. 20This is what
we must do. We must let them live. Otherwise, God’s anger will
be against us for breaking the oath we swore to them. 21So let
them live, but they will cut wood and carry water for our
people.” So the leaders kept their promise to them.

22Joshua called for the Gibeonites and asked, “Why did you
lie to us? Your land was near our camp, but you told us you
were from a far country. 23Now, you will be placed under a
curse to be our slaves. You will have to cut wood and carry
water for the house of my God.”

24The Gibeonites answered Joshua, “We lied to you because
we were afraid you would kill us. We heard that the LORD your
God commanded his servant Moses to give you all of this land

and to kill all the people who lived in it. That is why we did this.
25Now you can decide what to do with us, whatever you think is
right."
26So Joshua saved their lives by not allowing the Israelites to
kill them, 27but he made the Gibeonites slaves. They cut wood
and carried water for the Israelites, and they did it for the altar
of the LORD—wherever he chose it to be. They are still doing this
today.

## *The Sun Stands Still*

10 At this time Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua
had defeated Ai and completely destroyed it, as he had also
done to Jericho and its king. The king also learned that the
Gibeonites had made a peace agreement with Israel and that
they lived nearby. 2Adoni-Zedek and his people were very afraid
because of this. Gibeon was not a little town like Ai; it was a
large city, as big as a city that had a king, and all its men were
good fighters. 3So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem sent a
message to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth,
Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon. He begged
them, 4"Come with me and help me attack Gibeon, which has
made a peace agreement with Joshua and the Israelites."
5Then these five Amorite kings—the kings of Jerusalem,
Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon—gathered their armies,
went to Gibeon, surrounded it, and attacked it.
6The Gibeonites sent this message to Joshua in his camp at
Gilgal: "Don't let us, your servants, be destroyed. Come quickly
and help us! Save us! All the Amorite kings from the mountains
have joined their armies and are fighting against us."
7So Joshua marched out of Gilgal with his whole army,
including his best fighting men. 8The LORD said to Joshua, "Don't
be afraid of those armies, because I will hand them over to you.
None of them will be able to stand against you."
9Joshua and his army marched all night from Gilgal for a
surprise attack. 10The LORD confused those armies when Israel
attacked, so Israel defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon.
They chased them along the road going up to Beth Horon and
killed men all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. 11As they
chased the enemy down the Beth Horon Pass to Azekah, the
LORD threw large hailstones on them from the sky and killed
them. More people were killed by the hailstones than by the
Israelites' swords.
12On the day that the LORD gave up the Amorites to the
Israelites, Joshua stood before all the people of Israel and said
to the LORD:

“Sun, stand still over Gibeon.
    Moon, stand still over the Valley of Aijalon.”

13So the sun stood still,
    and the moon stopped
    until the people defeated their enemies.

These words are written in the Book of Jashar.

The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and waited to go down for a full day. 14That has never happened at any time before that day or since. That was the day the LORD listened to a human being. Truly the LORD was fighting for Israel!

15After this, Joshua and his army went back to the camp at Gilgal.

16During the fight the five kings ran away and hid in a cave near Makkedah, 17but someone found them hiding in the cave at Makkedah and told Joshua. 18So he said, “Cover the opening of the cave with large rocks. Put some men there to guard it, 19but don’t stay there yourselves. Continue chasing the enemy and attacking them from behind. Don’t let them get to their cities, because the LORD your God will hand them over to you.”

20So Joshua and the Israelites killed the enemy, but a few were able to get back to their strong, walled cities. 21After the fighting, Joshua’s men came back safely to him at Makkedah. No one was brave enough to say a word against the Israelites.

22Joshua said, “Move the rocks that are covering the opening of the cave and bring those five kings out to me.” 23So Joshua’s men brought the five kings out of the cave—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. 24When they brought the five kings out to Joshua, he called for all his men. He said to the commanders of his army, “Come here! Put your feet on the necks of these kings.” So they came close and put their feet on their necks.

25Joshua said to his men, “Be strong and brave! Don’t be afraid, because I will show you what the LORD will do to the enemies you will fight in the future.” 26Then Joshua killed the five kings and hung their bodies on five trees, where he left them until evening.

27At sunset Joshua told his men to take the bodies down from the trees. Then they threw them into the same cave where they had been hiding and covered the opening of the cave with large rocks, which are still there today.

28That day Joshua defeated Makkedah. He killed the king and completely destroyed all the people in that city as an offering to the LORD; no one was left alive. He did the same thing to the king of Makkedah that he had done to the king of Jericho.

### *Defeating Southern Cities*

[29]Joshua and all the Israelites traveled from Makkedah to
Libnah and attacked it. [30]The LORD handed over the city and its
king. They killed every person in the city; no one was left alive.
And they did the same thing to that king that they had done to
the king of Jericho.
[31]Then Joshua and all the Israelites left Libnah and went to
Lachish, which they surrounded and attacked. [32]The LORD
handed over Lachish on the second day. The Israelites killed
everyone in that city just as they had done to Libnah. [33]During
this same time Horam king of Gezer came to help Lachish, but
Joshua also defeated him and his army; no one was left alive.
[34]Then Joshua and all the Israelites went from Lachish to
Eglon. They surrounded Eglon, attacked it, and [35]captured it
the same day. They killed all its people and completely
destroyed everything in it as an offering to the LORD, just as they
had done to Lachish.
[36]Then Joshua and the Israelites went from Eglon to Hebron
and attacked it, [37]capturing it and all the little towns near it.
The Israelites killed everyone in Hebron; no one was left alive
there. Just as they had done to Eglon, they completely
destroyed the city and all its people as an offering to the LORD.
[38]Then Joshua and the Israelites went back to Debir and
attacked it. [39]They captured that city, its king, and all the little
towns near it, completely destroying everyone in Debir as an
offering to the LORD; no one was left alive there. Israel did to
Debir and its king just as they had done to Libnah and its king,
just as they had done to Hebron.
[40]So Joshua defeated all the kings of the cities of these areas:
the mountains, southern Canaan, the western hills, and the
slopes. The LORD, the God of Israel, had told Joshua to
completely destroy all the people as an offering to the LORD, so
he left no one alive in those places. [41]Joshua captured all the
cities from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza, and from Goshen to Gibeon.
[42]He captured all these cities and their kings on one trip,
because the LORD, the God of Israel, was fighting for Israel.
[43]Then Joshua and all the Israelites returned to their camp at
Gilgal.

## Psalm 44:1–3

### *A Prayer for Help*

**For the director of music. A maskil of the sons of Korah.**

44 God, we have heard about you.Our ancestors told us

what you did in their days,
in days long ago.

2With your power you forced the nations out of the land
and placed our ancestors here.

You destroyed those other nations,
but you made our ancestors grow strong.

3It wasn't their swords that took the land.
It wasn't their power that gave them victory.

But it was your great power and strength.
You were with them because you loved them.

## Proverbs 13:24–25

24If you do not punish your children, you don't love them,
but if you love your children, you will correct them.

25Good people have enough to eat,
but the wicked will go hungry.

## Luke 10:1–24

### *Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-Two*

10 After this, the Lord chose seventy-two[n] others and sent them

out in pairs ahead of him into every town and place where he planned to go. 2He said to them, “There are a great many people to harvest, but there are only a few workers. So pray to God, who owns the harvest, that he will send more workers to help gather his harvest. 3Go now, but listen! I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. 4Don’t carry a purse, a bag, or sandals, and don’t waste time talking with people on the road. 5Before you go into a house, say, ‘Peace be with this house.’ 6If peace-loving people live there, your blessing of peace will stay with them, but if not, then your blessing will come back to you. 7Stay in the same house, eating and drinking what the people there give you. A worker should be given his pay. Don’t move from house to house. 8If you go into a town and the people welcome you, eat what they give you. 9Heal the sick who live there, and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’ 10But if you go into a town, and the people don’t welcome you, then go into the streets and say, 11‘Even the dirt from your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you.[n] But remember that the kingdom of God is near.’ 12I tell you, on the Judgment Day it will be better for the people of Sodom[n] than for the people of that town.

## *Jesus Warns Unbelievers*

13“How terrible for you, Korazin! How terrible for you, Bethsaida! If the miracles I did in you had happened in Tyre and Sidon,[n] those people would have changed their lives long ago. They would have worn rough cloth and put ashes on themselves to show they had changed. 14But on the Judgment Day it will be better for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 15And you, Capernaum,[n] will you be lifted up to heaven? No! You will be thrown down to the depths!

16“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever refuses to accept you refuses to accept me. And whoever refuses to accept me refuses to accept the One who sent me.”

## *Satan Falls*

17When the seventy-two[n] came back, they were very happy and said, “Lord, even the demons obeyed us when we used your name!”

18Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19Listen, I have given you power to walk on snakes and scorpions, power that is greater than the enemy has. So nothing will hurt you. 20But you should not be happy because the spirits obey you but because your names are written in heaven.”

## *Jesus Prays to the Father*

21 Then Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I praise
you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden
these things from the people who are wise and smart. But you
have shown them to those who are like little children. Yes,
Father, this is what you really wanted.
22 “My Father has given me all things. No one knows who the
Son is, except the Father. And no one knows who the Father is,
except the Son and those whom the Son chooses to tell.”
23 Then Jesus turned to his followers and said privately, “You
are blessed to see what you now see. 24 I tell you, many prophets
and kings wanted to see what you now see, but they did not,
and they wanted to hear what you now hear, but they did not.”

# April 11

## Who Is the Servant?

*"Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the better thing and it will never be taken away from her."*

Luke 10:41–42

Martha is worried about something good. She's having Jesus over for dinner. She's literally serving God. Her aim was to please Jesus. But she made a common, yet dangerous mistake. As she began to work for him, her work became more important than her Lord. What began as a way to serve Jesus, slowly and subtly became a way to serve self … She has forgotten that the meal is to honor Jesus, not Martha …

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

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## Joshua 11:1—12:24

### *Defeating Northern Kings*

11 When Jabin king of Hazor heard about all that had happened,
he sent messages to Jobab king of Madon, to the king of
Shimron, and to the king of Acshaph. 2He sent messages to the
kings in the northern mountains and also to the kings in the
Jordan Valley south of Lake Galilee and in the western hills. He
sent a message to the king of Naphoth Dor in the west 3and to
the kings of the Canaanites in the east and in the west. He sent
messages to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Jebusites in
the mountains. Jabin also sent one to the Hivites, who lived
below Mount Hermon in the area of Mizpah. 4So the armies of
all these kings came together with their horses and chariots.
There were as many soldiers as grains of sand on the seashore.

5All of these kings met together at the waters of Merom,
joined their armies together into one camp, and made plans to

fight against the Israelites.

6Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Don’t be afraid of them,
because at this time tomorrow I will give them to you. You will
cripple their horses and burn all their chariots.”

7So Joshua and his whole army surprised the enemy by
attacking them at the waters of Merom. 8The LORD handed them
over to Israel. They chased them to Greater Sidon, Misrephoth
Maim, and the Valley of Mizpah in the east. Israel fought until
none of the enemy was left alive. 9Joshua did what the LORD said
to do; he crippled their horses and burned their chariots.

10Then Joshua went back and captured the city of Hazor and
killed its king. (Hazor had been the leader of all the kingdoms
that fought against Israel.) 11Israel killed everyone in Hazor,
completely destroying them; no one was left alive. Then they
burned Hazor itself.

12Joshua captured all of these cities, killed all of their kings,
and completely destroyed everything in these cities. He did this
just as Moses, the servant of the LORD, had commanded. 13But
the Israelites did not burn any cities that were built on their
mounds, except Hazor; only that city was burned by Joshua.
14The people of Israel kept for themselves everything they
found in the cities, including all the animals. But they killed all
the people there; they left no one alive. 15Long ago the LORD had
commanded his servant Moses to do this, and then Moses had
commanded Joshua to do it. Joshua did everything the LORD had
commanded Moses.

16So Joshua defeated all the people in the land. He had
control of the mountains and the area of southern Canaan, all
the areas of Goshen, the western hills, and the Jordan Valley. He
controlled the mountains of Israel and all the hills near them.
17Joshua controlled all the land from Mount Halak near Edom to
Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon, below Mount Hermon.
Joshua also captured all the kings in the land and killed them.
18He fought against them for many years. 19The people of only
one city in all the land had made a peace agreement with Israel
—the Hivites living in Gibeon. All the other cities were defeated
in war. 20The LORD made those people stubborn so they would
fight against Israel and he could completely destroy them
without mercy. This is what the LORD had commanded Moses to
do.

21Now Joshua fought the Anakites who lived in the
mountains of Hebron, Debir, Anab, Judah, and Israel, and he
completely destroyed them and their towns. 22There were no
Anakites left living in the land of the Israelites and only a few
were left in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. 23Joshua took control of all
the land of Israel as the LORD had told Moses to do long ago. He
gave the land to Israel, because he had promised it to them.
Then Joshua divided the land among the tribes of Israel, and
there was peace in the land.

## *Kings Defeated by Israel*

12 The Israelites took control of the land east of the Jordan River
from the Arnon Ravine to Mount Hermon and all the land along
the eastern side of the Jordan Valley. These lands belonged to
the kings whom the Israelites defeated.

2Sihon king of the Amorites lived in the city of Heshbon and
ruled the land from Aroer at the Arnon Ravine to the Jabbok
River. His land started in the middle of the ravine, which was
their border with the Ammonites. Sihon ruled over half the land
of Gilead 3and over the eastern side of the Jordan Valley from
Lake Galilee to the Dead Sea. And he ruled from Beth Jeshimoth
south to the slopes of Pisgah.

4Og king of Bashan was one of the last of the Rephaites. He
ruled the land in Ashtaroth and Edrei. 5He ruled over Mount
Hermon, Salecah, and all the area of Bashan up to where the
people of Geshur and Maacah lived. Og also ruled half the land
of Gilead up to the border of Sihon king of Heshbon.

6The LORD's servant Moses and the Israelites defeated all
these kings, and Moses gave that land to the tribes of Reuben
and Gad and to East Manasseh as their own.

7Joshua and the Israelites also defeated kings in the land
west of the Jordan River. He gave the people the land and
divided it among the twelve tribes to be their own. It was
between Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon and Mount Halak
near Edom. 8This included the mountains, the western hills, the
Jordan Valley, the slopes, the desert, and southern Canaan. This
was the land where the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites,
Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites had lived. The Israelites
defeated the king of each of the following cities: 9Jericho, Ai
(near Bethel), 10Jerusalem, Hebron, 11Jarmuth, Lachish,
12Eglon, Gezer, 13Debir, Geder, 14Hormah, Arad, 15Libnah,
Adullam, 16Makkedah, Bethel, 17Tappuah, Hepher, 18Aphek,
Lasharon, 19Madon, Hazor, 20Shimron Meron, Acshaph,
21Taanach, Megiddo, 22Kedesh, Jokneam in Carmel, 23Dor (in
Naphoth Dor), Goyim in Gilgal, and 24Tirzah.

The total number of kings was thirty-one.

## Psalm 44:4–19

4My God, you are my King.
Your commands led Jacob's people to victory.

5 With your help we pushed back our enemies.
In your name we trampled those who came against us.

6 I don't trust my bow to help me,
and my sword can't save me.

7 You saved us from our foes,
and you made our enemies ashamed.

8 We will praise God every day;
we will praise your name forever. *Selah*

9 But you have rejected us and shamed us.
You don't march with our armies anymore.

10 You let our enemies push us back,
and those who hate us have taken our wealth.

11 You gave us away like sheep to be eaten
and have scattered us among the nations.

12 You sold your people for nothing
and made no profit on the sale.

13 You made us a joke to our neighbors;
those around us laugh and make fun of us.

14 You made us a joke to the other nations;
people shake their heads.

15 I am always in disgrace,
and I am covered with shame.

16 My enemy is getting even
with insults and curses.

17 All these things have happened to us,
but we have not forgotten you
or failed to keep our agreement with you.

18 Our hearts haven't turned away from you,
and we haven't stopped following you.

19 But you crushed us in this place where wild dogs live,
and you covered us with deep darkness.

## Proverbs 14:1–2

14 A wise woman strengthens her family,but a foolish woman destroys hers by what she does.

2 People who live good lives respect the LORD,
but those who live evil lives don't.

## Luke 10:25–42

### *The Good Samaritan*

25 Then an expert on the law stood up to test Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to get life forever?"
26 Jesus said, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"
27 The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind."[n] Also, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."[n]
28 Jesus said to him, "Your answer is right. Do this and you will live."
29 But the man, wanting to show the importance of his question, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
30 Jesus answered, "As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, some robbers attacked him. They tore off his clothes, beat him, and left him lying there, almost dead. 31 It happened that a priest was going down that road. When he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. 32 Next, a Levite[n] came there, and after he went over and looked at the man, he walked by on

the other side of the road. 33Then a Samaritan[n] traveling down the road came to where the hurt man was. When he saw the man, he felt very sorry for him. 34The Samaritan went to him, poured olive oil and wine[n] on his wounds, and bandaged them. Then he put the hurt man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he cared for him. 35The next day, the Samaritan brought out two coins,[n] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of this man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again.'"

36Then Jesus said, "Which one of these three men do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by the robbers?"

37The expert on the law answered, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Then go and do what he did."

## *Mary and Martha*

38While Jesus and his followers were traveling, Jesus went into a town. A woman named Martha let Jesus stay at her house. 39Martha had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to him teach. 40But Martha was busy with all the work to be done. She went in and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to help me."

41But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. 42Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the better thing, and it will never be taken away from her."

# April 12

# God Sees Our Value

*He knows what is in our hearts.*

Psalm 44:21

God sees us with the eyes of a Father. He sees our defects, errors, and blemishes. But he also sees our value. What did Jesus know that enabled him to do what he did?

Here's part of the answer. He knew the value of people. He knew that each human being is a treasure. And because he did, people were not a source of stress but a source of joy.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## Joshua 13:1—14:15

### *Land Still to Be Taken*

13 When Joshua was very old, the LORD said to him, "Joshua, you
have grown old, but there is still much land for you to take.
2This is what is left: the regions of Geshur and of the Philistines;
3the area from the Shihor River at the border of Egypt to Ekron
in the north, which belongs to the Canaanites; the five Philistine
leaders at Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron; the
Avvites, 4who live south of the Canaanite land; 5the Gebalites,
and the area of Lebanon east of Baal Gad below Mount Hermon
to Lebo Hamath.

6"The Sidonians are living in the hill country from Lebanon
to Misrephoth Maim, but I will force all of them out ahead of the
Israelites. Be sure to remember this land when you divide the
land among the Israelites, as I told you.

7"Now divide the land among the nine tribes and West
Manasseh."

### *Dividing the Land*

[8]East Manasseh and the tribes of Reuben and Gad had
received their land. The LORD's servant Moses had given them
the land east of the Jordan River. [9]Their land started at Aroer at
the Arnon Ravine and continued to the town in the middle of the
ravine, and it included the whole plain from Medeba to Dibon.
[10]All the towns ruled by Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled
in the city of Heshbon, were in that land. The land continued to
the area where the Ammonites lived. [11]Gilead was also there, as
well as the area where the people of Geshur and Maacah lived,
and all of Mount Hermon and Bashan as far as Salecah. [12]All
the kingdom of Og king of Bashan was in the land. Og was one
of the last of the Rephaites, and in the past he ruled in
Ashtaroth and Edrei. Moses had defeated them and had taken
their land. [13]Because the Israelites did not force out the people
of Geshur and Maacah, they still live among the Israelites today.

[14]The tribe of Levi was the only one that did not get any
land. Instead, they were given all the burned sacrifices made to
the LORD, the God of Israel, as he had promised them.

[15]Moses had given each family group from the tribe of
Reuben some land: [16]Theirs was the land from Aroer near the
Arnon Ravine to the town of Medeba, including the whole plain
and the town in the middle of the ravine; [17]Heshbon and all the
towns on the plain: Dibon, Bamoth Baal, and Beth Baal Meon,
[18]Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath, [19]Kiriathaim, Sibmah, Zereth
Shahar on the hill in the valley, [20]Beth Peor, the hills of Pisgah,
and Beth Jeshimoth. [21]So that land included all the towns on the
plain and all the area that Sihon king of the Amorites had ruled
from the town of Heshbon. Moses had defeated him along with
the leaders of the Midianites, including Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur,
and Reba. All these leaders fought together with Sihon and
lived in that country. [22]The Israelites killed many people during
the fighting, including Balaam of Beor, who tried to use magic
to tell the future. [23]The land given to Reuben stopped at the
shore of the Jordan River. So the land given to the family groups
of Reuben included all these towns and their villages that were
listed.

[24]This is the land Moses gave to the tribe of Gad, to all its
family groups: [25]the land of Jazer and all the towns of Gilead;
half the land of the Ammonites that went as far as Aroer near
Rabbah; [26]the area from Heshbon to Ramath Mizpah and
Betonim; the area from Mahanaim to the land of Debir; [27]in the
valley, Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the
other land Sihon king of Heshbon had ruled east of the Jordan
River and continuing to the end of Lake Galilee. [28]All this land
went to the family groups of Gad, including all these towns and
their villages.

[29]This is the land Moses had given to East Manasseh. Half of

all the family groups in the tribe of Manasseh were given this land: 30The land started at Mahanaim and included all of Bashan and the land ruled by Og king of Bashan; all the towns of Jair in Bashan, sixty cities in all; 31half of Gilead, Ashtaroth, and Edrei, the cities where Og king of Bashan had ruled. All this went to the family of Makir son of Manasseh, and half of all his sons were given this land.

32Moses had given this land to these tribes on the plains of Moab across the Jordan River east of Jericho. 33But Moses had given no land to the tribe of Levi because the LORD, the God of Israel, promised that he himself would be the gift for the Levites.

14 Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders of all the tribes of Israel decided what land to give to the people in the land of Canaan. 2The LORD had commanded Moses long ago how he wanted the people to choose their land. The people of the nine-and-a-half tribes threw lots to decide which land they would receive. 3Moses had already given the two-and-a-half tribes their land east of the Jordan River. But the tribe of Levi was not given any land like the others. 4The sons of Joseph had divided into two tribes—Manasseh and Ephraim. The tribe of Levi was not given any land. It was given only some towns in which to live and pastures for its animals. 5The LORD had told Moses how to give the land to the tribes of Israel, and the Israelites divided the land.

## *Caleb's Land*

6One day some men from the tribe of Judah went to Joshua at Gilgal. Among them was Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite. He said to Joshua, "You remember what the LORD said at Kadesh Barnea when he was speaking to the prophet Moses about you and me. 7Moses, the LORD's servant, sent me to look at the land where we were going. I was forty years old then. When I came back, I told Moses what I thought about the land. 8The other men who went with me frightened the people, but I fully believed the LORD would allow us to take the land. 9So that day Moses promised me, 'The land where you went will become your land, and your children will own it forever. I will give you that land because you fully believed in the LORD, my God.'

10"Now then, the LORD has kept his promise. He has kept me alive for forty-five years from the time he said this to Moses during the time we all wandered in the desert. Now here I am, eighty-five years old. 11I am still as strong today as I was the day Moses sent me out, and I am just as ready to fight now as I was then. 12So give me the mountain country the LORD promised me that day long ago. Back then you heard that the Anakite people lived there and the cities were large and well protected.

But now with the LORD helping me, I will force them out, just as the LORD said."

[13]Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him the city of Hebron as his own. [14]Hebron still belongs to the family of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite because he had faith and obeyed the LORD, the God of Israel. [15](In the past it was called Kiriath Arba, named for Arba, the greatest man among the Anakites.)

After this there was peace in the land.

## Psalm 44:20–26

[20]If we had forgotten our God
or lifted our hands in prayer to foreign gods,

[21]God would have known,
because he knows what is in our hearts.

[22]But for you we are in danger of death all the time.
People think we are worth no more than sheep to be killed.

[23]Wake up, Lord! Why are you sleeping?
Get up! Don't reject us forever.

[24]Why do you hide from us?
Have you forgotten our pain and troubles?

[25]We have been pushed down into the dirt;
we are flat on the ground.

[26]Get up and help us.
Because of your love, save us.

## Proverbs 14:3

3 Fools will be punished for their proud words,
but the words of the wise will protect them.

## Luke 11:1–28

### *Jesus Teaches About Prayer*

11 One time Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he
finished, one of his followers said to him, “Lord, teach us to
pray as John taught his followers.”
2 Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say:

‘Father, may your name always be kept holy.

May your kingdom come.

3 Give us the food we need for each day.
4 Forgive us for our sins,
because we forgive everyone who has done wrong to us.

And do not cause us to be tempted.’”[n]

### *Continue to Ask*

5 Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose one of you went to your
friend’s house at midnight and said to him, ‘Friend, loan me
three loaves of bread. 6 A friend of mine has come into town to
visit me, but I have nothing for him to eat.’ 7 Your friend inside
the house answers, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already
locked, and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and
give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, if friendship is not enough to
make him get up to give you the bread, your boldness will make
him get up and give you whatever you need. 9 So I tell you, ask,
and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and
the door will open for you. 10 Yes, everyone who asks will
receive. The one who searches will find. And everyone who
knocks will have the door opened. 11 If your children ask for[n] a

fish, which of you would give them a snake instead? 12Or, if your children ask for an egg, would you give them a scorpion? 13Even though you are bad, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

## *Jesus’ Power Is from God*

14One time Jesus was sending out a demon who could not talk. When the demon came out, the man who had been unable to speak, then spoke. The people were amazed. 15But some of them said, “Jesus uses the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons, to force demons out of people.”

16Other people, wanting to test Jesus, asked him to give them a sign from heaven. 17But knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom that is divided against itself will be destroyed. And a family that is divided against itself will not continue. 18So if Satan is divided against himself, his kingdom will not continue. You say that I use the power of Beelzebul to force out demons. 19But if I use the power of Beelzebul to force out demons, what power do your people use to force demons out? So they will be your judges. 20But if I use the power of God to force out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

21“When a strong person with many weapons guards his own house, his possessions are safe. 22But when someone stronger comes and defeats him, the stronger one will take away the weapons the first man trusted and will give away the possessions.

23“Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not work with me is working against me.

## *The Empty Person*

24“When an evil spirit comes out of a person, it travels through dry places, looking for a place to rest. But when it finds no place, it says, ‘I will go back to the house I left.’ 25And when it comes back, it finds that house swept clean and made neat. 26Then the evil spirit goes out and brings seven other spirits more evil than it is, and they go in and live there. So the person has even more trouble than before.”

## *People Who Are Truly Blessed*

27As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out to Jesus, “Blessed is the mother who gave birth to you and nursed you.”

28But Jesus said, “No, blessed are those who hear the

teaching of God and obey it.”

# April 13

# God Is Eternal

*God, your throne will last forever and ever.*

Psalm 45:6

scripture says that the number of God's years is unsearchable. We may search out the moment the first wave slapped on a shore or the first star burst in the sky, but we'll never find the first moment when God was God, for there is no moment when God was not God. He has never *not been*, for he is eternal. God is not bound by time.

But when Jesus came to the earth, all this changed. He heard for the first time a phrase never used in heaven: "Your time is up." As a child, he had to leave the Temple because his time was up. As a man, he had to leave Nazareth because his time was up. And as a Savior, he had to die because his time was up. For thirty-three years, the stallion of heaven lived in the corral of time.

from *He Chose the Nails*

## Joshua 15:1—16:10

### *Land for Judah*

15 The land that was given to the tribe of Judah was divided among all the family groups. It went all the way to the Desert of Zin in the far south, at the border of Edom.

2The southern border of Judah's land started at the south end of the Dead Sea 3and went south of Scorpion Pass to Zin. From there it passed to the south of Kadesh Barnea and continued past Hezron to Addar. From Addar it turned and went to Karka. 4It continued to Azmon, the brook of Egypt, and then to the Mediterranean Sea. This was the southern border.

5The eastern border was the shore of the Dead Sea, as far as the mouth of the Jordan River.

The northern border started at the bay of the sea at the mouth of the Jordan River. 6Then it went to Beth Hoglah and continued north of Beth Arabah to the stone of Bohan son of Reuben. 7Then the northern border went through the Valley of Achor to Debir where it turned toward the north and went to Gilgal. Gilgal is across from the road that goes through Adummim Pass, on the south side of the ravine. The border continued to the waters of En Shemesh and stopped at En Rogel. 8Then it went through the Valley of Ben Hinnom, next to the southern side of the Jebusite city (which is called Jerusalem). There the border went to the top of the hill on the west side of Hinnom Valley, at the northern end of the Valley of Giants. 9From there it went to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah and then it went to the cities near Mount Ephron. There it turned and went toward Baalah, which is called Kiriath Jearim. 10At Baalah the border turned west and went toward Mount Seir. It continued along the north side of Mount Jearim (also called Kesalon) and came to Beth Shemesh. From there it went past Timnah 11to the hill north of Ekron. Then it turned toward Shikkeron and went past Mount Baalah and continued on to Jabneel, ending at the sea.

12The Mediterranean Sea was the western border. Inside these borders lived the family groups of Judah.

13The LORD had commanded Joshua to give Caleb son of Jephunneh part of the land in Judah, so he gave Caleb the town of Kiriath Arba, also called Hebron. (Arba was the father of Anak.) 14Caleb forced out the three Anakite families living in Hebron: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak. 15Then he left there and went to fight against the people living in Debir. (In the past Debir had been called Kiriath Sepher.) 16Caleb said, “I will give Acsah, my daughter, as a wife to the man who attacks and captures the city of Kiriath Sepher.” 17Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s brother, captured the city, so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to Othniel to be his wife. 18When Acsah came to Othniel, she told him to ask her father for a field.

So Acsah went to her father. When she got down from her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What do you want?”

19Acsah answered, “Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in southern Canaan, also give me springs of water.” So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

20The tribe of Judah got the land God had promised them. Each family group got part of the land.

21The tribe of Judah got all these towns in the southern part of Canaan near the border of Edom: Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, 22Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, 23Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, 24Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, 25Hazor Hadattah, Kerioth Hezron (also called Hazor), 26Amam, Shema, Moladah, 27Hazar Gaddah, Heshmon, Beth Pelet, 28Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah, 29Baalah, Iim,

Ezem, [30]Eltolad, Kesil, Hormah, [31]Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, [32]Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon. There were twenty-nine towns and their villages.

[33]The tribe of Judah got these towns in the western hills: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, [34]Zanoah, En Gannim, Tappuah, Enam, [35]Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, [36]Shaaraim, Adithaim, and Gederah (also called Gederothaim). There were fourteen towns and their villages.

[37]Judah was also given these towns in the western hills: Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal Gad, [38]Dilean, Mizpah, Joktheel, [39]Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, [40]Cabbon, Lahmas, Kitlish, [41]Gederoth, Beth Dagon, Naamah, and Makkedah. There were sixteen towns and their villages.

[42]Judah was also given these towns in the western hills: Libnah, Ether, Ashan, [43]Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib, [44]Keilah, Aczib, and Mareshah. There were nine towns and their villages.

[45]The tribe of Judah was also given these towns: Ekron and all the small towns and villages near it; [46]the area west of Ekron and all the villages and small towns near Ashdod; [47]Ashdod and the small towns and villages around it; the villages and small towns around Gaza as far as the brook of Egypt and along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

[48]The tribe of Judah was also given these towns in the mountains: Shamir, Jattir, Socoh, [49]Dannah, Kiriath Sannah (also called Debir), [50]Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim, [51]Goshen, Holon, and Giloh. There were eleven towns and their villages.

[52]They were also given these towns in the mountains: Arab, Dumah, Eshan, [53]Janim, Beth Tappuah, Aphekah, [54]Humtah, Kiriath Arba (also called Hebron), and Zior. There were nine towns and their villages.

[55]Judah was also given these towns in the mountains: Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, [56]Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, [57]Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah. There were ten towns and their villages.

[58]They were also given these towns in the mountains: Halhul, Beth Zur, Gedor, [59]Maarath, Beth Anoth, and Eltekon. There were six towns and their villages.

[60]The people of Judah were also given the two towns of Rabbah and Kiriath Baal (also called Kiriath Jearim) and their villages.

[61]Judah was given these towns in the desert: Beth Arabah, Middin, Secacah, [62]Nibshan, the City of Salt, and En Gedi. There were six towns and all their villages.

[63]The army of Judah was not able to force out the Jebusites living in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites still live among the people of Judah to this day.

## *Land for Ephraim and Manasseh*

16 This is the land the tribe of Joseph received. It started at the
Jordan River near Jericho and continued to the waters of
Jericho, just east of the city. The border went up from Jericho to
the mountains of Bethel. 2Then it continued from Bethel (also
called Luz) to the Arkite border at Ataroth. 3From there it went
west to the border of the Japhletites and continued to the area
of the Lower Beth Horon. Then it went to Gezer and ended at
the sea.

4So Manasseh and Ephraim, sons of Joseph, received their
land.

5This is the land that was given to the family groups of
Ephraim: Their border started at Ataroth Addar in the east,
went to Upper Beth Horon, 6and then to the sea. From
Micmethath it turned eastward toward Taanath Shiloh and
continued eastward to Janoah. 7Then it went down from Janoah
to Ataroth and to Naarah. It continued until it touched Jericho
and stopped at the Jordan River. 8The border went from
Tappuah west to Kanah Ravine and ended at the sea. This is all
the land that was given to each family group in the tribe of the
Ephraimites. 9Many of the towns were actually within
Manasseh's borders, but the people of Ephraim got those towns
and their villages. 10The Ephraimites could not force the
Canaanites to leave Gezer, so the Canaanites still live among
the Ephraimites today, but they became slaves of the
Ephraimites.

## Psalm 45:1–9

### *A Song for the King's Wedding*

**For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." A
maskil. A love song of the sons of Korah.**

45 Beautiful words fill my mind.I am speaking of royal things.
My tongue is like the pen of a skilled writer.

2You are more handsome than anyone,
and you are an excellent speaker,
so God has blessed you forever.

[3]Put on your sword, powerful warrior.
Show your glory and majesty.

[4]In your majesty win the victory
for what is true and right.
Your power will do amazing things.

[5]Your sharp arrows will enter
the hearts of the king's enemies.
Nations will be defeated before you.

[6]God, your throne will last forever and ever.
You will rule your kingdom with fairness.

[7]You love right and hate evil,
so God has chosen you from among your friends;
he has set you apart with much joy.

[8]Your clothes smell like myrrh, aloes, and cassia.
From palaces of ivory
music comes to make you happy.

[9]Kings' daughters are among your honored women.
Your bride stands at your right side
wearing gold from Ophir.

## Proverbs 14:4–5

[4]When there are no oxen, no food is in the barn.
But with a strong ox, much grain can be grown.

[5]A truthful witness does not lie,
but a false witness tells nothing but lies.

## Luke 11:29–54

## *The People Want a Miracle*

29 As the crowd grew larger, Jesus said, “The people who live
today are evil. They want to see a miracle for a sign, but no sign
will be given them, except the sign of Jonah.[n] 30 As Jonah was a
sign for those people who lived in Nineveh, the Son of Man will
be a sign for the people of this time. 31 On the Judgment Day the
Queen of the South[n] will stand up with the people who live now.
She will show they are guilty, because she came from far away
to listen to Solomon’s wise teaching. And I tell you that
someone greater than Solomon is here. 32 On the Judgment Day
the people of Nineveh will stand up with the people who live
now, and they will show that you are guilty. When Jonah
preached to them, they were sorry and changed their lives. And
I tell you that someone greater than Jonah is here.

## *Be a Light for the World*

33 “No one lights a lamp and puts it in a secret place or under
a bowl, but on a lampstand so the people who come in can see.
34 Your eye is a light for the body. When your eyes are good,
your whole body will be full of light. But when your eyes are
evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. 35 So be careful
not to let the light in you become darkness. 36 If your whole
body is full of light, and none of it is dark, then you will shine
bright, as when a lamp shines on you.”

## *Jesus Accuses the Pharisees*

37 After Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee asked Jesus
to eat with him. So Jesus went in and sat at the table. 38 But the
Pharisee was surprised when he saw that Jesus did not wash his
hands[n] before the meal. 39 The Lord said to him, “You Pharisees
clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full
of greed and evil. 40 You foolish people! The same one who made
what is outside also made what is inside. 41 So give what is in
your dishes to the poor, and then you will be fully clean. 42 How
terrible for you Pharisees! You give God one-tenth of even your
mint, your rue, and every other plant in your garden. But you
fail to be fair to others and to love God. These are the things
you should do while continuing to do those other things. 43 How
terrible for you Pharisees, because you love to have the most
important seats in the synagogues, and you love to be greeted
with respect in the marketplaces. 44 How terrible for you,

because you are like hidden graves, which people walk on without knowing.”

## *Jesus Talks to Experts on the Law*

45One of the experts on the law said to Jesus, “Teacher, when you say these things, you are insulting us, too.”

46Jesus answered, “How terrible for you, you experts on the law! You make strict rules that are very hard for people to obey, but you yourselves don’t even try to follow those rules. 47How terrible for you, because you build tombs for the prophets whom your ancestors killed! 48And now you show that you approve of what your ancestors did. They killed the prophets, and you build tombs for them! 49This is why in his wisdom God said, ‘I will send prophets and apostles to them. They will kill some, and they will treat others cruelly.’ 50So you who live now will be punished for the deaths of all the prophets who were killed since the beginning of the world— 51from the killing of Abel to the killing of Zechariah,[n] who died between the altar and the Temple. Yes, I tell you that you who are alive now will be punished for them all.

52“How terrible for you, you experts on the law. You have taken away the key to learning about God. You yourselves would not learn, and you stopped others from learning, too.”

53When Jesus left, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees began to give him trouble, asking him questions about many things, 54trying to catch him saying something wrong.

# April 14

## A Burst of Love

*"Seek God's kingdom, and all your other needs will be met as well."*

Luke 12:31

sometimes God is so touched by what he sees that he gives us what we need and not simply that for which we ask. It's a good thing. For who would have ever thought to ask God for what he gives? Which of us would have dared to say: "God, would you please hang yourself on a tool of torture as a substitution for every mistake I have ever committed?" And then have the audacity to add: "And after you forgive me, could you prepare me a place in your house to live forever?"

And if that wasn't enough: "And would you please live within me and protect me and guide me and bless me with more than I could ever deserve?"

Honestly, would we have the chutzpah to ask for that? …

Jesus already knows the cost of grace. He already knows the price of forgiveness. But he offers it anyway. Love burst his heart.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## Joshua 17:1—18:28

17 Then land was given to the tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's first
son. Manasseh's first son was Makir, the father of Gilead. Makir
was a great soldier, so the lands of Gilead and Bashan were
given to his family. 2Land was also given to the other family
groups of Manasseh—Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hepher,
and Shemida. These were all the other sons of Manasseh son of
Joseph.
3Zelophehad was the son of Hepher, who was the son of
Gilead, who was the son of Makir, who was the son of
Manasseh. Zelophehad had no sons, but he had five daughters,
named Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 4They went

to Eleazar the priest and to Joshua son of Nun and all the leaders. They said, “The LORD told Moses to give us land like the men received.” So Eleazar obeyed the LORD and gave the daughters some land, just like the brothers of their father. 5So the tribe of Manasseh had ten sections of land west of the Jordan River and two more sections, Gilead and Bashan, on the east side of the Jordan River. 6The daughters of Manasseh received land just as the sons did. Gilead was given to the rest of the families of Manasseh.

7The lands of Manasseh were in the area between Asher and Micmethath, near Shechem. The border went south to the En Tappuah area, 8which belonged to Manasseh, except for the town of Tappuah. It was along the border of Manasseh’s land and belonged to the sons of Ephraim. 9The border of Manasseh continued south to Kanah Ravine. The cities in this area of Manasseh belonged to Ephraim. Manasseh’s border was on the north side of the ravine and went to the sea. 10The land to the south belonged to Ephraim, and the land to the north belonged to Manasseh. The Mediterranean Sea was the western border. The border touched Asher’s land on the north and Issachar’s land on the east.

11In the areas of Issachar and Asher, the people of Manasseh owned these towns: Beth Shan and its small towns; Ibleam and its small towns; the people who lived in Dor and its small towns; the people in Naphoth Dor and its small towns; the people who lived in Taanach and its small towns; the people in Megiddo and its small towns. 12Manasseh was not able to defeat those cities, so the Canaanites continued to live there. 13When the Israelites grew strong, they forced the Canaanites to work for them, although they did not force them to leave the land.

14The people from the tribes of Joseph said to Joshua, “You gave us only one area of land, but we are many people. Why did you give us only one part of all the land the LORD gave his people?”

15And Joshua answered them, “If you have too many people, go up to the forest and make a place for yourselves to live there in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaites. The mountain country of Ephraim is too small for you.”

16The people of Joseph said, “It is true. The mountain country of Ephraim is not enough for us, but the land where the Canaanites live is dangerous. They are skilled fighters. They have powerful weapons in Beth Shan and all the small towns in that area, and they are also in the Valley of Jezreel.”

17Then Joshua said to the people of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh, “There are many of you, and you have great power. You should be given more than one share of land. 18You also will have the mountain country. It is a forest, but you can cut down the trees and make it a good place to live. You will own all of it because you will force the Canaanites to leave the land even

though they have powerful weapons and are strong.”

## *The Rest of the Land Divided*

18 All of the Israelites gathered together at Shiloh where they
set up the Meeting Tent. The land was now under their control.
2But there were still seven tribes of Israel that had not yet
received their land.

3So Joshua said to the Israelites: “Why do you wait so long to
take your land? The LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given
this land to you. 4Choose three men from each tribe, and I will
send them out to study the land. They will describe in writing
the land their tribe wants as its share, and then they will come
back to me. 5They will divide the land into seven parts. The
people of Judah will keep their land in the south, and the people
of Joseph will keep their land in the north. 6You should describe
the seven parts of land in writing and bring what you have
written to me. Then I will throw lots in the presence of the LORD
our God. 7But the Levites do not get any part of these lands,
because they are priests, and their work is to serve the LORD.
Gad, Reuben, and East Manasseh have received the land
promised to them, which is east of the Jordan River. Moses, the
servant of the LORD, gave it to them.”

8So the men who were chosen to map the land started out.
Joshua told them, “Go and study the land and describe it in
writing. Then come back to me, and I will throw lots in the
presence of the LORD here in Shiloh.” 9So the men left and went
into the land. They described in a scroll each town in the seven
parts of the land. Then they came back to Joshua, who was still
at the camp at Shiloh. 10There Joshua threw lots in the presence
of the LORD to choose the lands that should be given to each
tribe.

## *Land for Benjamin*

11The first part of the land was given to the tribe of
Benjamin. Each family group received some land between the
land of Judah and the land of Joseph. This is the land chosen for
Benjamin: 12The northern border started at the Jordan River
and went along the northern edge of Jericho, and then it went
west into the mountains. That boundary continued until it was
just east of Beth Aven. 13From there it went south to Luz (also
called Bethel) and then down to Ataroth Addar, which is on the
hill south of Lower Beth Horon.

14At the hill to the south of Beth Horon, the border turned
and went south near the western side of the hill. It went to
Kiriath Baal (also called Kiriath Jearim), a town where people of
Judah lived. This was the western border.

15 The southern border started near Kiriath Jearim and went
west to the waters of Nephtoah. 16 Then it went down to the
bottom of the hill, which was near the Valley of Ben Hinnom, on
the north side of the Valley of Rephaim. The border continued
down the Hinnom Valley just south of the Jebusite city to En
Rogel. 17 There it turned north and went to En Shemesh. It
continued to Geliloth near the Adummim Pass. Then it went
down to the great Stone of Bohan son of Reuben. 18 The border
continued to the northern part of Beth Arabah and went down
into the Jordan Valley. 19 From there it went to the northern part
of Beth Hoglah and ended at the north shore of the Dead Sea,
where the Jordan River flows into the sea. This was the
southern border.

20 The Jordan River was the border on the eastern side. So
this was the land given to the family groups of Benjamin with
the borders on all sides.

21 The family groups of Benjamin received these cities:
Jericho, Beth Hoglah, Emek Keziz, 22 Beth Arabah, Zemaraim,
Bethel, 23 Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, 24 Kephar Ammoni, Ophni, and
Geba. There were twelve towns and all their villages.

25 The tribe of Benjamin also received Gibeon, Ramah,
Beeroth, 26 Mizpah, Kephirah, Mozah, 27 Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah,
28 Zelah, Haeleph, the Jebusite city (Jerusalem), Gibeah, and
Kiriath. There were fourteen towns and their villages. All these
areas are the lands the family groups of Benjamin were given.

## Psalm 45:10–17

10 Listen to me, daughter; look and pay attention.
Forget your people and your father’s family.

11 The king loves your beauty.
Because he is your master, you should obey him.

12 People from the city of Tyre have brought a gift.
Wealthy people will want to meet you.

13 The princess is very beautiful.
Her gown is woven with gold.

14 In her beautiful clothes she is brought to the king.
Her bridesmaids follow behind her,
and they are also brought to him.

15 They come with happiness and joy;
they enter the king's palace.

16 You will have sons to replace your fathers.
You will make them rulers through all the land.

17 I will make your name famous from now on,
so people will praise you forever and ever.

## Proverbs 14:6

6 Those who make fun of wisdom look for it and do not find it,
but knowledge comes easily to those with understanding.

## Luke 12:1–31

### *Don't Be Like the Pharisees*

12 So many thousands of people had gathered that they were stepping on each other. Jesus spoke first to his followers, saying, "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, because they are hypocrites. 2 Everything that is hidden will be shown, and everything that is secret will be made known. 3 What you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in an inner room will be shouted from the housetops.

4 "I tell you, my friends, don't be afraid of people who can kill the body but after that can do nothing more to hurt you. 5 I will show you the one to fear. Fear the one who has the power to kill you and also to throw you into hell. Yes, this is the one you should fear.

6 "Five sparrows are sold for only two pennies, and God does not forget any of them. 7 But God even knows how many hairs you have on your head. Don't be afraid. You are worth much

more than many sparrows.

## *Don't Be Ashamed of Jesus*

8"I tell you, all those who stand before others and say they
believe in me, I, the Son of Man, will say before the angels of
God that they belong to me. 9But all who stand before others
and say they do not believe in me, I will say before the angels of
God that they do not belong to me.
10"Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be
forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not
be forgiven.
11"When you are brought into the synagogues before the
leaders and other powerful people, don't worry about how to
defend yourself or what to say. 12At that time the Holy Spirit
will teach you what you must say."

## *Jesus Warns Against Selfishness*

13Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my
brother to divide with me the property our father left us."
14But Jesus said to him, "Who said I should judge or decide
between you?" 15Then Jesus said to them, "Be careful and guard
against all kinds of greed. Life is not measured by how much
one owns."
16Then Jesus told this story: "There was a rich man who had
some land, which grew a good crop. 17He thought to himself,
'What will I do? I have no place to keep all my crops.' 18Then he
said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build
bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and other goods.
19Then I can say to myself, "I have enough good things stored to
last for many years. Rest, eat, drink, and enjoy life!"'
20"But God said to him, 'Foolish man! Tonight your life will
be taken from you. So who will get those things you have
prepared for yourself?'
21"This is how it will be for those who store up things for
themselves and are not rich toward God."

## *Don't Worry*

22Jesus said to his followers, "So I tell you, don't worry about
the food you need to live, or about the clothes you need for your
body. 23Life is more than food, and the body is more than
clothes. 24Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest, they
don't have storerooms or barns, but God feeds them. And you
are worth much more than birds. 25You cannot add any time to
your life by worrying about it. 26If you cannot do even the little

things, then why worry about the big things? [27]Consider how the lilies grow; they don't work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that even Solomon with his riches was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. [28]God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow is thrown into the fire. So how much more will God clothe you? Don't have so little faith! [29]Don't always think about what you will eat or what you will drink, and don't keep worrying. [30]All the people in the world are trying to get these things, and your Father knows you need them. [31]But seek God's kingdom, and all your other needs will be met as well.

# April 15

# A Life Free of Clutter

*"Your heart will be where your treasure is."*

Luke 12:34

The most powerful life is the most simple life. The most powerful life is the life that knows where it's going, that knows where the source of strength is, and the life that stays free of clutter and happenstance and hurriedness.

Being busy is not a sin. Jesus was busy. Paul was busy. Peter was busy. Nothing of significance is achieved without effort and hard work and weariness. Being busy, in and of itself, is not a sin. But being busy in an endless pursuit of *things* that leave us empty and hollow and broken inside—that cannot be pleasing to God.

One source of man's weariness is the pursuit of things that can never satisfy; but which one of us has not been caught up in that pursuit at some time in our life? Our passions, possessions, and pride—these are all *dead* things. When we try to get life out of dead things, the result is only weariness and dissatisfaction.

from *Walking with the Savior*

## Joshua 19:1—20:9

### *Land for Simeon*

19 The second part of the land was given to the tribe of Simeon.
Each family group received some of the land inside the area of
Judah. 2They received Beersheba (also called Sheba), Moladah,
3Hazar Shual, Balah, Ezem, 4Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, 5Ziklag,
Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susah, 6Beth Lebaoth, and Sharuhen.
There were thirteen towns and their villages.

7They received the towns of Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan,
four towns and their villages. 8They also received all the very
small areas with people living in them as far as Baalath Beer

(this is the same as Ramah in southern Canaan). So these were the lands given to the family groups in the tribe of Simeon. [9]The land of the Simeonites was taken from part of the land of Judah. Since Judah had much more land than they needed, the Simeonites received part of their land.

## *Land for Zebulun*

[10]The third part of the land was given to the tribe of Zebulun. Each family group of Zebulun received some of the land. The border of Zebulun went as far as Sarid. [11]Then it went west to Maralah and came near Dabbesheth and then near Jokneam. [12]Then it turned to the east. It went from Sarid to the area of Kisloth Tabor and on to Daberath and to Japhia. [13]It continued eastward to Gath Hepher and Eth Kazin, ending at Rimmon. There the border turned and went toward Neah. [14]At Neah it turned again and went to the north to Hannathon and continued to the Valley of Iphtah El. [15]Inside this border were the cities of Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem. There were twelve towns and their villages.

[16]So these are the towns and the villages that were given to the family groups of Zebulun.

## *Land for Issachar*

[17]The fourth part of the land was given to the tribe of Issachar. Each family group of Issachar received some of the land. [18]Their land included Jezreel, Kesulloth, Shunem, [19]Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath, [20]Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, [21]Remeth, En Gannim, En Haddah, and Beth Pazzez.

[22]The border of their land touched the area called Tabor, Shahazumah, and Beth Shemesh and stopped at the Jordan River. There were sixteen towns and their villages.

[23]These cities and towns were part of the land that was given to the family groups of Issachar.

## *Land for Asher*

[24]The fifth part of the land was given to the tribe of Asher. Each family group of Asher received some of the land. [25]Their land included Helkath, Hali, Beten, Acshaph, [26]Allammelech, Amad, and Mishal.

The western border touched Mount Carmel and Shihor Libnath. [27]Then it turned east and went to Beth Dagon, touching Zebulun and the Valley of Iphtah El. Then it went north of Beth Emek and Neiel and passed north to Cabul. [28]From there it went to Abdon, Rehob, Hammon, and Kanah and

continued to Greater Sidon. [29]Then the border went back south toward Ramah and continued to the strong, walled city of Tyre. There it turned and went toward Hosah, ending at the sea. This was in the area of Aczib, [30]Ummah, Aphek, and Rehob. There were twenty-two towns and their villages.

[31]These cities and their villages were part of the land that was given to the family groups of Asher.

## *Land for Naphtali*

[32]The sixth part of the land was given to the tribe of Naphtali. Each family group of Naphtali received some of the land. [33]The border of their land started at the large tree in Zaanannim, which is near Heleph. Then it went through Adami Nekeb and Jabneel, as far as Lakkum, and ended at the Jordan River. [34]Then it went to the west through Aznoth Tabor and stopped at Hukkok. It went to the area of Zebulun on the south, Asher on the west, and Judah, at the Jordan River, on the east. [35]The strong, walled cities inside these borders were called Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Kinnereth, [36]Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, [37]Kedesh, Edrei, En Hazor, [38]Iron, Migdal El, Horem, Beth Anath, and Beth Shemesh. There were nineteen towns and all their villages.

[39]The towns and the villages around them were in the land that was given to the family groups of Naphtali.

## *Land for Dan*

[40]The seventh part of the land was given to the tribe of Dan. Each family group of Dan received some of the land. [41]Their land included Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir Shemesh, [42]Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, [43]Elon, Timnah, Ekron, [44]Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, [45]Jehud, Bene Berak, Gath Rimmon, [46]Me Jarkon, Rakkon, and the area near Joppa.

[47](But the Danites had trouble taking their land. They went and fought against Leshem, defeated it, and killed the people who lived there. So the Danites moved into the town of Leshem and changed its name to Dan, because he was the father of their tribe.) [48]All of these towns and villages were given to the family groups of Dan.

## *Land for Joshua*

[49]After the leaders finished dividing the land and giving it to the different tribes, the Israelites gave Joshua son of Nun his land also. [50]They gave Joshua the town he asked for, Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim, just as the LORD

commanded. He built up the town and lived there.

51So these lands were given to the different tribes of Israel. Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders of each tribe divided up the land by lots at Shiloh. They met in the presence of the LORD at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. Now they were finished dividing the land.

## *Cities of Safety*

20 Then the LORD said to Joshua: 2"Tell the Israelites to choose the special cities of safety, as I had Moses command you to do. 3If a person kills someone accidentally and without meaning to kill him, that person may go to a city of safety to hide. There the killer will be safe from the relative who has the duty of punishing a murderer.

4"When the killer runs to one of those cities, he must stop at the entrance gate, stand there, and tell the leaders of the people what happened. Then that person will be allowed to enter the city and will be given a place to live among them. 5But if the one who is chasing him follows him to that city, the leaders of the city must not hand over the killer. It was an accident. He did not hate him beforehand or kill him on purpose. 6The killer must stay in the city until a court comes to a decision and until the high priest dies. Then he may go back home to the town from which he ran away."

7So the Israelites chose these cities to be cities of safety: Kedesh in Galilee in the mountains of Naphtali; Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim; Kiriath Arba (also called Hebron) in the mountains of Judah; 8Bezer on the east side of the Jordan River near Jericho in the desert in the land of Reuben; Ramoth in Gilead in the land of Gad; and Golan in Bashan in the land of Manasseh. 9Any Israelite or anyone living among them who killed someone accidentally was to be allowed to run to one of these cities of safety. There he would not be killed, before he was judged, by the relative who had the duty of punishing a murderer.

# Psalm 46:1–6

## *God Protects His People*

**For the director of music. By alamoth. A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

46 God is our protection and our strength.
He always helps in times of trouble.

2So we will not be afraid even if the earth shakes,
or the mountains fall into the sea,

3even if the oceans roar and foam,
or the mountains shake at the raging sea. *Selah*

4There is a river that brings joy to the city of God,
the holy place where God Most High lives.

5God is in that city, and so it will not be shaken.
God will help her at dawn.

6Nations tremble and kingdoms shake.
God shouts and the earth crumbles.

## Proverbs 14:7–11

7Stay away from fools,
because they can’t teach you anything.

8A wise person will understand what to do,
but a foolish person is dishonest.

9Fools don’t care if they sin,
but honest people work at being right.

10No one else can know your sadness,
and strangers cannot share your joy.

11The wicked person’s house will be destroyed,
but a good person’s tent will still be standing.

# Luke 12:32–59

## *Don’t Trust in Money*

32 “Don’t fear, little flock, because your Father wants to give
you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor.
Get for yourselves purses that will not wear out, the treasure in
heaven that never runs out, where thieves can’t steal and moths
can’t destroy. 34 Your heart will be where your treasure is.

## *Always Be Ready*

35 “Be dressed, ready for service, and have your lamps
shining. 36 Be like servants who are waiting for their master to
come home from a wedding party. When he comes and knocks,
the servants immediately open the door for him. 37 They will be
blessed when their master comes home, because he sees that
they were watching for him. I tell you the truth, the master will
dress himself to serve and tell the servants to sit at the table,
and he will serve them. 38 Those servants will be blessed when
he comes in and finds them still waiting, even if it is midnight or
later.
39 “Remember this: If the owner of the house knew what time
a thief was coming, he would not allow the thief to enter his
house. 40 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will
come at a time when you don’t expect him!”

## *Who Is the Trusted Servant?*

41 Peter said, “Lord, did you tell this story to us or to all
people?”
42 The Lord said, “Who is the wise and trusted servant that
the master trusts to give the other servants their food at the
right time? 43 When the master comes and finds the servant
doing his work, the servant will be blessed. 44 I tell you the
truth, the master will choose that servant to take care of
everything he owns. 45 But suppose the servant thinks to
himself, ‘My master will not come back soon,’ and he begins to
beat the other servants, men and women, and to eat and drink
and get drunk. 46 The master will come when that servant is not
ready and is not expecting him. Then the master will cut him in
pieces and send him away to be with the others who don’t obey.
47 “The servant who knows what his master wants but is not
ready, or who does not do what the master wants, will be beaten

with many blows! 48But the servant who does not know what his master wants and does things that should be punished will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. And from the one trusted with much, much more will be expected.

## *Jesus Causes Division*

49"I came to set fire to the world, and I wish it were already burning! 50I have a baptism[n] to suffer through, and I feel very troubled until it is over. 51Do you think I came to give peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I came to divide it. 52From now on, a family with five people will be divided, three against two, and two against three. 53They will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

## *Understanding the Times*

54Then Jesus said to the people, "When you see clouds coming up in the west, you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it happens. 55When you feel the wind begin to blow from the south, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it happens. 56Hypocrites! You know how to understand the appearance of the earth and sky. Why don't you understand what is happening now?

## *Settle Your Problems*

57"Why can't you decide for yourselves what is right? 58If your enemy is taking you to court, try hard to settle it on the way. If you don't, your enemy might take you to the judge, and the judge might turn you over to the officer, and the officer might throw you into jail. 59I tell you, you will not get out of there until you have paid everything you owe."

# April 16

## A Cut Above

*"Be still and know that I am God."*

Psalm 46:10

The word *holy* means "to separate." The ancestry of the term can be traced back to an ancient word which means "to cut." To be holy, then, is to be a cut above the norm, superior, extraordinary … The Holy One dwells on a different level from the rest of us. What frightens us does not frighten him. What troubles us does not trouble him.

I'm more a landlubber than a sailor, but I've puttered around in a bass boat enough to know the secret for finding land in a storm … You don't aim at another boat. You certainly don't stare at the waves. You set your sights on an object unaffected by the wind—a light on the shore—and go straight toward it …

When you set your sights on our God, you focus on one "a cut above" any storm life may bring … You find peace.

from *The Great House of God*

## Joshua 21:1—22:34

### *Towns for the Levites*

21 The heads of the Levite families went to talk to Eleazar the
priest, to Joshua son of Nun, and to the heads of the families of
all the tribes of Israel. 2At Shiloh in the land of Canaan, the
heads of the Levite families said to them, "The LORD commanded
Moses that you give us towns where we may live and pastures
for our animals." 3So the Israelites obeyed this command of the
LORD and gave the Levite people these towns and pastures for
their own land: 4The Kohath family groups were part of the
tribe of Levi. Some of the Levites in the Kohath family groups
were from the family of Aaron the priest. To these Levites were
given thirteen towns in the areas of Judah, Simeon, and

Benjamin. [5]The other family groups of Kohath were given ten towns in the areas of Ephraim, Dan, and West Manasseh.

[6]The people from the Gershon family groups were given thirteen towns in the land of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the East Manasseh in Bashan.

[7]The family groups of Merari were given twelve towns in the areas of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

[8]So the Israelites gave the Levites these towns and the pastures around them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

[9]These are the names of the towns that came from the lands of Judah and Simeon. [10]The first choice of towns was given to the Kohath family groups of the Levites. [11]They gave them Kiriath Arba, also called Hebron, and all its pastures in the mountains of Judah. (Arba was the father of Anak.) [12]But the fields and the villages around Kiriath Arba had been given to Caleb son of Jephunneh.

[13]So they gave the city of Hebron to the descendants of Aaron (Hebron was a city of safety). They also gave them the towns of Libnah, [14]Jattir, Eshtemoa, [15]Holon, Debir, [16]Ain, Juttah, and Beth Shemesh, and all the pastures around them. Nine towns were given from these two tribes.

[17]They also gave the people of Aaron these cities that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon, Geba, [18]Anathoth, and Almon. They gave them these four towns and the pastures around them.

[19]So these thirteen towns with their pastures were given to the priests, who were from the family of Aaron.

[20]The other Kohathite family groups of the Levites were given these towns from the tribe of Ephraim: [21]Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim (which was a city of safety), Gezer, [22]Kibzaim, and Beth Horon. There were four towns and their pastures.

[23]The tribe of Dan gave them Eltekeh, Gibbethon, [24]Aijalon, and Gath Rimmon. There were four towns and their pastures.

[25]West Manasseh gave them Taanach and Gath Rimmon and the pastures around these two towns.

[26]So these ten towns and the pastures around them were given to the rest of the Kohathite family groups.

[27]The Gershonite family groups of the Levite tribe were given these towns: East Manasseh gave them Golan in Bashan, which was a city of safety, and Be Eshtarah, and the pastures around these two towns.

[28]The tribe of Issachar gave them Kishion, Daberath, [29]Jarmuth, and En Gannim, and the pastures around these four towns.

[30]The tribe of Asher gave them Mishal, Abdon, [31]Helkath, and Rehob, and the pastures around these four towns.

[32]The tribe of Naphtali gave them Kedesh in Galilee (a city of

safety), Hammoth Dor, and Kartan, and the pastures around these three towns.

33So the Gershonite family groups received thirteen towns and the pastures around them.

34The Merarite family groups (the rest of the Levites) were given these towns: The tribe of Zebulun gave them Jokneam, Kartah, 35Dimnah, and Nahalal, and the pastures around these four towns.

36The tribe of Reuben gave them Bezer, Jahaz, 37Kedemoth, and Mephaath, along with the pastures around these four towns.

38The tribe of Gad gave them Ramoth in Gilead (a city of safety), Mahanaim, 39Heshbon, and Jazer, and the pastures around these four towns.

40So the total number of towns given to the Merarite family groups was twelve.

41A total of forty-eight towns with their pastures in the land of Israel were given to the Levites. 42Each town had pastures around it.

43So the LORD gave the people all the land he had promised their ancestors. The people took the land and lived there. 44The LORD gave them peace on all sides, as he had promised their ancestors. None of their enemies defeated them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. 45He kept every promise he had made to the Israelites; each one came true.

## *Three Tribes Go Home*

22 Then Joshua called a meeting of all the people from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. 2He said to them, "You have done everything Moses, the LORD's servant, told you to do. You have also obeyed all my commands. 3For a long time you have supported the other Israelites. You have been careful to obey the commands the LORD your God gave you. 4The LORD your God promised to give the Israelites peace, and he has kept his promise. Now you may go back to your homes, to the land that Moses, the LORD's servant, gave you, on the east side of the Jordan River. 5But be careful to obey the teachings and laws Moses, the LORD's servant, gave you: to love the LORD your God and obey his commands, to continue to follow him and serve him the very best you can."

6Then Joshua said good-bye to them, and they left and went away to their homes. 7Moses had given the land of Bashan to East Manasseh. Joshua gave land on the west side of the Jordan River to West Manasseh. And he sent them to their homes and he blessed them. 8He said, "Go back to your homes and your riches. You have many animals, silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and many beautiful clothes. Also, you have taken many things

from your enemies that you should divide among yourselves."

9So the people from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh left the other Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan and went back to Gilead. It was their own land, given to them by Moses as the LORD had commanded.

10The people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh went to Geliloth, near the Jordan River in the land of Canaan. There they built a beautiful altar. 11The other Israelites still at Shiloh heard about the altar these three tribes built at the border of Canaan at Geliloth, near the Jordan River on Israel's side. 12All the Israelites became very angry at these three tribes, so they met together and decided to fight them.

13The Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest to Gilead to talk to the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. 14They also sent one leader from each of the ten tribes at Shiloh. Each of them was a leader of his family group of Israelites.

15These leaders went to Gilead to talk to the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. They said: 16"All the Israelites ask you: 'Why did you turn against the God of Israel by building an altar for yourselves? You know that this is against God's law. 17Remember what happened at Peor? We still suffer today because of that sin, for which God made many Israelites very sick. 18And now are you turning against the LORD and refusing to follow him?

"'If you don't stop what you're doing today, the LORD will be angry with everyone in Israel tomorrow. 19If your land is unclean, come over into our land where the LORD's Tent is. Share it with us. But don't turn against the LORD and us by building another altar for the LORD our God. 20Remember how Achan son of Zerah refused to obey the command about what must be completely destroyed. That one man broke God's law, but all the Israelites were punished. Achan died because of his sin, but others also died.'"

21The people from Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh answered, 22"The LORD is God of gods! The LORD is God of gods! God knows, and we want you to know also. If we have done something wrong, you may kill us. 23If we broke God's law, we ask the LORD himself to punish us. We did not build this altar to offer burnt offerings or grain and fellowship offerings.

24"We did not build it for that reason. We feared that someday your people would not accept us as part of your nation. Then they might say, 'You cannot worship the LORD, the God of Israel. 25The LORD made the Jordan River a border between us and you people of Reuben and Gad. You cannot worship the LORD.' So we feared that your children might make our children stop worshiping the LORD.

26"That is why we decided to build this altar. But it is not for

burnt offerings and sacrifices. [27]This altar is proof to you and us and to all our children who will come after us that we worship the LORD with our whole burnt offerings, grain, and fellowship offerings. This was so your children would not say to our children, 'You are not the LORD's.'

[28]"In the future if your children say that, our children can say, 'See the altar made by our ancestors. It is exactly like the LORD's altar, but we do not use it for sacrifices. It shows that we are part of Israel.'

[29]"Truly, we don't want to be against the LORD or to stop following him by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, or sacrifices. We know the only true altar to the LORD our God is in front of the Holy Tent."

[30]When Phinehas the priest and the ten leaders heard the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh, they were pleased. [31]So Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, said, "Now we know the LORD is with us and that you didn't turn against him. Now the Israelites will not be punished by the LORD."

[32]Then Phinehas and the leaders left the people of Reuben and Gad in Gilead and went back to Canaan where they told the Israelites what had happened. [33]They were pleased and thanked God. So they decided not to fight the people of Reuben and Gad and destroy those lands.

[34]And the people of Reuben and Gad named the altar Proof That We Believe the LORD Is God.

## Psalm 46:7–11

[7]The LORD All-Powerful is with us;
the God of Jacob is our defender. *Selah*

[8]Come and see what the LORD has done,
the amazing things he has done on the earth.

[9]He stops wars everywhere on the earth.
He breaks all bows and spears
and burns up the chariots with fire.

[10]God says, "Be still and know that I am God.
I will be praised in all the nations;
I will be praised throughout the earth."

11 The LORD All-Powerful is with us;
the God of Jacob is our defender. *Selah*

## Proverbs 14:12–13

12 Some people think they are doing right,
but in the end it leads to death.

13 Someone who is laughing may be sad inside,
and joy may end in sadness.

## Luke 13:1–21

### *Change Your Hearts*

13 At that time some people were there who told Jesus that
Pilate[n] had killed some people from Galilee while they were
worshiping. He mixed their blood with the blood of the animals
they were sacrificing to God. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think
this happened to them because they were more sinful than all
others from Galilee? 3 No, I tell you. But unless you change your
hearts and lives, you will be destroyed as they were! 4 What
about those eighteen people who died when the tower of Siloam
fell on them? Do you think they were more sinful than all the
others who live in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you. But unless you
change your hearts and lives, you will all be destroyed too!"

### *The Useless Tree*

6 Jesus told this story: "A man had a fig tree planted in his
vineyard. He came looking for some fruit on the tree, but he
found none. 7 So the man said to his gardener, 'I have been
looking for fruit on this tree for three years, but I never find
any. Cut it down. Why should it waste the ground?' 8 But the
servant answered, 'Master, let the tree have one more year to
produce fruit. Let me dig up the dirt around it and put on some
fertilizer. 9 If the tree produces fruit next year, good. But if not,
you can cut it down.'"

## *Jesus Heals on the Sabbath*

10 Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the
Sabbath day. 11 A woman was there who, for eighteen years, had
an evil spirit in her that made her crippled. Her back was
always bent; she could not stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw
her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are free from
your sickness.” 13 Jesus put his hands on her, and immediately
she was able to stand up straight and began praising God.

14 The synagogue leader was angry because Jesus healed on
the Sabbath day. He said to the people, “There are six days
when one has to work. So come to be healed on one of those
days, and not on the Sabbath day.”

15 The Lord answered, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you
untie your work animals and lead them to drink water every day
—even on the Sabbath day? 16 This woman that I healed, a
daughter of Abraham, has been held by Satan for eighteen
years. Surely it is not wrong for her to be freed from her
sickness on a Sabbath day!” 17 When Jesus said this, all of those
who were criticizing him were ashamed, but the entire crowd
rejoiced at all the wonderful things Jesus was doing.

## *Stories of Mustard Seed and Yeast*

18 Then Jesus said, “What is God’s kingdom like? What can I
compare it with? 19 It is like a mustard seed that a man plants in
his garden. The seed grows and becomes a tree, and the wild
birds build nests in its branches.”

20 Jesus said again, “What can I compare God’s kingdom
with? 21 It is like yeast that a woman took and hid in a large tub
of flour until it made all the dough rise.”

# April 17

# The Big Choice

*"If you don't want to serve the LORD, you must choose for yourselves today whom you will serve."*

Joshua 24:15

[God's] invitation is clear and nonnegotiable. He gives all and we give him all. Simple and absolute. He is clear in what he asks and clear in what he offers. The choice is up to us. Isn't it incredible that God leaves the choice to us? Think about it. There are many things in life we can't choose. We can't, for example, choose the weather. We can't control the economy.

We can't choose whether or not we are born with a big nose or blue eyes or a lot of hair. We can't even choose how people respond to us.

But we can choose where we spend eternity. The big choice, God leaves to us. The critical decision is ours.

That is the only decision which really matters.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## Joshua 23:1—24:33

### *The Last Words of Joshua*

23 The LORD gave Israel peace from their enemies around them.
Many years passed, and Joshua grew very old. 2He called a
meeting of all the elders, heads of families, judges, and officers
of Israel. He said, "I am now very old. 3You have seen what the
LORD has done to our enemies to help us. The LORD your God
fought for you. 4Remember that your people have been given
their land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea
in the west, the land I promised to give you. 5The LORD your God
will force out the people living there. The LORD will push them
out ahead of you. And you will own the land, as he has promised
you.

6“Be strong. You must be careful to obey everything
commanded in the Book of the Teachings of Moses. Do not stray
from it either from the left or the right. 7Don’t become friends
with the people living among us who are not Israelites. Don’t
say the names of their gods or make anyone swear by them.
Don’t serve or worship them. 8You must continue to follow the
LORD your God, as you have done in the past.
9“The LORD has forced many great and powerful nations to
leave ahead of you. No nation has been able to defeat you.
10With his help, one Israelite could defeat a thousand, because
the LORD your God fights for you, as he promised to do. 11So you
must be careful to love the LORD your God.
12“If you turn away from the way of the LORD and become
friends with these people who are not part of Israel and marry
them, 13the LORD your God will not help you defeat your
enemies. They will be like traps for you, like whips on your back
and thorns in your eyes, and none of you will be left in this good
land the LORD your God has given you.
14“It’s almost time for me to die. You know and fully believe
that the LORD has done great things for you. You know that he
has not failed to keep any of his promises. 15Every good promise
that the LORD your God made has come true, and in the same
way, his other promises will come true. He promised that evil
will come to you and that he will destroy you from this good
land that he gave you. 16This will happen if you don’t keep your
agreement with the LORD your God. If you go and serve other
gods and worship them, the LORD will become very angry with
you. Then none of you will be left in this good land he has given
you.”
24 Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem.
He called the elders, heads of families, judges, and officers of
Israel to stand before God.
2Then Joshua said to all the people, “Here’s what the LORD,
the God of Israel, says to you: ‘A long time ago your ancestors
lived on the other side of the Euphrates River. Terah, the father
of Abraham and Nahor, worshiped other gods. 3But I, the LORD,
took your ancestor Abraham from the other side of the river and
led him through the land of Canaan. And I gave him many
children, including his son Isaac. 4I gave Isaac two sons named
Jacob and Esau. I gave the land around the mountains of Edom
to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. 5Then I
sent Moses and Aaron to Egypt, where I brought many disasters
on the Egyptians. Afterwards I brought you out. 6When I
brought your ancestors out of Egypt, they came to the Red Sea,
and the Egyptians chased them with chariots and men on
horses. 7So the people called out to the LORD. And I brought
darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea to
cover them. You yourselves saw what I did to the army of Egypt.

After that, you lived in the desert for a long time.
8"'Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, east of the
Jordan River. They fought against you, but I handed them over
to you. I destroyed them before you, and you took control of
that land. 9But the king of Moab, Balak son of Zippor, prepared
to fight against the Israelites. The king sent for Balaam son of
Beor to curse you, 10but I refused to listen to Balaam. So he
asked for good things to happen to you! I saved you and
brought you out of his power.
11"'Then you crossed the Jordan River and came to Jericho,
where the people of Jericho fought against you. Also, the
Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites,
and Jebusites fought against you. But I handed them over to
you. 12I sent terror ahead of you to force out two Amorite kings.
You took the land without using swords and bows. 13I gave you
that land where you did not have to work. I gave you cities that
you did not have to build. And now you live in that land and in
those cities, and you eat from vineyards and olive trees that you
did not plant.'"
14Then Joshua said to the people, "Now respect the LORD and
serve him fully and sincerely. Throw away the gods that your
ancestors worshiped on the other side of the Euphrates River
and in Egypt. Serve the LORD. 15But if you don't want to serve
the LORD, you must choose for yourselves today whom you will
serve. You may serve the gods that your ancestors worshiped
when they lived on the other side of the Euphrates River, or you
may serve the gods of the Amorites who lived in this land. As for
me and my family, we will serve the LORD."
16Then the people answered, "We will never stop following
the LORD to serve other gods! 17It was the LORD our God who
brought our ancestors out of Egypt. We were slaves in that land,
but the LORD did great things for us there. He brought us out
and protected us while we traveled through other lands. 18Then
he forced out all the people living in these lands, even the
Amorites. So we will serve the LORD, because he is our God."
19Then Joshua said, "You are not able to serve the LORD,
because he is a holy God and a jealous God. If you turn against
him and sin, he will not forgive you. 20If you leave the LORD and
serve other gods, he will send you great trouble. The LORD may
have been good to you, but if you turn against him, he will
destroy you."
21But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD."
22Then Joshua said, "You are your own witnesses that you
have chosen to serve the LORD."
The people said, "Yes, we are."
23Then Joshua said, "Now throw away the gods that you
have. Love the LORD, the God of Israel, with all your heart."
24Then the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our
God, and we will obey him."

25 On that day at Shechem Joshua made an agreement for the
people. He made rules and laws for them to follow. 26 Joshua
wrote these things in the Book of the Teachings of God. Then he
took a large stone and set it up under the oak tree near the
LORD's Holy Tent.
27 Joshua said to all the people, "See this stone! It will remind
you of what we did today. It was here the LORD spoke to us
today. It will remind you of what happened so you will not turn
against your God."

### *Joshua Dies*

28 Then Joshua sent the people back to their land.
29 After that, Joshua son of Nun died at the age of one
hundred ten. 30 They buried him in his own land at Timnath
Serah, in the mountains of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.
31 The Israelites served the LORD during the lifetime of Joshua
and during the lifetimes of the elders who lived after Joshua
who had seen what the LORD had done for Israel.

### *Joseph Comes Home*

32 When the Israelites left Egypt, they carried the bones of
Joseph with them. They buried them at Shechem, in the land
Jacob had bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of
Hamor (Hamor was the father of Shechem). This land now
belonged to Joseph's children.
33 And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah in
the mountains of Ephraim, which had been given to Eleazar's
son Phinehas.

## Psalm 47:1–9

### *God, the King of the World*

**For the director of music. A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

47 Clap your hands, all you people. Shout to God with joy.

2 The LORD Most High is wonderful.
He is the great King over all the earth!

3 He defeated nations for us
and put them under our control.

4 He chose the land we would inherit.
We are the children of Jacob, whom he loved.

*Selah*

5 God has risen with a shout of joy;
the LORD has risen as the trumpets sounded.

6 Sing praises to God. Sing praises.
Sing praises to our King. Sing praises.

7 God is King of all the earth,
so sing a song of praise to him.

8 God is King over the nations.
God sits on his holy throne.

9 The leaders of the nations meet
with the people of the God of Abraham,

because the leaders of the earth belong to God.
He is supreme.

## Proverbs 14:14

14 Evil people will be paid back for their evil ways,
and good people will be rewarded for their good ones.

## Luke 13:22–35

## *The Narrow Door*

22 Jesus was teaching in every town and village as he traveled
toward Jerusalem. 23 Someone said to Jesus, “Lord, will only a
few people be saved?”

Jesus said, 24 “Try hard to enter through the narrow door,
because many people will try to enter there, but they will not be
able. 25 When the owner of the house gets up and closes the
door, you can stand outside and knock on the door and say, ‘Sir,
open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or
where you come from.’ 26 Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank
with you, and you taught in the streets of our town.’ 27 But he
will say to you, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Go
away from me, all you who do evil!’ 28 You will cry and grind
your teeth with pain when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and
all the prophets in God’s kingdom, but you yourselves thrown
outside. 29 People will come from the east, west, north, and
south and will sit down at the table in the kingdom of God.
30 There are those who are last now who will be first in the
future. And there are those who are first now who will be last in
the future.”

## *Jesus Will Die in Jerusalem*

31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Go
away from here! Herod wants to kill you!”

32 Jesus said to them, “Go tell that fox Herod, ‘Today and
tomorrow I am forcing demons out and healing people. Then, on
the third day, I will reach my goal.’ 33 Yet I must be on my way
today and tomorrow and the next day. Surely it cannot be right
for a prophet to be killed anywhere except in Jerusalem.

34 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone to
death those who are sent to you. Many times I wanted to gather
your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but
you would not let me. 35 Now your house is left completely
empty. I tell you, you will not see me until that time when you
will say, ‘God bless the One who comes in the name of the
Lord.’”[n]

# April 18

## Know Your Part

*"All who make themselves great will be made humble, but those who make themselves humble will be made great."*

Luke 14:11

True humility is not thinking lowly of yourself but thinking accurately of yourself. The humble heart does not say, "I can't do anything." But rather, "I can't do everything. I know my part and am happy to do it."

When Paul writes "give more honor to others than to yourselves" (Philippians 2:3), he uses a verb that means "to calculate," "to reckon." The word implies a conscious judgment resting on carefully weighed facts. To give more honor to others than to yourself, then, is not to say you have no place; it is to say that you know your place. "Do not think you are better than you are. You must decide what you really are by the amount of faith God has given you" (Romans 12:3).

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Judges 1:1—3:6

### *Judah Fights the Canaanites*

1 After Joshua died, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Who will be
first to go and fight for us against the Canaanites?"

2 The LORD said to them, "The tribe of Judah will go. I have
handed the land over to them."

3 The men of Judah said to the men of Simeon, their relatives,
"Come and help us fight the Canaanites for our land. If you do,
we will go and help you fight for your land." So the men of
Simeon went with them.

4 When Judah attacked, the LORD handed over the Canaanites
and the Perizzites to them, and they defeated ten thousand men
at the city of Bezek. 5 There they found Adoni-Bezek, the ruler of

the city, and fought him. The men of Judah defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites, [6]but Adoni-Bezek ran away. The men of Judah chased him, and when they caught him, they cut off his thumbs and big toes.

[7]Adoni-Bezek said, “Seventy kings whose thumbs and big toes had been cut off used to eat scraps that fell from my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them.” The men of Judah took Adoni-Bezek to Jerusalem, and he died there.

[8]Then the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it. They attacked with their swords and burned the city.

[9]Later, they went down to fight the Canaanites who lived in the mountains, in the dry country to the south, and in the western hills. [10]The men of Judah went to fight against the Canaanites in the city of Hebron (which used to be called Kiriath Arba). And they defeated Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

## *Caleb and His Daughter*

[11]Then they left there and went to fight against the people living in Debir. (In the past Debir had been called Kiriath Sepher.) [12]Before attacking the city, Caleb said, “I will give Acsah, my daughter, as a wife to the man who attacks and captures the city of Kiriath Sepher.” [13]Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, captured the city, so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to Othniel to be his wife. [14]When Acsah came to Othniel, she told him to ask her father for a field. When she got down from her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What do you want?”

[15]Acsah answered him, “Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in southern Canaan, also give me springs of water.” So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

## *Fights with the Canaanites*

[16]The Kenite people, who were from the family of Moses’ father-in-law, left Jericho, the city of palm trees. They went with the men of Judah to the Desert of Judah to live with them there in southern Judah near the city of Arad.

[17]The men of Judah and the men of Simeon, their relatives, defeated the Canaanites who lived in Zephath. They completely destroyed the city, so they called it Hormah.[n] [18]The men of Judah captured Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, and the lands around them.

[19]The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took the land in the mountains, but they could not force out the people living on the plain, because they had iron chariots. [20]As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, and Caleb forced out the three sons of Anak. [21]But the people of Benjamin could not

make the Jebusite people leave Jerusalem. Since that time the Jebusites have lived with the Benjaminites in Jerusalem.

22The men of Joseph went to fight against the city of Bethel, and the LORD was with them. 23They sent some spies to Bethel (which used to be called Luz). 24The spies saw a man coming out of the city and said to him, “Show us a way into the city, and we will be kind to you.” 25So the man showed them the way into the city. The men of Joseph attacked with swords the people in Bethel, but they let the man and his family go free. 26He went to the land where the Hittites lived and built a city. He named it Luz, which it is called even today.

27There were Canaanites living in the cities of Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and the small towns around them. The people of Manasseh did not force those people out of their towns, because the Canaanites were determined to stay there. 28Later, the Israelites grew strong and forced the Canaanites to work as slaves, but they did not make all the Canaanites leave their land. 29The people of Ephraim did not force out all of the Canaanites living in Gezer. So the Canaanites continued to live in Gezer with the people of Ephraim. 30The people of Zebulun did not force out the Canaanites living in the cities of Kitron and Nahalol. They stayed and lived with the people of Zebulun, but Zebulun made them work as slaves.

31The people of Asher did not force the Canaanites from the cities of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek, and Rehob. 32Since the people of Asher did not force them out, the Canaanites continued to live with them. 33The people of Naphtali did not force out the people of the cities of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath. So they continued to live with the Canaanites in those cities, and the Canaanites worked as slaves. 34The Amorites forced the Danites back into the mountains and would not let them come down to live in the plain. 35The Amorites were determined to stay in Mount Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim. But when the Israelites grew stronger, they made the Amorites work as slaves. 36The land of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and beyond.

## *The Angel of the Lord at Bokim*

2 The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said,
“I brought you up from Egypt and led you to the land I promised
to give your ancestors. I said, ‘I will never break my agreement
with you. 2But you must not make an agreement with the people
who live in this land. You must destroy their altars.’ But you did
not obey me. How could you do this? 3Now I tell you, ‘I will not
force out the people in this land. They will be your enemies, and
their gods will be a trap for you.’”

4After the angel gave Israel this message from the LORD, they
cried loudly. 5So they named the place Bokim.[n] There they
offered sacrifices to the LORD.

## *Joshua Dies*

6Then Joshua sent the people back to their land. 7The people
served the LORD during the lifetime of Joshua and during the
lifetimes of the elders who lived after Joshua and who had seen
what great things the LORD had done for Israel. 8Joshua son of
Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred
ten. 9They buried him in his own land at Timnath Serah in the
mountains of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

## *The People Disobey*

10After those people had died, their children grew up and did
not know the LORD or what he had done for Israel. 11So they did
what the LORD said was wrong, and they worshiped the Baal
idols. 12They quit following the LORD, the God of their ancestors
who had brought them out of Egypt. They began to worship the
gods of the people who lived around them, and that made the
LORD angry. 13The Israelites quit following the LORD and
worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth. 14The LORD was angry with the
people of Israel, so he handed them over to robbers who took
their possessions. He let their enemies who lived around them
defeat them; they could not protect themselves. 15When the
Israelites went out to fight, they always lost, because the LORD
was not with them. The LORD had sworn to them this would
happen. So the Israelites suffered very much.

## *God Chooses Judges*

16Then the LORD chose leaders called judges,[n] who saved the
Israelites from the robbers. 17But the Israelites did not listen to
their judges. They were not faithful to God but worshiped other
gods instead. Their ancestors had obeyed the LORD's commands,
but they quickly turned away and did not obey. 18When their
enemies hurt them, the Israelites cried for help. So the LORD felt
sorry for them and sent judges to save them from their enemies.
The LORD was with those judges all their lives. 19But when the
judges died, the Israelites again sinned and worshiped other
gods. They became worse than their ancestors. The Israelites
were very stubborn and refused to change their evil ways.

20So the LORD became angry with the Israelites. He said,
"These people have broken the agreement I made with their
ancestors. They have not listened to me. 21I will no longer

defeat the nations who were left when Joshua died. 22I will use
them to test Israel, to see if Israel will keep the LORD's
commands as their ancestors did." 23In the past the LORD had
permitted those nations to stay in the land. He did not quickly
force them out or help Joshua's army defeat them.
3 These are the nations the LORD did not force to leave. He
wanted to test the Israelites who had not fought in the wars of
Canaan. 2(The only reason the LORD left those nations in the
land was to teach the descendants of the Israelites who had not
fought in those wars how to fight.) 3These are the nations: the
five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the people of
Sidon, and the Hivites who lived in the Lebanon mountains from
Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. 4Those nations were in
the land to test the Israelites—to see if they would obey the
commands the LORD had given to their ancestors by Moses.
5The people of Israel lived with the Canaanites, Hittites,
Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 6The Israelites
began to marry the daughters of those people, and they allowed
their daughters to marry the sons of those people. Israel also
served their gods.

## Psalm 48:1–7

### *Jerusalem, the City of God*

**A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

48 The LORD is great; he should be praised
in the city of our God, on his holy mountain.

2It is high and beautiful
and brings joy to the whole world.

Mount Zion is like the high mountains of the north;
it is the city of the Great King.

3God is within its palaces;
he is known as its defender.

4 Kings joined together
and came to attack the city.

5 But when they saw it, they were amazed.
They ran away in fear.

6 Fear took hold of them;
they hurt like a woman having a baby.

7 You destroyed the large trading ships
with an east wind.

## Proverbs 14:15–17

15 Fools will believe anything,
but the wise think about what they do.

16 Wise people are careful and stay out of trouble,
but fools are careless and quick to act.

17 Someone with a quick temper does foolish things,
but someone with understanding remains calm.

## Luke 14:1–24

### *Healing on the Sabbath*

14 On a Sabbath day, when Jesus went to eat at the home of a
leading Pharisee, the people were watching Jesus very closely.
2 And in front of him was a man with dropsy.[n] 3 Jesus said to the
Pharisees and experts on the law, “Is it right or wrong to heal
on the Sabbath day?” 4 But they would not answer his question.
So Jesus took the man, healed him, and sent him away. 5 Jesus
said to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, “If your child[n] or

ox falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not pull him out quickly?” 6And they could not answer him.

## *Don’t Make Yourself Important*

7When Jesus noticed that some of the guests were choosing the best places to sit, he told this story: 8“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, don’t take the most important seat, because someone more important than you may have been invited. 9The host, who invited both of you, will come to you and say, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then you will be embarrassed and will have to move to the last place. 10So when you are invited, go sit in a seat that is not important. When the host comes to you, he may say, ‘Friend, move up here to a more important place.’ Then all the other guests will respect you. 11All who make themselves great will be made humble, but those who make themselves humble will be made great.”

## *You Will Be Rewarded*

12Then Jesus said to the man who had invited him, “When you give a lunch or a dinner, don’t invite only your friends, your family, your other relatives, and your rich neighbors. At another time they will invite you to eat with them, and you will be repaid. 13Instead, when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14Then you will be blessed, because they have nothing and cannot pay you back. But you will be repaid when the good people rise from the dead.”

## *A Story About a Big Banquet*

15One of those at the table with Jesus heard these things and said to him, “Blessed are the people who will share in the meal in God’s kingdom.”

16Jesus said to him, “A man gave a big banquet and invited many people. 17When it was time to eat, the man sent his servant to tell the guests, ‘Come. Everything is ready.’

18“But all the guests made excuses. The first one said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go look at it. Please excuse me.’ 19Another said, ‘I have just bought five pairs of oxen; I must go and try them. Please excuse me.’ 20A third person said, ‘I just got married; I can’t come.’ 21So the servant returned and told his master what had happened. Then the master became angry and said, ‘Go at once into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ 22Later the servant said to him, ‘Master, I did what you commanded, but we still have room.’ 23The master said to the servant, ‘Go

out to the roads and country lanes, and urge the people there to
come so my house will be full. [24]I tell you, none of those whom I
invited first will eat with me.’”

# April 19

## It’s Your Choice

*“Whoever is not willing to carry his cross and follow me cannot be my follower.”*

Luke 14:27

On one side stands the crowd. Jeering. Baiting. Demanding. On the other stands a peasant.
Swollen lips. Lumpy eye. Lofty promise.
One promises acceptance, the other a cross.
One offers flesh and flash, the other offers faith.
The crowd challenges, “Follow us and fit in.”
Jesus promises, “Follow me and stand out.”
They promise to please. God promises to save.
God looks at you and asks, “Which will be your choice?”

from *A Gentle Thunder*

### Judges 3:7—4:24

#### *Othniel, the First Judge*

7 The Israelites did what the LORD said was wrong. They
forgot about the LORD their God and served the idols of Baal and
Asherah. 8 So the LORD was angry with Israel and allowed
Cushan-Rishathaim king of Northwest Mesopotamia to rule over
the Israelites for eight years. 9 When Israel cried to the LORD, the
LORD sent someone to save them. Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s
younger brother, saved the Israelites. 10 The Spirit of the LORD
entered Othniel, and he became Israel’s judge. When he went to
war, the LORD handed over to him Cushan-Rishathaim king of
Northwest Mesopotamia. 11 So the land was at peace for forty
years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

#### *Ehud, the Judge*

[12]Again the people of Israel did what the LORD said was
wrong. So the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power to defeat
Israel because of the evil Israel did. [13]Eglon got the Ammonites
and the Amalekites to join him. Then he attacked Israel and
took Jericho, the city of palm trees. [14]So the people of Israel
were ruled by Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.

[15]When the people cried to the LORD, he sent someone to
save them. He was Ehud, son of Gera from the people of
Benjamin, who was left-handed. Israel sent Ehud to give Eglon
king of Moab the payment he demanded. [16]Ehud made himself a
sword with two edges, about eighteen inches long, and he tied
it to his right hip under his clothes. [17]Ehud gave Eglon king of
Moab the payment he demanded. Now Eglon was a very fat
man. [18]After he had given Eglon the payment, Ehud sent away
the people who had carried it. [19]When he passed the statues
near Gilgal, he turned around and said to Eglon, “I have a
secret message for you, King Eglon.”

The king said, “Be quiet!” Then he sent all of his servants out
of the room. [20]Ehud went to King Eglon, as he was sitting alone
in the room above his summer palace.

Ehud said, “I have a message from God for you.” As the king
stood up from his chair, [21]Ehud reached with his left hand and
took out the sword that was tied to his right hip. Then he
stabbed the sword deep into the king’s belly! [22]Even the handle
sank in, and the blade came out his back. The king’s fat covered
the whole sword, so Ehud left the sword in Eglon. [23]Then he
went out of the room and closed and locked the doors behind
him.

[24]When the servants returned just after Ehud left, they found
the doors to the room locked. So they thought the king was
relieving himself. [25]They waited for a long time. Finally they
became worried because he still had not opened the doors. So
they got the key and unlocked them and saw their king lying
dead on the floor!

[26]While the servants were waiting, Ehud had escaped. He
passed by the statues and went to Seirah. [27]When he reached
the mountains of Ephraim he blew the trumpet. The people of
Israel heard it and went down from the hills with Ehud leading
them.

[28]He said to them, “Follow me! The LORD has helped you to
defeat your enemies, the Moabites.” So Israel followed Ehud
and captured the crossings of the Jordan River. They did not
allow the Moabites to cross the Jordan River. [29]Israel killed
about ten thousand strong and able men from Moab; not one
escaped. [30]So that day Moab was forced to be under the rule of
Israel, and there was peace in the land for eighty years.

## *Shamgar, the Judge*

31 After Ehud, Shamgar son of Anath saved Israel. Shamgar
killed six hundred Philistines with a sharp stick used to guide
oxen.

## *Deborah, the Woman Judge*

4 After Ehud died, the Israelites again did what the LORD said
was wrong. 2 So he let Jabin, a king of Canaan who ruled in the
city of Hazor, defeat Israel. Sisera, who lived in Harosheth
Haggoyim, was the commander of Jabin's army. 3 Because he
had nine hundred iron chariots and was very cruel to the people
of Israel for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.

4 A prophetess named Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was
judge of Israel at that time. 5 Deborah would sit under the Palm
Tree of Deborah, which was between the cities of Ramah and
Bethel, in the mountains of Ephraim. And the people of Israel
would come to her to settle their arguments.

6 Deborah sent a message to Barak son of Abinoam. Barak
lived in the city of Kedesh, which is in the area of Naphtali.
Deborah said to Barak, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands
you: 'Go and gather ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun
and lead them to Mount Tabor. 7 I will make Sisera, the
commander of Jabin's army, and his chariots, and his army meet
you at the Kishon River. I will hand Sisera over to you.'"

8 Then Barak said to Deborah, "I will go if you will go with
me, but if you won't go with me, I won't go."

9 "Of course I will go with you," Deborah answered, "but you
will not get credit for the victory. The LORD will let a woman
defeat Sisera." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. 10 At
Kedesh, Barak called the people of Zebulun and Naphtali
together. From them, he gathered ten thousand men to follow
him, and Deborah went with him also.

11 Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the
descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law. Heber had put up
his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim, near Kedesh.

12 When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone
to Mount Tabor, 13 Sisera gathered his nine hundred iron
chariots and all the men with him, from Harosheth Haggoyim to
the Kishon River.

14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get up! Today is the day the
LORD will hand over Sisera. The LORD has already cleared the
way for you." So Barak led ten thousand men down Mount
Tabor. 15 As Barak approached, the LORD confused Sisera and his
army and chariots. The LORD defeated them with the sword, but
Sisera left his chariot and ran away on foot. 16 Barak and his
men chased Sisera's chariots and army to Harosheth Haggoyim.

With their swords they killed all of Sisera's men; not one of them was left alive.

17But Sisera himself ran away to the tent where Jael lived. She was the wife of Heber, one of the Kenite family groups. Heber's family was at peace with Jabin king of Hazor. 18Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come into my tent, master! Come in. Don't be afraid." So Sisera went into Jael's tent, and she covered him with a rug.

19Sisera said to Jael, "I am thirsty. Please give me some water to drink." So she opened a leather bag of milk and gave him a drink. Then she covered him up.

20He said to her, "Go stand at the entrance to the tent. If anyone comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'"

21But Jael, the wife of Heber, took a tent peg and a hammer and quietly went to Sisera. Since he was very tired, he was in a deep sleep. She hammered the tent peg through the side of Sisera's head and into the ground. And so Sisera died.

22At that very moment Barak came by Jael's tent, chasing Sisera. Jael went out to meet him and said, "Come. I will show you the man you are looking for." So Barak entered her tent, and there Sisera lay dead, with the tent peg in his head.

23On that day God defeated Jabin king of Canaan in the sight of Israel.

24Israel became stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan until finally they destroyed him.

## Psalm 48:8–14

8First we heard
and now we have seen

that God will always keep his city safe.
It is the city of the LORD All-Powerful,
the city of our God. *Selah*

9God, we come into your Temple
to think about your love.

10God, your name is known everywhere;
all over the earth people praise you.
Your right hand is full of goodness.

[11]Mount Zion is happy
and all the towns of Judah rejoice,

because your decisions are fair.

[12]Walk around Jerusalem
and count its towers.

[13]Notice how strong they are.
Look at the palaces.
Then you can tell your children about them.

[14]This God is our God forever and ever.
He will guide us from now on.

## Proverbs 14:18–19

[18]Fools are rewarded with nothing but more foolishness,
but the wise are rewarded with knowledge.

[19]Evil people will bow down to those who are good;
the wicked will bow down at the door of those who do right.

## Luke 14:25–35

### *The Cost of Being Jesus' Follower*

[25]Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and said to them, [26]"If anyone comes to me but loves his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters—or even life—more than me, he cannot be my follower. [27]Whoever is not willing to carry his cross and follow me cannot be my follower. [28]If you want to build a tower, you first sit down and decide how much it

will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job. [29]If you don't, you might lay the foundation, but you would not be able to finish. Then all who would see it would make fun of you, [30]saying, 'This person began to build but was not able to finish.'

[31]"If a king is going to fight another king, first he will sit down and plan. He will decide if he and his ten thousand soldiers can defeat the other king who has twenty thousand soldiers. [32]If he can't, then while the other king is still far away, he will send some people to speak to him and ask for peace. [33]In the same way, you must give up everything you have to be my follower.

## *Don't Lose Your Influence*

[34]"Salt is good, but if it loses its salty taste, you cannot make it salty again. [35]It is no good for the soil or for manure; it is thrown away.

"Let those with ears use them and listen."

# April 20

## What Heaven Holds

*"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God when one sinner changes his heart and life."*

Luke 15:10

why do Jesus and his angels rejoice over one repenting sinner? Can they see something we can't? Do they know something we don't? Absolutely. They know what heaven holds …

Heaven is populated by those who let God change them. Arguments will cease, for jealousy won't exist. Suspicions won't surface, for there will be no secrets. Every sin is gone. Every insecurity is forgotten. Every fear is past. Pure wheat. No weeds. Pure gold. No alloy. Pure love. No lust. Pure hope. No fear. No wonder the angels rejoice when one sinner repents; they know another work of art will soon grace the gallery of God. They know what heaven holds.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Judges 5:1—6:32

### *The Song of Deborah*

5 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:

2 "The leaders led Israel.
The people volunteered to go to battle.
Praise the LORD!

3 Listen, kings.
Pay attention, rulers!

I myself will sing to the LORD.
I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel.

4 “LORD, when you came from Edom,
when you marched from the land of Edom,
the earth shook,
the skies rained,
and the clouds dropped water.

5 The mountains shook before the LORD, the God of Mount Sinai,
before the LORD, the God of Israel!

6 “In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, the main roads were empty.
Travelers went on the back roads.

7 There were no warriors in Israel
until I, Deborah, arose,
until I arose to be a mother to Israel.

8 At that time they chose to follow new gods.
Because of this, enemies fought us at our city gates.

No one could find a shield or a spear
among the forty thousand people of Israel.

9 My heart is with the commanders of Israel.
They volunteered freely from among the people.

Praise the LORD!

10 “You who ride on white donkeys
and sit on saddle blankets,
and you who walk along the road, listen!

11 Listen to the sound of the singers

at the watering holes.

There they tell about the victories of the LORD,
the victories of the Lord's warriors in Israel.

Then the LORD's people went down to the city gates.

12 "Wake up, wake up, Deborah!
Wake up, wake up, sing a song!

Get up, Barak!
Go capture your enemies, son of Abinoam!

13 "Then those who were left came down to the important leaders.
The LORD's people came down to me with strong men.

14 They came from Ephraim in the mountains of Amalek.
Benjamin was among the people who followed you.

From the family group of Makir, the commanders came down.
And from Zebulun came those who lead.

15 The princes of Issachar were with Deborah.
The people of Issachar were loyal to Barak
and followed him into the valley.

The Reubenites thought hard
about what they would do.

16 Why did you stay by the sheepfold?
Was it to hear the music played for your sheep?

The Reubenites thought hard
about what they would do.

17 The people of Gilead stayed east of the Jordan River.
People of Dan, why did you stay by the ships?

The people of Asher stayed at the seashore,
at their safe harbors.

18 But the people of Zebulun risked their lives,
as did the people of Naphtali on the battlefield.

19 "The kings came, and they fought.
At that time the kings of Canaan fought

at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo.
But they took away no silver or possessions of Israel.

20 The stars fought from heaven;
from their paths, they fought Sisera.

21 The Kishon River swept Sisera's men away,
that old river, the Kishon River.

March on, my soul, with strength!

22 Then the horses' hoofs beat the ground.
Galloping, galloping go Sisera's mighty horses.

23 'May the town of Meroz be cursed,' said the angel of the LORD.
'Bitterly curse its people,

because they did not come to help the LORD.
They did not fight the strong enemy.'

24 "May Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite,
be blessed above all women who live in tents.

25 Sisera asked for water,
but Jael gave him milk.

In a bowl fit for a ruler,
she brought him cream.

26 Jael reached out and took the tent peg.
Her right hand reached for the workman's hammer.

She hit Sisera! She smashed his head!
She crushed and pierced the side of his head!

27 At Jael's feet he sank.
He fell, and he lay there.

At her feet he sank. He fell.
Where Sisera sank, there he fell, dead!

28 "Sisera's mother looked out through the window.
She looked through the curtains and cried out,

'Why is Sisera's chariot so late in coming?
Why are sounds of his chariots' horses delayed?'

29 The wisest of her servant ladies answer her,
and Sisera's mother says to herself,

30 'Surely they are robbing the people they defeated!
Surely they are dividing those things among themselves!

Each soldier is given a girl or two.
Maybe Sisera is taking pieces of dyed cloth.

Maybe they are even taking
pieces of dyed, embroidered cloth for the necks of the victors!'

31 “Let all your enemies die this way, LORD!
But let all the people who love you
be as strong as the rising sun!”

Then there was peace in the land for forty years.

## *The Midianites Attack Israel*

6 Again the Israelites did what the LORD said was wrong. So for
seven years the LORD handed them over to Midian. 2 Because the
Midianites were very powerful and were cruel to Israel, the
Israelites made hiding places in the mountains, in caves, and in
safe places. 3 Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the
Midianites, Amalekites, and other peoples from the east would
come and attack them. 4 They camped in the land and destroyed
the crops that the Israelites had planted as far away as Gaza.
They left nothing for Israel to eat, and no sheep, cattle, or
donkeys. 5 The Midianites came with their tents and their
animals like swarms of locusts to ruin the land. There were so
many people and camels they could not be counted. 6 Israel
became very poor because of the Midianites, so they cried out
to the LORD.
7 When the Israelites cried out to the LORD against the
Midianites, 8 the LORD sent a prophet to them. He said, “This is
what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you out of
Egypt, the land of slavery. 9 I saved you from the Egyptians and
from all those who were against you. I forced the Canaanites
out of their land and gave it to you. 10 Then I said to you, ‘I am
the LORD your God. Live in the land of the Amorites, but do not
worship their gods.’ But you did not obey me.”

## *The Angel of the Lord Visits Gideon*

11 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak
tree at Ophrah that belonged to Joash, one of the Abiezrite
people. Gideon, Joash’s son, was separating some wheat from
the chaff in a winepress to keep the wheat from the Midianites.
12 The angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon and said, “The LORD
is with you, mighty warrior!”
13 Then Gideon said, “Sir, if the LORD is with us, why are we
having so much trouble? Where are the miracles our ancestors
told us he did when the LORD brought them out of Egypt? But
now he has left us and has handed us over to the Midianites.”
14 The LORD turned to Gideon and said, “Go with your
strength and save Israel from the Midianites. I am the one who
is sending you.”
15 But Gideon answered, “Lord, how can I save Israel? My

family group is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family."

16 The LORD answered him, "I will be with you. It will seem as if the Midianites you are fighting are only one man."

17 Then Gideon said to the LORD, "If you are pleased with me, give me proof that it is really you talking with me. 18 Please wait here until I come back to you. Let me bring my offering and set it in front of you."

And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return."

19 So Gideon went in and cooked a young goat, and with twenty quarts of flour, made bread without yeast. Then he put the meat into a basket and the broth into a pot. He brought them out and gave them to the angel under the oak tree.

20 The angel of God said to Gideon, "Put the meat and the bread without yeast on that rock over there. Then pour the broth on them." And Gideon did as he was told. 21 The angel of the LORD touched the meat and the bread with the end of the stick that was in his hand. Then fire jumped up from the rock and completely burned up the meat and the bread! And the angel of the LORD disappeared! 22 Then Gideon understood he had been talking to the angel of the LORD. So Gideon cried out, "Lord God! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"

23 But the LORD said to Gideon, "Calm down! Don't be afraid! You will not die!"

24 So Gideon built an altar there to worship the LORD and named it The LORD Is Peace. It still stands at Ophrah, where the Abiezrites live.

## *Gideon Tears Down the Altar of Baal*

25 That same night the LORD said to Gideon, "Take the bull that belongs to your father and a second bull seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah idol beside it. 26 Then build an altar to the LORD your God with its stones in the right order on this high ground. Kill and burn a second bull on this altar, using the wood from the Asherah idol."

27 So Gideon got ten of his servants and did what the LORD had told him to do. But Gideon was afraid that his family and the men of the city might see him, so he did it at night, not in the daytime.

28 When the men of the city got up the next morning, they saw that the altar for Baal had been destroyed and that the Asherah idol beside it had been cut down! They also saw the altar Gideon had built and the second bull that had been sacrificed on it. 29 The men of the city asked each other, "Who did this?"

After they asked many questions, someone told them, "Gideon son of Joash did this."

30 So they said to Joash, “Bring your son out. He has pulled
down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah idol beside it.
He must die!”
31 But Joash said to the angry crowd around him, “Are you
going to take Baal’s side? Are you going to defend him? Anyone
who takes Baal’s side will be killed by morning! If Baal is a god,
let him fight for himself. It’s his altar that has been pulled
down.” 32 So on that day Gideon got the name Jerub-Baal, which
means “let Baal fight against him,” because Gideon pulled down
Baal’s altar.

## Psalm 49:1–9

### *Trusting Money Is Foolish*

**For the director of music. A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

49 Listen to this, all you nations;
listen, all you who live on earth.

2 Listen, both great and small,
rich and poor together.

3 What I say is wise,
and my heart speaks with understanding.

4 I will pay attention to a wise saying;
I will explain my riddle on the harp.

5 Why should I be afraid of bad days?
Why should I fear when evil people surround me?

6 They trust in their money
and brag about their riches.

7 No one can buy back the life of another.

No one can pay God for his own life,

8because the price of a life is high.
No payment is ever enough.

9Do people live forever?
Don't they all face death?

## Proverbs 14:20–21

20The poor are rejected, even by their neighbors,
but the rich have many friends.

21It is a sin to hate your neighbor,
but being kind to the needy brings happiness.

## Luke 15:1–10

### *A Lost Sheep, a Lost Coin*

15 The tax collectors and sinners all came to listen to Jesus. 2But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to complain: "Look, this man welcomes sinners and even eats with them."

3Then Jesus told them this story: 4"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep but loses one of them. Then he will leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the open field and go out and look for the lost sheep until he finds it. 5And when he finds it, he happily puts it on his shoulders 6and goes home. He calls to his friends and neighbors and says, 'Be happy with me because I found my lost sheep.' 7In the same way, I tell you there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes his heart and life, than over ninety-nine good people who don't need to change.

8"Suppose a woman has ten silver coins,[n] but loses one. She will light a lamp, sweep the house, and look carefully for the coin until she finds it. 9And when she finds it, she will call her friends and neighbors and say, 'Be happy with me because I have found the coin that I lost.' 10In the same way, there is joy

in the presence of the angels of God when one sinner changes his heart and life."

# April 21

# Stubborn Love

*"My son was dead, but now he is alive again! He was lost, but now he is found!"*

Luke 15:24

Jesus … summarized God's stubborn love with a parable. He told about a teenager who decided that life at the farm was too slow for his tastes. So with pockets full of inheritance money, he set out to find the big time. What he found instead were hangovers, fair-weather friends, and long unemployment lines. When he had had just about as much of the pig's life as he could take, he swallowed his pride, dug his hands deep into his empty pockets, and began the long walk home; all the while rehearsing a speech that he planned to give to his father.

He never used it. Just when he got to the top of the hill, his father, who'd been waiting at the gate, saw him. The boy's words of apology were quickly muffled by the father's words of forgiveness …

If you ever wonder how God can use you to make a difference in your world, … look at the forgiveness found in those open arms and take courage.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## Judges 6:33—8:35

### *Gideon Defeats Midian*

33 All the Midianites, the Amalekites, and other peoples from
the east joined together and came across the Jordan River and
camped in the Valley of Jezreel. 34 But the Spirit of the LORD
entered Gideon, and he blew a trumpet to call the Abiezrites to
follow him. 35 He sent messengers to all of Manasseh, calling
them to follow him. He also sent messengers to the people of
Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. So they also went up to meet

Gideon and his men.

36Then Gideon said to God, “You said you would help me
save Israel. 37I will put some wool on the threshing floor. If
there is dew only on the wool but all of the ground is dry, then I
will know that you will use me to save Israel, as you said.”
38And that is just what happened. When Gideon got up early the
next morning and squeezed the wool, he got a full bowl of water
from it.

39Then Gideon said to God, “Don’t be angry with me if I ask
just one more thing. Please let me make one more test. Let only
the wool be dry while the ground around it gets wet with dew.”
40That night God did that very thing. Just the wool was dry, but
the ground around it was wet with dew.

7 Early in the morning Jerub-Baal (also called Gideon) and all
his men set up their camp at the spring of Harod. The
Midianites were camped north of them in the valley at the
bottom of the hill called Moreh. 2Then the LORD said to Gideon,
“You have too many men to defeat the Midianites. I don’t want
the Israelites to brag that they saved themselves. 3So now,
announce to the people, ‘Anyone who is afraid may leave Mount
Gilead and go back home.’” So twenty-two thousand men
returned home, but ten thousand remained.

4Then the LORD said to Gideon, “There are still too many men.
Take the men down to the water, and I will test them for you
there. If I say, ‘This man will go with you, he will go. But if I say,
‘That one will not go with you,’ he will not go.”

5So Gideon led the men down to the water. There the LORD
said to him, “Separate them into those who drink water by
lapping it up like a dog and those who bend down to drink.”
6There were three hundred men who used their hands to bring
water to their mouths, lapping it as a dog does. All the rest got
down on their knees to drink.

7Then the LORD said to Gideon, “Using the three hundred
men who lapped the water, I will save you and hand Midian over
to you. Let all the others go home.” 8So Gideon sent the rest of
Israel to their homes. But he kept three hundred men and took
the jars and the trumpets of those who left.

Now the camp of Midian was in the valley below Gideon.
9That night the LORD said to Gideon, “Get up. Go down and
attack the camp of the Midianites, because I will give them to
you. 10But if you are afraid to go down, take your servant Purah
with you. 11When you come to the camp of Midian, you will hear
what they are saying. Then you will not be afraid to attack the
camp.”

## *Gideon Is Encouraged*

So Gideon and his servant Purah went down to the edge of

the enemy camp. [12]The Midianites, the Amalekites, and all the peoples from the east were camped in that valley. There were so many of them they seemed like locusts. Their camels could not be counted because they were as many as the grains of sand on the seashore!

[13]When Gideon came to the enemy camp, he heard a man telling his friend about a dream. He was saying, “I dreamed that a loaf of barley bread rolled into the camp of Midian. It hit the tent so hard that the tent turned over and fell flat!”

[14]The man’s friend said, “Your dream is about the sword of Gideon son of Joash, a man of Israel. God will hand Midian and the whole army over to him!”

[15]When Gideon heard about the dream and what it meant, he worshiped God. Then Gideon went back to the camp of Israel and called out to them, “Get up! The LORD has handed the army of Midian over to you!” [16]Gideon divided the three hundred men into three groups. He gave each man a trumpet and an empty jar with a burning torch inside.

[17]Gideon told the men, “Watch me and do what I do. When I get to the edge of the camp, do what I do. [18]Surround the enemy camp. When I and everyone with me blow our trumpets, you blow your trumpets, too. Then shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon!’”

## *Midian Is Defeated*

[19]So Gideon and the one hundred men with him came to the edge of the enemy camp just after they had changed guards. It was during the middle watch of the night. Then Gideon and his men blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. [20]All three groups of Gideon’s men blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands. Then they shouted, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” [21]Each of Gideon’s men stayed in his place around the camp, but the Midianites began shouting and running to escape.

[22]When Gideon’s three hundred men blew their trumpets, the LORD made all the Midianites fight each other with their swords! The enemy army ran away to the city of Beth Shittah toward Zererah. They ran as far as the border of Abel Meholah, near the city of Tabbath. [23]Then men of Israel from Naphtali, Asher, and all of Manasseh were called out to chase the Midianites. [24]Gideon sent messengers through all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, “Come down and attack the Midianites. Take control of the Jordan River as far as Beth Barah before the Midianites can get to it.”

So they called out all the men of Ephraim, who took control of the Jordan River as far as Beth Barah. [25]The men of Ephraim

captured two princes of Midian named Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb, and they continued chasing the Midianites. They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was east of the Jordan River.
8 The men of Ephraim asked Gideon, “Why did you treat us this way? Why didn’t you call us when you went to fight against Midian?” They argued angrily with Gideon.

2But he answered them, “I have not done as well as you! The small part you did was better than all that my people of Abiezer did. 3God let you capture Oreb and Zeeb, the princes of Midian. How can I compare what I did with what you did?” When the men of Ephraim heard Gideon’s answer, they were not as angry anymore.

## *Gideon Captures Two Kings*

4When Gideon and his three hundred men came to the Jordan River, they were tired, but they chased the enemy across to the other side. 5Gideon said to the men of Succoth, “Please give my soldiers some bread because they are very tired. I am chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.”

6But the leaders of Succoth said, “Why should we give your soldiers bread? You haven’t caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet.”

7Then Gideon said, “The LORD will surrender Zebah and Zalmunna to me. After that, I will whip your skin with thorns and briers from the desert.”

8Gideon left Succoth and went to the city of Peniel and asked them for food. But the people of Peniel gave him the same answer as the people of Succoth. 9So Gideon said to the men of Peniel, “After I win the victory, I will return and pull down this tower.”

10Zebah and Zalmunna and their army were in the city of Karkor. About fifteen thousand men were left of the armies of the peoples of the east. Already one hundred twenty thousand soldiers had been killed. 11Gideon went up the road of those who live in tents east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and he attacked the enemy army when they did not expect it. 12Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian, ran away, but Gideon chased and captured them and frightened away their army.

13Then Gideon son of Joash returned from the battle by the Pass of Heres. 14Gideon captured a young man from Succoth and asked him some questions. So the young man wrote down for Gideon the names of seventy-seven officers and elders of Succoth.

## *Gideon Punishes Succoth*

15When Gideon came to Succoth, he said to the people of
that city, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna. You made fun of me
by saying, ‘Why should we give bread to your tired men? You
have not caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet.’” 16So Gideon took
the elders of the city and punished them with thorns and briers
from the desert. 17He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and
killed the people in that city.
18Gideon asked Zebah and Zalmunna, “What were the men
like that you killed on Mount Tabor?”
They answered, “They were like you. Each one of them
looked like a prince.”
19Gideon said, “Those were my brothers, my mother’s sons.
As surely as the LORD lives, I would not kill you if you had spared
them.” 20Then Gideon said to Jether, his oldest son, “Kill them.”
But Jether was only a boy and was afraid, so he did not take out
his sword.
21Then Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, “Come on. Kill
us yourself. As the saying goes, ‘It takes a man to do a man’s
job.’” So Gideon got up and killed Zebah and Zalmunna and
took the decorations off their camels’ necks.

## *Gideon Makes an Idol*

22The people of Israel said to Gideon, “You saved us from the
Midianites. Now, we want you and your son and your grandson
to rule over us.”
23But Gideon told them, “The LORD will be your ruler. I will
not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you.” 24He said, “I
want you to do this one thing for me. I want each of you to give
me a gold earring from the things you took in the fighting.”
(The Ishmaelites[n] wore gold earrings.)
25They said, “We will gladly give you what you want.” So
they spread out a coat, and everyone threw down an earring
from what he had taken. 26The gold earrings weighed about
forty-three pounds. This did not count the decorations,
necklaces, and purple robes worn by the kings of Midian, nor
the chains from the camels’ necks. 27Gideon used the gold to
make a holy vest, which he put in his hometown of Ophrah. But
all the Israelites were unfaithful to God and worshiped it, so it
became a trap for Gideon and his family.

## *The Death of Gideon*

28So Midian was under the rule of Israel; they did not cause
trouble anymore. And the land had peace for forty years, as
long as Gideon was alive.
29Gideon[n] son of Joash went to his home to live. 30He had
seventy sons of his own, because he had many wives. 31He had

a slave woman who lived in Shechem, and he had a son by her, whom he named Abimelech. 32So Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age. He was buried in the tomb of Joash, his father, in Ophrah, where the Abiezrites live.

33As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel were again unfaithful to God and followed the Baals. They made Baal-Berith their god. 34The Israelites did not remember the LORD their God, who had saved them from all their enemies living all around them. 35And they were not kind to the family of Jerub-Baal, also called Gideon, for all the good he had done for Israel.

## Psalm 49:10–20

10See, even wise people die.
Fools and stupid people also die
and leave their wealth to others.

11Their graves will always be their homes.
They will live there from now on,
even though they named places after themselves.

12Even rich people do not live forever;
like the animals, people die.

13This is what will happen to those who trust in themselves
and to their followers who believe them. *Selah*

14Like sheep, they must die,
and death will be their shepherd.

Honest people will rule over them in the morning,
and their bodies will rot in a grave far from home.

15But God will save my life
and will take me from the grave. *Selah*

16 Don’t be afraid of rich people
because their houses are more beautiful.

17 They don’t take anything to the grave;
their wealth won’t go down with them.

18 Even though they were praised when they were alive—
and people may praise you when you succeed—

19 they will go to where their ancestors are.
They will never see light again.

20 Rich people with no understanding
are just like animals that die.

## Proverbs 14:22–24

22 Those who make evil plans will be ruined,
but those who plan to do good will be loved and trusted.

23 Those who work hard make a profit,
but those who only talk will be poor.

24 Wise people are rewarded with wealth,
but fools only get more foolishness.

## Luke 15:11–32

### *The Son Who Left Home*

11 Then Jesus said, “A man had two sons. 12 The younger son said to his father, ‘Give me my share of the property.’ So the father divided the property between his two sons. 13 Then the

younger son gathered up all that was his and traveled far away to another country. There he wasted his money in foolish living. 14After he had spent everything, a time came when there was no food anywhere in the country, and the son was poor and hungry. 15So he got a job with one of the citizens there who sent the son into the fields to feed pigs. 16The son was so hungry that he wanted to eat the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. 17When he realized what he was doing, he thought, 'All of my father's servants have plenty of food. But I am here, almost dying with hunger. 18I will leave and return to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son, but let me be like one of your servants."' 20So the son left and went to his father.

"While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for his son. So the father ran to him and hugged and kissed him. 21The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'[n] 22But the father said to his servants, 'Hurry! Bring the best clothes and put them on him. Also, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23And get our fat calf and kill it so we can have a feast and celebrate. 24My son was dead, but now he is alive again! He was lost, but now he is found!' So they began to celebrate.

25"The older son was in the field, and as he came closer to the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. 26So he called to one of the servants and asked what all this meant. 27The servant said, 'Your brother has come back, and your father killed the fat calf, because your brother came home safely.' 28The older son was angry and would not go in to the feast. So his father went out and begged him to come in. 29But the older son said to his father, 'I have served you like a slave for many years and have always obeyed your commands. But you never gave me even a young goat to have at a feast with my friends. 30But your other son, who wasted all your money on prostitutes, comes home, and you kill the fat calf for him!' 31The father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32We had to celebrate and be happy because your brother was dead, but now he is alive. He was lost, but now he is found.'"

# April 22

## The Prison of Want

*"You cannot serve both God and worldly riches."*

Luke 16:13

Are you in prison? You are if you feel better when you have more and worse when you have less. You are if joy is one delivery away, one transfer away, one award away, or one makeover away. If your happiness comes from something you deposit, drive, drink, or digest, then face it—you are in prison, the prison of want.

That's the bad news. The good news is, you have a visitor. And your visitor has a message that can get you paroled. Make your way to the receiving room. Take your seat in the chair, and look across the table at the psalmist David. He motions for you to lean forward. "I have a secret to tell you," he whispers, "the secret of satisfaction. 'The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need" (Psalm 23:1).

It's as if he is saying, "What I have in God is greater than what I don't have in life." You think you and I could learn to say the same?

from *Traveling Light*

### Judges 9:1—10:18

#### *Abimelech Becomes King*

9 Abimelech son of Gideon went to his uncles in the city of Shechem. He said to his uncles and all of his mother's family group, 2"Ask the leaders of Shechem, 'Is it better for the seventy sons of Gideon to rule over you or for one man to rule?' Remember, I am your relative."

3Abimelech's uncles spoke to all the leaders of Shechem about this. And they decided to follow Abimelech, because they said, "He is our relative." 4So the leaders of Shechem gave

Abimelech about one and three-quarter pounds of silver from the temple of the god Baal-Berith. Abimelech used the silver to hire some worthless, reckless men, who followed him wherever he went. 5He went to Ophrah, the hometown of his father, and murdered his seventy brothers, the sons of Gideon. He killed them all on one stone. But Gideon's youngest son, Jotham, hid from Abimelech and escaped. 6Then all of the leaders of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree standing in Shechem. There they made Abimelech their king.

## *Jotham's Story*

7When Jotham heard this, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim. He shouted to the people: "Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, so that God will listen to you! 8One day the trees decided to appoint a king to rule over them. They said to the olive tree, 'You be king over us!'

9"But the olive tree said, 'Men and gods are honored by my oil. Should I stop making it and go and sway over the other trees?'

10"Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be king over us!'

11"But the fig tree answered, 'Should I stop making my sweet and good fruit and go and sway over the other trees?'

12"Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be king over us!'

13"But the vine answered, 'My new wine makes men and gods happy. Should I stop making it and go and sway over the trees?'

14"Then all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be king over us.'

15"But the thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to appoint me king over you, come and find shelter in my shade! But if not, let fire come out of the thornbush and burn up the cedars of Lebanon!'

16"Now, were you completely honest and sincere when you made Abimelech king? Have you been fair to Gideon[n] and his family? Have you treated Gideon as you should? 17Remember, my father fought for you and risked his life to save you from the power of the Midianites. 18But now you have turned against my father's family and have killed his seventy sons on one stone. You have made Abimelech, the son of my father's slave girl, king over the leaders of Shechem just because he is your relative! 19So then, if you have been honest and sincere to Gideon and his family today, be happy with Abimelech as your king. And may he be happy with you! 20But if not, may fire come out of Abimelech and completely burn you leaders of Shechem and Beth Millo! Also may fire come out of the leaders of Shechem

and Beth Millo and burn up Abimelech!”

21Then Jotham ran away and escaped to the city of Beer. He lived there because he was afraid of his brother Abimelech.

## *Abimelech Fights Against Shechem*

22Abimelech ruled Israel for three years. 23Then God sent an evil spirit to make trouble between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem so that the leaders of Shechem turned against him. 24Abimelech had killed Gideon’s[n] seventy sons, his own brothers, and the leaders of Shechem had helped him. So God sent the evil spirit to punish them. 25The leaders of Shechem were against Abimelech then. They put men on the hilltops in ambush who robbed everyone going by. And Abimelech was told.

26A man named Gaal son of Ebed and his brothers moved into Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem trusted him. 27They went out to the vineyards to pick grapes, and they squeezed the grapes. Then they had a feast in the temple of their god, where they ate and drank and cursed Abimelech. 28Gaal son of Ebed said, “We are the men of Shechem. Who is Abimelech that we should serve him? Isn’t he one of Gideon’s sons, and isn’t Zebul his officer? We should serve the men of Hamor, Shechem’s father. Why should we serve Abimelech? 29If you made me commander of these people, I would get rid of Abimelech. I would say to him, ‘Get your army ready and come out to battle.’”

30Now when Zebul, the ruler of Shechem, heard what Gaal son of Ebed said, he was very angry. 31He sent secret messengers to Abimelech, saying, “Gaal son of Ebed and Gaal’s brothers have come to Shechem, and they are turning the city against you! 32You and your men should get up during the night and hide in the fields outside the city. 33As soon as the sun comes up in the morning, attack the city. When Gaal and his men come out to fight you, do what you can to them.”

34So Abimelech and all his soldiers got up during the night and hid near Shechem in four groups. 35Gaal son of Ebed went out and was standing at the entrance to the city gate. As he was standing there, Abimelech and his soldiers came out of their hiding places.

36When Gaal saw the soldiers, he said to Zebul, “Look! There are people coming down from the mountains!”

But Zebul said, “You are seeing the shadows of the mountains. The shadows just look like people.”

37But again Gaal said, “Look, there are people coming down from the center of the land, and there is a group coming from the fortune-tellers’ tree!”

38Zebul said to Gaal, “Where is your bragging now? You said,

‘Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?’ You made fun of these men. Now go out and fight them.”

39So Gaal led the men of Shechem out to fight Abimelech.
40Abimelech and his men chased them, and many of Gaal’s men were killed before they could get back to the city gate. 41While Abimelech stayed at Arumah, Zebul forced Gaal and his brothers to leave Shechem.

42The next day the people of Shechem went out to the fields. When Abimelech was told about it, 43he separated his men into three groups and hid them in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he jumped up and attacked them.
44Abimelech and his group ran to the entrance gate to the city. The other two groups ran out to the people in the fields and struck them down. 45Abimelech and his men fought the city of Shechem all day until they captured it and killed its people. Then he tore it down and threw salt[n] over the ruins.

## *The Tower of Shechem Burns*

46When the leaders who were in the Tower of Shechem heard what had happened to Shechem, they gathered in the safest room of the temple of El Berith. 47Abimelech heard that all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem had gathered there.
48So he and all his men went up Mount Zalmon, near Shechem. Abimelech took an ax and cut some branches and put them on his shoulders. He said to all those with him, “Hurry! Do what I have done!” 49So all those men cut branches and followed Abimelech and piled them against the safest room of the temple. Then they set them on fire and burned the people inside. So all the people who were at the Tower of Shechem also died—about a thousand men and women.

## *Abimelech’s Death*

50Then Abimelech went to the city of Thebez. He surrounded the city, attacked it, and captured it. 51But inside the city was a strong tower, so all the men, women, and leaders of that city ran to the tower. When they got inside, they locked the door behind them. Then they climbed up to the roof of the tower.
52Abimelech came to the tower to attack it. He approached the door of the tower to set it on fire, 53but as he came near, a woman dropped a grinding stone on his head, crushing his skull.

54He quickly called to the officer who carried his armor and said, “Take out your sword and kill me. I don’t want people to say, ‘A woman killed Abimelech.’” So the officer stabbed Abimelech, and he died. 55When the people of Israel saw Abimelech was dead, they all returned home.

56In that way God punished Abimelech for all the evil he had
done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. 57God also
punished the men of Shechem for the evil they had done. So the
curse spoken by Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon,[n] came
true.

## *Tola, the Judge*

10 After Abimelech died, another judge came to save Israel. He
was Tola son of Puah, the son of Dodo. Tola was from the people
of Issachar and lived in the city of Shamir in the mountains of
Ephraim. 2Tola was a judge for Israel for twenty-three years.
Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

## *Jair, the Judge*

3After Tola died, Jair from the region of Gilead became judge.
He was a judge for Israel for twenty-two years. 4Jair had thirty
sons, who rode thirty donkeys. These thirty sons controlled
thirty towns in Gilead, which are called the Towns of Jair to this
day. 5Jair died and was buried in the city of Kamon.

## *The Ammonites Trouble Israel*

6Again the Israelites did what the LORD said was wrong. They
worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth, the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab,
and Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines. The Israelites left
the LORD and stopped serving him. 7So the LORD was angry with
them and handed them over to the Philistines and the
Ammonites. 8In the same year those people destroyed the
Israelites who lived east of the Jordan River in the region of
Gilead, where the Amorites lived. So the Israelites suffered for
eighteen years. 9The Ammonites then crossed the Jordan River
to fight the people of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim, causing
much trouble to the people of Israel. 10So the Israelites cried
out to the LORD, “We have sinned against you. We left our God
and worshiped the Baal idols.”

11The LORD answered the Israelites, “When the Egyptians,
Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, 12Sidonians, Amalekites, and
Maonites were cruel to you, you cried out to me, and I saved
you. 13But now you have left me again and have worshiped
other gods. So I refuse to save you again. 14You have chosen
those gods. So go call to them for help. Let them save you when
you are in trouble.”

15But the people of Israel said to the LORD, “We have sinned.
Do to us whatever you want, but please save us today!” 16Then
the Israelites threw away the foreign gods among them, and

they worshiped the LORD again. So he felt sorry for them when he saw their suffering.

17 The Ammonites gathered for war and camped in Gilead.
The Israelites gathered and camped at Mizpah. 18 The leaders of
the people of Gilead said, "Who will lead us to attack the
Ammonites? He will become the head of all those who live in
Gilead."

## Psalm 50:1–6

### *God Wants True Worship*

**A psalm of Asaph.**

50 The God of gods, the LORD, speaks.
He calls the earth from the rising to the setting sun.

2 God shines from Jerusalem,
whose beauty is perfect.

3 Our God comes, and he will not be silent.
A fire burns in front of him,
and a powerful storm surrounds him.

4 He calls to the sky above and to the earth
that he might judge his people.

5 He says, "Gather around, you who worship me,
who have made an agreement with me, using a sacrifice."

6 God is the judge,
and even the skies say he is right. *Selah*

## Proverbs 14:25–27

25 A truthful witness saves lives,
but a false witness is a traitor.

26 Those who respect the LORD will have security,
and their children will be protected.

27 Respect for the LORD gives life.
It is like a fountain that can save people from death.

## Luke 16:1–31

### *True Wealth*

16 Jesus also said to his followers, “Once there was a rich man
who had a manager to take care of his business. This manager
was accused of cheating him. 2 So he called the manager in and
said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of
what you have done with my money, because you can’t be my
manager any longer.’ 3 The manager thought to himself, ‘What
will I do since my master is taking my job away from me? I am
not strong enough to dig ditches, and I am ashamed to beg. 4 I
know what I’ll do so that when I lose my job people will
welcome me into their homes.’

5 “So the manager called in everyone who owed the master
any money. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe?’ 6 He
answered, ‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil.’ The manager said
to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write four hundred
gallons.’ 7 Then the manager asked another one, ‘How much do
you owe?’ He answered, ‘One thousand bushels of wheat.’ Then
the manager said to him, ‘Take your bill and write eight
hundred bushels.’ 8 So, the master praised the dishonest
manager for being clever. Yes, worldly people are more clever
with their own kind than spiritual people are.

9 “I tell you, make friends for yourselves using worldly riches
so that when those riches are gone, you will be welcomed in
those homes that continue forever. 10 Whoever can be trusted
with a little can also be trusted with a lot, and whoever is
dishonest with a little is dishonest with a lot. 11 If you cannot be
trusted with worldly riches, then who will trust you with true
riches? 12 And if you cannot be trusted with things that belong
to someone else, who will give you things of your own?

13 “No servant can serve two masters. The servant will hate

one master and love the other, or will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. You cannot serve both God and worldly riches."

## *God's Law Cannot Be Changed*

14 The Pharisees, who loved money, were listening to all these things and made fun of Jesus. 15 He said to them, "You make yourselves look good in front of people, but God knows what is really in your hearts. What is important to people is hateful in God's sight.

16 "The law of Moses and the writings of the prophets were preached until John[n] came. Since then the Good News about the kingdom of God is being told, and everyone tries to enter it by force. 17 It would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the smallest part of a letter in the law to be changed.

## *Divorce and Remarriage*

18 "If a man divorces his wife and marries another woman, he is guilty of adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman is also guilty of adultery."

## *The Rich Man and Lazarus*

19 Jesus said, "There was a rich man who always dressed in the finest clothes and lived in luxury every day. 20 And a very poor man named Lazarus, whose body was covered with sores, was laid at the rich man's gate. 21 He wanted to eat only the small pieces of food that fell from the rich man's table. And the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22 Later, Lazarus died, and the angels carried him to the arms of Abraham. The rich man died, too, and was buried. 23 In the place of the dead, he was in much pain. The rich man saw Abraham far away with Lazarus at his side. 24 He called, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am suffering in this fire!' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember when you were alive you had the good things in life, but bad things happened to Lazarus. Now he is comforted here, and you are suffering. 26 Besides, there is a big pit between you and us, so no one can cross over to you, and no one can leave there and come here.' 27 The rich man said, 'Father, then please send Lazarus to my father's house. 28 I have five brothers, and Lazarus could warn them so that they will not come to this place of pain.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets; let them learn from them.' 30 The rich man said, 'No, father Abraham! If someone goes to

them from the dead, they would believe and change their hearts and lives.’ 31But Abraham said to him, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not listen to someone who comes back from the dead.’”

# April 23

## Pray About Everything

*"Call to me in times of trouble. I will save you, and you will honor me."*

Psalm 50:15

want to worry less? Then pray more. Rather than look forward in fear, look upward in faith. This command surprises no one. Regarding prayer, the Bible never blushes. Jesus taught people that "they should always pray and never lose hope" (Luke 18:1). Paul told believers, "Continue praying, keeping alert, and always thanking God" (Colossians 4:2). James declared, "Anyone who is having troubles should pray" (James 5:13).

Rather than worry about anything, "pray about everything." Everything? Diaper changes and dates? Business meetings and broken bathtubs? Procrastinations and prognostications? Pray about everything.

from *Come Thirsty*

## Judges 11:1—12:15

### *Jephthah Is Chosen as Leader*

11 Jephthah was a strong soldier from Gilead. His father was named Gilead, and his mother was a prostitute. 2Gilead's wife had several sons. When they grew up, they forced Jephthah to leave his home, saying to him, "You will not get any of our father's property, because you are the son of another woman." 3So Jephthah ran away from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. There some worthless men began to follow him.

4After a time the Ammonites fought against Israel. 5When the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to Jephthah to bring him back from Tob. 6They said to him, "Come and lead our army so we can fight the Ammonites."

7But Jephthah said to them, "Didn't you hate me? You forced

me to leave my father's house. Why are you coming to me now that you are in trouble?"

8The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "It is because of those troubles that we come to you now. Please come with us and fight against the Ammonites. You will be the ruler over everyone who lives in Gilead."

9Then Jephthah answered, "If you take me back to Gilead to fight the Ammonites and the LORD helps me win, I will be your ruler."

10The elders of Gilead said to him, "The LORD is listening to everything we are saying. We promise to do all that you tell us to do." 11So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him their leader and commander of their army. Jephthah repeated all of his words in front of the LORD at Mizpah.

## *Jephthah Sends Messengers to the Ammonite King*

12Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, asking, "What have you got against Israel? Why have you come to attack our land?"

13The king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, "We are fighting Israel because you took our land when you came up from Egypt. You took our land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River to the Jordan River. Now give our land back to us peacefully."

14Jephthah sent the messengers to the Ammonite king again. 15They said:

"This is what Jephthah says: Israel did not take the land of the people of Moab or Ammon. 16When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they went into the desert to the Red Sea and then to Kadesh. 17Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Let the people of Israel go across your land.' But the king of Edom refused. We sent the same message to the king of Moab, but he also refused. So the Israelites stayed at Kadesh.

18"Then the Israelites went into the desert around the borders of the lands of Edom and Moab. Israel went east of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon River, the border of Moab. They did not cross it to go into the land of Moab.

19"Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of the city of Heshbon, asking, 'Let the people of Israel pass through your land to go to our land.' 20But Sihon did not trust the Israelites to cross his land. So he gathered all of his people and camped at Jahaz and fought with Israel.

21"But the LORD, the God of Israel, handed Sihon and his army over to Israel. All the land of the Amorites became the

property of Israel. [22]So Israel took all the land of the Amorites from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River, from the desert to the Jordan River.

[23]"It was the LORD, the God of Israel, who forced out the Amorites ahead of the people of Israel. So do you think you can make them leave? [24]Take the land that your god Chemosh has given you. We will live in the land the LORD our God has given us!

[25]"Are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel or fight with the people of Israel? [26]For three hundred years the Israelites have lived in Heshbon and Aroer and the towns around them and in all the cities along the Arnon River. Why have you not taken these cities back in all that time? [27]I have not sinned against you, but you are sinning against me by making war on me. May the LORD, the Judge, decide whether the Israelites or the Ammonites are right."

[28]But the king of the Ammonites ignored this message from Jephthah.

## *Jephthah's Promise*

[29]Then the Spirit of the LORD entered Jephthah. Jephthah passed through Gilead and Manasseh and the city of Mizpah in Gilead to the land of the Ammonites. [30]Jephthah made a promise to the LORD, saying, "If you will hand over the Ammonites to me, [31]I will give you as a burnt offering the first thing that comes out of my house to meet me when I return from the victory. It will be the LORD's."

[32]Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD handed them over to him. [33]In a great defeat Jephthah struck them down from the city of Aroer to the area of Minnith, and twenty cities as far as the city of Abel Keramim. So the Ammonites were defeated by the Israelites.

[34]When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, his daughter was the first one to come out to meet him, playing a tambourine and dancing. She was his only child; he had no other sons or daughters. [35]When Jephthah saw his daughter, he tore his clothes to show his sorrow. He said, "My daughter! You have made me so sad because I made a promise to the LORD, and I cannot break it!"

[36]Then his daughter said, "Father, you made a promise to the LORD. So do to me just what you promised, because the LORD helped you defeat your enemies, the Ammonites." [37]She also said, "But let me do one thing. Let me be alone for two months to go to the mountains. Since I will never marry, let me and my friends go and cry together."

[38]Jephthah said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months. She and her friends stayed in the mountains and cried for her

because she would never marry. 39After two months she returned to her father, and Jephthah did to her what he had promised. Jephthah's daughter never had a husband.

From this came a custom in Israel that 40every year the young women of Israel would go out for four days to remember the daughter of Jephthah from Gilead.

## *Jephthah and Ephraim*

12 The men of Ephraim called all their soldiers together and crossed the river to the town of Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, "Why didn't you call us to help you fight the Ammonites? We will burn your house down with you in it."

2Jephthah answered them, "My people and I fought a great battle against the Ammonites. I called you, but you didn't come to help me. 3When I saw that you would not help me, I risked my own life and went against the Ammonites. The LORD handed them over to me. So why have you come to fight against me today?"

4Then Jephthah called the men of Gilead together and fought the men of Ephraim. The men of Gilead struck them down because the Ephraimites had said, "You men of Gilead are nothing but deserters from Ephraim—living between Ephraim and Manasseh." 5The men of Gilead captured the crossings of the Jordan River that led to the country of Ephraim. A person from Ephraim trying to escape would say, "Let me cross the river." Then the men of Gilead would ask him, "Are you from Ephraim?" If he replied no, 6they would say to him, "Say the word 'Shibboleth.'" The men of Ephraim could not say that word correctly. So if the person from Ephraim said, "Sibboleth," the men of Gilead would kill him at the crossing. So forty-two thousand people from Ephraim were killed at that time.

7Jephthah was a judge for Israel for six years. Then Jephthah, the man from Gilead, died and was buried in a town in Gilead.

## *Ibzan, the Judge*

8After Jephthah died, Ibzan from Bethlehem was a judge for Israel. 9He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He let his daughters marry men who were not in his family group, and he brought thirty women who were not in his tribe to be wives for his sons. Ibzan judged Israel for seven years. 10Then he died and was buried in Bethlehem.

## *Elon, the Judge*

11After Ibzan died, Elon from the tribe of Zebulun was a judge for Israel. He judged Israel for ten years. 12Then Elon, the

man of Zebulun, died and was buried in the city of Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

### *Abdon, the Judge*

13 After Elon died, Abdon son of Hillel from the city of
Pirathon was a judge for Israel. 14 He had forty sons and thirty
grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. He judged Israel for
eight years. 15 Then Abdon son of Hillel died and was buried in
Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mountains where the
Amalekites lived.

## Psalm 50:7–15

7 God says, “My people, listen to me;
Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.

8 I do not scold you for your sacrifices.
You always bring me your burnt offerings.

9 But I do not need bulls from your stalls
or goats from your pens,

10 because every animal of the forest is already mine.
The cattle on a thousand hills are mine.

11 I know every bird on the mountains,
and every living thing in the fields is mine.

12 If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
because the earth and everything in it are mine.

13 I don’t eat the meat of bulls
or drink the blood of goats.

14 Give an offering to show thanks to God.
Give God Most High what you have promised.

15 Call to me in times of trouble.
I will save you, and you will honor me."

## Proverbs 14:28

28 A king is honored when he has many people to rule,
but a prince is ruined if he has none.

## Luke 17:1–19

### *Sin and Forgiveness*

17 Jesus said to his followers, "Things that cause people to sin will happen, but how terrible for the person who causes them to happen! 2 It would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a large stone around your neck than to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3 So be careful!

"If another follower sins, warn him, and if he is sorry and stops sinning, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in one day and says that he is sorry each time, forgive him."

### *How Big Is Your Faith?*

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Give us more faith!"

6 The Lord said, "If your faith were the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Dig yourself up and plant yourself in the sea,' and it would obey you.

### *Be Good Servants*

7 "Suppose one of you has a servant who has been plowing the ground or caring for the sheep. When the servant comes in from working in the field, would you say, 'Come in and sit down to eat'? 8 No, you would say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat. Then get yourself ready and serve me. After I finish

eating and drinking, you can eat.’ [9]The servant does not get any special thanks for doing what his master commanded. [10]It is the same with you. When you have done everything you are told to do, you should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done the work we should do.’”

## *Be Thankful*

[11]While Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he was going through the area between Samaria and Galilee. [12]As he came into a small town, ten men who had a skin disease met him there. They did not come close to Jesus [13]but called to him, “Jesus! Master! Have mercy on us!”

[14]When Jesus saw the men, he said, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”[n]

As the ten men were going, they were healed. [15]When one of them saw that he was healed, he went back to Jesus, praising God in a loud voice. [16]Then he bowed down at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. (And this man was a Samaritan.) [17]Jesus said, “Weren’t ten men healed? Where are the other nine? [18]Is this Samaritan the only one who came back to thank God?” [19]Then Jesus said to him, “Stand up and go on your way. You were healed because you believed.”

# April 24

## The Voice of Adventure

*"Those who try to keep their lives will lose them. But those who give up their lives will save them."*

Luke 17:33

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

Jesus says the options are clear. On one side there is the voice of safety. You can build a fire in the hearth, stay inside, and stay warm and dry and safe …

Or you can hear the voice of adventure—God's adventure. Instead of building a fire in your hearth, build a fire in your heart. Follow God's impulses. Adopt the child. Move overseas. Teach the class. Change careers. Run for office. Make a difference. Sure it isn't safe, but what is?

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## Judges 13:1—14:20

### *The Birth of Samson*

13 Again the people of Israel did what the LORD said was wrong.
So he handed them over to the Philistines for forty years.

2There was a man named Manoah from the tribe of Dan, who
lived in the city of Zorah. He had a wife, but she could not have
children. 3The angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah's wife and
said, "You have not been able to have children, but you will
become pregnant and give birth to a son. 4Be careful not to
drink wine or beer or eat anything that is unclean, 5because you
will become pregnant and have a son. You must never cut his
hair, because he will be a Nazirite, given to God from birth. He
will begin to save Israel from the power of the Philistines."

6 Then Manoah's wife went to him and told him what had
happened. She said, "A man from God came to me. He looked
like an angel from God; his appearance was frightening. I didn't
ask him where he was from, and he didn't tell me his name.
7 But he said to me, 'You will become pregnant and will have a
son. Don't drink wine or beer or eat anything that is unclean,
because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from his birth until
the day of his death.'"
8 Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "Lord, I beg you to let the
man of God come to us again. Let him teach us what we should
do for the boy who will be born to us."
9 God heard Manoah's prayer, and the angel of God came to
Manoah's wife again while she was sitting in the field. But her
husband Manoah was not with her. 10 So she ran to tell him, "He
is here! The man who appeared to me the other day is here!"
11 Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the
man, he said, "Are you the man who spoke to my wife?"
The man said, "I am."
12 So Manoah asked, "When what you say happens, what kind
of life should the boy live? What should he do?"
13 The angel of the LORD said, "Your wife must be careful to do
everything I told her to do. 14 She must not eat anything that
grows on a grapevine, or drink any wine or beer, or eat
anything that is unclean. She must do everything I have
commanded her."
15 Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "We would like you
to stay awhile so we can cook a young goat for you."
16 The angel of the LORD answered, "Even if I stay awhile, I
would not eat your food. But if you want to prepare something,
offer a burnt offering to the LORD." (Manoah did not understand
that the man was really the angel of the LORD.)
17 Then Manoah asked the angel of the LORD, "What is your
name? Then we will honor you when what you have said really
happens."
18 The angel of the LORD said, "Why do you ask my name? It is
too amazing for you to understand." 19 So Manoah sacrificed a
young goat on a rock and offered some grain as a gift to the
LORD. Then an amazing thing happened as Manoah and his wife
watched. 20 The flames went up to the sky from the altar. As the
fire burned, the angel of the LORD went up to heaven in the
flame. When Manoah and his wife saw that, they bowed
facedown on the ground. 21 The angel of the LORD did not appear
to them again. Then Manoah understood that the man was
really the angel of the LORD. 22 Manoah said, "We have seen God,
so we will surely die."
23 But his wife said to him, "If the LORD wanted to kill us, he
would not have accepted our burnt offering or grain offering.
He would not have shown us all these things or told us all this."

24So the woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson.
He grew, and the LORD blessed him. 25The Spirit of the LORD
began to work in Samson while he was in the city of Mahaneh
Dan, between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol.

## *Samson's First Marriage*

14 Samson went down to the city of Timnah where he saw a
Philistine woman. 2When he returned home, he said to his
father and mother, "I saw a Philistine woman in Timnah. I want
you to get her for me so I can marry her."

3His father and mother answered, "Surely there is a woman
from Israel you can marry. Do you have to marry a woman from
the Philistines, who are not circumcised?"

But Samson said, "Get that woman for me! She is the one I
want!" 4(Samson's parents did not know that the LORD wanted
this to happen because he was looking for a way to challenge
the Philistines, who were ruling over Israel at this time.)
5Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, as
far as the vineyard near there. Suddenly, a young lion came
roaring toward Samson! 6The Spirit of the LORD entered Samson
with great power, and he tore the lion apart with his bare
hands. For him it was as easy as tearing apart a young goat. But
Samson did not tell his father or mother what he had done.
7Then he went down to the city and talked to the Philistine
woman, and he liked her.

8Several days later Samson went back to marry her. On his
way he went over to look at the body of the dead lion and found
a swarm of bees and honey in it. 9Samson got some of the honey
with his hands and walked along eating it. When he came to his
parents, he gave some to them. They ate it, too, but Samson did
not tell them he had taken the honey from the body of the dead
lion.

10Samson's father went down to see the Philistine woman.
And Samson gave a feast, as was the custom for the
bridegroom. 11When the people saw him, they sent thirty
friends to be with him.

## *Samson's Riddle*

12Samson said to them, "Let me tell you a riddle. Try to find
the answer during the seven days of the feast. If you can, I will
give you thirty linen shirts and thirty changes of clothes. 13But
if you can't, you must give me thirty linen shirts and thirty
changes of clothes."

So they said, "Tell us your riddle so we can hear it."

14Samson said,

“Out of the eater comes something to eat.
Out of the strong comes something sweet.”

After three days, they had not found the answer.

15On the fourth[n] day they said to Samson’s wife, “Did you invite us here to make us poor? Trick your husband into telling us the answer to the riddle. If you don’t, we will burn you and everyone in your father’s house.”

16So Samson’s wife went to him, crying, and said, “You hate me! You don’t really love me! You told my people a riddle, but you won’t tell me the answer.”

Samson said, “I haven’t even told my father or mother. Why should I tell you?”

17Samson’s wife cried for the rest of the seven days of the feast. So he finally gave her the answer on the seventh day, because she kept bothering him. Then she told her people the answer to the riddle.

18Before sunset on the seventh day of the feast, the Philistine men had the answer. They came to Samson and said,

“What is sweeter than honey?
What is stronger than a lion?”

Then Samson said to them,

“If you had not plowed with my young cow,
you would not have solved my riddle!”

19Then the Spirit of the LORD entered Samson and gave him great power. Samson went down to the city of Ashkelon and killed thirty of its men and took all that they had and gave the clothes to the men who had answered his riddle. Then he went to his father’s house very angry. 20And Samson’s wife was given to his best man.

## Psalm 50:16–23

16But God says to the wicked,
“Why do you talk about my laws?
Why do you mention my agreement?

17You hate my teachings

and turn your back on what I say.

18 When you see a thief, you join him.
You take part in adultery.

19 You don’t stop your mouth from speaking evil,
and your tongue makes up lies.

20 You speak against your brother
and lie about your mother’s son.

21 I have kept quiet while you did these things,
so you thought I was just like you.

But I will scold you
and accuse you to your face.

22 “Think about this, you who forget God.
Otherwise, I will tear you apart,
and no one will save you.

23 Those people honor me
who bring me offerings to show thanks.

And I, God, will save those who do that.”

## Proverbs 14:29–30

29 Patient people have great understanding,
but people with quick tempers show their foolishness.

30 Peace of mind means a healthy body,
but jealousy will rot your bones.

# Luke 17:20–37

## *God's Kingdom Is Within You*

20 Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the
kingdom of God come?"
Jesus answered, "God's kingdom is coming, but not in a way
that you will be able to see with your eyes. 21 People will not say,
'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' because God's kingdom is
within[n] you."
22 Then Jesus said to his followers, "The time will come when
you will want very much to see one of the days of the Son of
Man. But you will not see it. 23 People will say to you, 'Look,
there he is!' or, 'Look, here he is!' Stay where you are; don't go
away and search.

## *When Jesus Comes Again*

24 "When the Son of Man comes again, he will shine like
lightning, which flashes across the sky and lights it up from one
side to the other. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be
rejected by the people of this time. 26 When the Son of Man
comes again, it will be as it was when Noah lived. 27 People were
eating, drinking, marrying, and giving their children to be
married until the day Noah entered the boat. Then the flood
came and killed them all. 28 It will be the same as during the
time of Lot. People were eating, drinking, buying, selling,
planting, and building. 29 But the day Lot left Sodom,[n] fire and
sulfur rained down from the sky and killed them all. 30 This is
how it will be when the Son of Man comes again.
31 "On that day, a person who is on the roof and whose
belongings are in the house should not go inside to get them. A
person who is in the field should not go back home.
32 Remember Lot's wife.[n] 33 Those who try to keep their lives will
lose them. But those who give up their lives will save them. 34 I
tell you, on that night two people will be sleeping in one bed;
one will be taken and the other will be left. 35 There will be two
women grinding grain together; one will be taken, and the other
will be left. [36 Two people will be in the field. One will be taken,
and the other will be left.]"[n]
37 The followers asked Jesus, "Where will this be, Lord?"
Jesus answered, "Where there is a dead body, there the
vultures will gather."

# April 25

## A Well of Optimism

*"You must accept the kingdom of God as if you were a child, or you will never enter it."*

Luke 18:17

Bedtime is a bad time for kids. No child understands the logic of going to bed while there is energy left in the body or hours left in the day. My children are no exception. A few years ago, after many objections and countless groans, the girls were finally in their gowns, in their beds, and on their pillows. I slipped into the room to give them a final kiss. Andrea, the five-year-old, was still awake, just barely, but awake. After I kissed her, she lifted her eyelids one final time and said, "I can't wait until I wake up."

Oh, for the attitude of a five-year-old! That simple uncluttered passion for living that can't wait for tomorrow. A philosophy of life that reads, "Play hard, laugh hard, and leave the worries to your father." A bottomless well of optimism flooded by a perpetual spring of faith. Is it any wonder Jesus said we must have the heart of a child before we can enter the kingdom of heaven?

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Judges 15:1—16:31

#### *Samson Troubles the Philistines*

15 At the time of the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his
wife, taking a young goat with him. He said, "I'm going to my
wife's room," but her father would not let him go in.

2He said to Samson, "I thought you really hated your wife, so
I gave her to your best man. Her younger sister is more
beautiful. Take her instead."

3But Samson said to them, "This time no one will blame me

for hurting you Philistines!” 4So Samson went out and caught three hundred foxes. He took two foxes at a time, tied their tails together, and then tied a torch to the tails of each pair of foxes. 5After he lit the torches, he let the foxes loose in the grainfields of the Philistines so that he burned up their standing grain, the piles of grain, their vineyards, and their olive trees.

6The Philistines asked, “Who did this?”

Someone told them, “Samson, the son-in-law of the man from Timnah, did because his father-in-law gave his wife to his best man.”

So the Philistines burned Samson’s wife and her father to death. 7Then Samson said to the Philistines, “Since you did this, I won’t stop until I pay you back!” 8Samson attacked the Philistines and killed many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.

9The Philistines went up and camped in the land of Judah, near a place named Lehi. 10The men of Judah asked them, “Why have you come here to fight us?”

They answered, “We have come to make Samson our prisoner, to pay him back for what he did to our people.”

11Then three thousand men of Judah went to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, “What have you done to us? Don’t you know that the Philistines rule over us?”

Samson answered, “I only paid them back for what they did to me.”

12Then they said to him, “We have come to tie you up and to hand you over to the Philistines.”

Samson said to them, “Promise me you will not hurt me yourselves.”

13The men from Judah said, “We agree. We will just tie you up and give you to the Philistines. We will not kill you.” So they tied Samson with two new ropes and led him up from the cave in the rock. 14When Samson came to the place named Lehi, the Philistines came to meet him, shouting for joy. Then the Spirit of the LORD entered Samson and gave him great power. The ropes on him weakened like burned strings and fell off his hands! 15Samson found the jawbone of a dead donkey, took it, and killed a thousand men with it!

16Then Samson said,

“With a donkey’s jawbone
I made donkeys out of them.

With a donkey’s jawbone
I killed a thousand men!”

17When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone. So

that place was named Ramath Lehi.[n]

18 Samson was very thirsty, so he cried out to the LORD, “You
gave me, your servant, this great victory. Do I have to die of
thirst now? Do I have to be captured by people who are not
circumcised?” 19 Then God opened up a hole in the ground at
Lehi, and water came out. When Samson drank, he felt better;
he felt strong again. So he named that spring Caller’s Spring,
which is still in Lehi.

20 Samson judged Israel for twenty years in the days of the
Philistines.

## *Samson Goes to the City of Gaza*

16 One day Samson went to Gaza and saw a prostitute there. He
went in to spend the night with her. 2 When the people of Gaza
heard, “Samson has come here!” they surrounded the place and
waited for him near the city gate all night. They whispered to
each other, “When dawn comes, we will kill Samson!”

3 But Samson only stayed with the prostitute until midnight.
Then he got up and took hold of the doors and the two posts of
the city gate and tore them loose, along with the bar. He put
them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill
that faces the city of Hebron.

## *Samson and Delilah*

4 After this, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah,
who lived in the Valley of Sorek. 5 The Philistine rulers went to
Delilah and said, “Find out what makes Samson so strong. Trick
him into telling you how we can overpower him and capture him
and tie him up. If you do this, each one of us will give you
twenty-eight pounds of silver.”

6 So Delilah said to Samson, “Tell me why you are so strong.
How can someone tie you up and capture you?”

7 Samson answered, “Someone would have to tie me up with
seven new bowstrings that have not been dried. Then I would
be as weak as any other man.”

8 The Philistine rulers brought Delilah seven new bowstrings
that had not been dried, and she tied Samson with them. 9 Some
men were hiding in another room. Delilah said to him, “Samson,
the Philistines are here!” But Samson broke the bowstrings like
pieces of burned string. So the Philistines did not find out the
secret of Samson’s strength.

10 Then Delilah said to Samson, “You made a fool of me. You
lied to me. Now tell me how someone can tie you up.”

11 Samson said, “They would have to tie me with new ropes
that have not been used before. Then I would become as weak
as any other man.”

12 So Delilah took new ropes and tied Samson. Some men
were hiding in another room. She called out to him, “Samson,
the Philistines are here!” But he broke the ropes as easily as if
they were threads.
13 Then Delilah said to Samson, “Again you have made a fool
of me. You lied to me. Tell me how someone can tie you up.”
He said, “Using the loom,[n] weave the seven braids of my hair
into the cloth, and tighten it with a pin. Then I will be as weak
as any other man.”
While Samson slept, Delilah wove the seven braids of his hair
into the cloth. 14 Then she fastened it with a pin.
Again she said to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!”
Samson woke up and pulled out the pin and the loom with the
cloth.
15 Then Delilah said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’
when you don’t even trust me? This is the third time you have
made a fool of me. You haven’t told me the secret of your great
strength.” 16 She kept bothering Samson about his secret day
after day until he felt he was going to die!
17 So he told her everything. He said, “I have never had my
hair cut, because I have been set apart to God as a Nazirite
since I was born. If someone shaved my head, I would lose my
strength and be as weak as any other man.”
18 When Delilah saw that he had told her everything
sincerely, she sent a message to the Philistine rulers. She said,
“Come back one more time, because he has told me
everything.” So the Philistine rulers came back to Delilah and
brought the silver with them. 19 Delilah got Samson to sleep,
lying in her lap. Then she called in a man to shave off the seven
braids of Samson’s hair. In this way she began to make him
weak, and his strength left him.
20 Then she said, “Samson, the Philistines are here!”
He woke up and thought, “I’ll leave as I did before and shake
myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him.
21 Then the Philistines captured Samson and tore out his
eyes. They took him down to Gaza, where they put bronze
chains on him and made him grind grain in the prison. 22 But his
hair began to grow again.

## *Samson Dies*

23 The Philistine rulers gathered to celebrate and to offer a
great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They said, “Our god has
handed Samson our enemy over to us.” 24 When the people saw
him, they praised their god, saying,

“This man destroyed our country.

He killed many of us!

But our god handed over
our enemy to us.”

25While the people were enjoying the celebration, they said,
“Bring Samson out to perform for us.” So they brought Samson
from the prison, and he performed for them. They made him
stand between the pillars. 26Samson said to the servant holding
his hand, “Let me feel the pillars that hold up the temple so I
can lean against them.” 27Now the temple was full of men and
women. All the Philistine rulers were there, and about three
thousand men and women were on the roof[n] watching Samson
perform. 28Then Samson prayed to the LORD, “Lord God,
remember me. God, please give me strength one more time so I
can pay these Philistines back for putting out my two eyes!”
29Then Samson turned to the two center pillars that supported
the whole temple. He braced himself between the two pillars,
with his right hand on one and his left hand on the other.
30Samson said, “Let me die with these Philistines!” Then he
pushed as hard as he could, causing the temple to fall on the
rulers and all the people in it. So Samson killed more of the
Philistines when he died than when he was alive.
31Samson’s brothers and his whole family went down to get
his body. They brought him back and buried him in the tomb of
Manoah, his father, between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol.
Samson was a judge for the people of Israel for twenty years.

## Psalm 51:1–5

### *A Prayer for Forgiveness*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to David after David’s sin with Bathsheba.**

51 God, be merciful to me
because you are loving.

Because you are always ready to be merciful,
wipe out all my wrongs.

[2]Wash away all my guilt
and make me clean again.

[3]I know about my wrongs,
and I can't forget my sin.

[4]You are the only one I have sinned against;
I have done what you say is wrong.

You are right when you speak
and fair when you judge.

[5]I was brought into this world in sin.
In sin my mother gave birth to me.

## Proverbs 14:31–32

[31]Whoever mistreats the poor insults their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

[32]The wicked are ruined by their own evil,
but those who do right are protected even in death.

## Luke 18:1–25

### *God Will Answer His People*

[18] Then Jesus used this story to teach his followers that they should always pray and never lose hope. [2]"In a certain town there was a judge who did not respect God or care about people. [3]In that same town there was a widow who kept coming to this judge, saying, 'Give me my rights against my enemy.' [4]For a while the judge refused to help her. But afterwards, he thought to himself, 'Even though I don't respect God or care

about people, [5]I will see that she gets her rights. Otherwise she will continue to bother me until I am worn out.'"

[6]The Lord said, "Listen to what the unfair judge said. [7]God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him night and day, and he will not be slow to answer them. [8]I tell you, God will help his people quickly. But when the Son of Man comes again, will he find those on earth who believe in him?"

## *Being Right with God*

[9]Jesus told this story to some people who thought they were very good and looked down on everyone else: [10]"A Pharisee and a tax collector both went to the Temple to pray. [11]The Pharisee stood alone and prayed, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people who steal, cheat, or take part in adultery, or even like this tax collector. [12]I fast[n] twice a week, and I give one-tenth of everything I get!'

[13]"The tax collector, standing at a distance, would not even look up to heaven. But he beat on his chest because he was so sad. He said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' [14]I tell you, when this man went home, he was right with God, but the Pharisee was not. All who make themselves great will be made humble, but all who make themselves humble will be made great."

## *Who Will Enter God's Kingdom?*

[15]Some people brought even their babies to Jesus so he could touch them. When the followers saw this, they told them to stop. [16]But Jesus called for the children, saying, "Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to people who are like these children. [17]I tell you the truth, you must accept the kingdom of God as if you were a child, or you will never enter it."

## *A Rich Man's Question*

[18]A certain leader asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to have life forever?"

[19]Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? Only God is good. [20]You know the commands: 'You must not be guilty of adultery. You must not murder anyone. You must not steal. You must not tell lies about your neighbor. Honor your father and mother.'"[n]

[21]But the leader said, "I have obeyed all these commands since I was a boy."

[22]When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one

more thing you need to do. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.” [23]But when the man heard this, he became very sad, because he was very rich.

[24]Jesus looked at him and said, “It is very hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. [25]It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

# April 26

# Dare to Dream

*“The things impossible for people are possible for God.”*

Luke 18:27

God always rejoices when we dare to dream. In fact, we are much like God when we dream. The Master exults in newness. He delights in stretching the old. He wrote the book on making the impossible possible.

Examples? Check the Book.

Eighty-year-old shepherds don’t usually play chicken with Pharaohs … but don’t tell that to Moses.

Teenage shepherds don’t normally have showdowns with giants … but don’t tell that to David.

Night-shift shepherds don’t usually get to hear angels sing and see God in a stable … but don’t tell that to the Bethlehem bunch.

And for sure don’t tell that to God. He’s made an eternity out of making the earthbound airborne. And he gets angry when people’s wings are clipped.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## Judges 17:1—19:30

### *Micah’s Idols*

17 There was a man named Micah who lived in the mountains of
Ephraim. 2He said to his mother, “I heard you speak a curse
about the twenty-eight pounds of silver that were taken from
you. I have the silver with me; I took it.”

His mother said, “The LORD bless you, my son!”

3Micah gave the twenty-eight pounds of silver to his mother.
Then she said, “I will give this silver to the LORD. I will have my
son make an idol and a statue. So I will give the silver back to
you.”

4When he gave the silver back to his mother, she took about
five pounds and gave it to a silversmith. With it he made an idol
and a statue, which stood in Micah's house. 5Micah had a
special holy place, and he made a holy vest and some household
idols. Then Micah chose one of his sons to be his priest. 6At that
time Israel did not have a king, so everyone did what seemed
right.

7There was a young man who was a Levite[n] from the city of
Bethlehem in Judah who was from the people of Judah. 8He left
Bethlehem to look for another place to live, and on his way he
came to Micah's house in the mountains of Ephraim. 9Micah
asked him, "Where are you from?"

He answered, "I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah. I'm
looking for a place to live."

10Micah said to him, "Live with me and be my father and my
priest. I will give you four ounces of silver each year and clothes
and food." So the Levite went in. 11He agreed to live with Micah
and became like one of Micah's own sons. 12Micah made him a
priest, and he lived in Micah's house. 13Then Micah said, "Now
I know the LORD will be good to me, because I have a Levite as
my priest."

## *Dan's Family Captures Laish*

18 At that time Israel did not have a king. And at that time the
tribe of Dan was still looking for a land where they could live, a
land of their own. The Danites had not yet been given their own
land among the tribes of Israel. 2So, from their family groups,
they chose five soldiers from the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol to
spy out and explore the land. They were told, "Go, explore the
land."

They came to the mountains of Ephraim, to Micah's house,
where they spent the night. 3When they came near Micah's
house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite.[n] So they
stopped there and asked him, "Who brought you here? What
are you doing here? Why are you here?"

4He told them what Micah had done for him, saying, "He
hired me. I am his priest."

5They said to him, "Please ask God if our journey will be
successful."

6The priest said to them, "Go in peace. The LORD is pleased
with your journey."

7So the five men left. When they came to the city of Laish,
they saw that the people there lived in safety, like the people of
Sidon. They thought they were safe and had plenty of
everything. They lived a long way from the Sidonians and had
no dealings with anyone else.

8When the five men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their

relatives asked them, “What did you find?”

9They answered, “We have seen the land, and it is very good.
We should attack them. Aren’t you going to do something? Don’t
wait! Let’s go and take that land! 10When you go, you will see
there is plenty of land—plenty of everything! The people are not
expecting an attack. Surely God has handed that land over to
us!”

11So six hundred Danites left Zorah and Eshtaol ready for
war. 12On their way they set up camp near the city of Kiriath
Jearim in Judah. That is why the place west of Kiriath Jearim is
named Mahaneh Dan[n] to this day. 13From there they traveled on
to the mountains of Ephraim. Then they came to Micah’s house.

14The five men who had explored the land around Laish said
to their relatives, “Do you know in one of these houses there are
a holy vest, household gods, an idol, and a statue? You know
what to do.” 15So they stopped at the Levite’s house, which was
also Micah’s house, and greeted the Levite. 16The six hundred
Danites stood at the entrance gate, wearing their weapons of
war. 17The five spies went into the house and took the idol, the
holy vest, the household idols, and the statue. The priest and
the six hundred men armed for war stood by the entrance gate.

18When the spies went into Micah’s house and took the
image, the holy vest, the household idols, and the statue, the
priest asked them, “What are you doing?”

19They answered, “Be quiet! Don’t say a word. Come with us
and be our father and priest. Is it better for you to be a priest
for one man’s house or for a tribe and family group in Israel?”
20This made the priest happy. So he took the holy vest, the
household idols, and the idol and went with the Danites. 21They
left Micah’s house, putting their little children, their animals,
and everything they owned in front of them.

22When they had gone a little way from Micah’s house, the
men who lived near Micah were called out and caught up with
them. 23The men with Micah shouted at the Danites, who
turned around and said to Micah, “What’s the matter with you?
Why have you been called out to fight?”

24Micah answered, “You took my gods that I made and my
priest. What do I have left? How can you ask me, ‘What’s the
matter?’”

25The Danites answered, “You should not argue with us.
Some of our angry men might attack you, killing you and your
family.” 26Then the Danites went on their way. Micah knew they
were too strong for him, so he turned and went back home.

27Then the Danites took what Micah had made and his priest
and went on to Laish. They attacked those peaceful people and
killed them with their swords and then burned the city. 28There
was no one to save the people of Laish. They lived too far from
Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone else. Laish was in

a valley near Beth Rehob.

The people of Dan rebuilt the city and lived there. [29]They changed the name of Laish to Dan, naming it for their ancestor Dan, one of the sons of Israel.

[30]The people of Dan set up the idols in the city of Dan. Jonathan son of Gershom, Moses' son, and his sons served as priests for the tribe of Dan until the land was captured. [31]The people of Dan set up the idols Micah had made as long as the Holy Tent of God was in Shiloh.

## *A Levite and His Servant*

[19] At that time Israel did not have a king. There was a Levite who lived in the faraway mountains of Ephraim. He had taken a slave woman from the city of Bethlehem in the land of Judah to live with him, [2]but she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah and stayed there for four months. [3]Then her husband went to ask her to come back to him, taking with him his servant and two donkeys. When the Levite came to her father's house, she invited him to come in, and her father was happy to see him. [4]The father-in-law, the young woman's father, asked him to stay. So he stayed for three days and ate, drank, and slept there.

[5]On the fourth day they got up early in the morning. The Levite was getting ready to leave, but the woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh yourself by eating something. Then go." [6]So the two men sat down to eat and drink together. After that, the father said to him, "Please stay tonight. Relax and enjoy yourself." [7]When the man got up to go, his father-in-law asked him to stay. So he stayed again that night. [8]On the fifth day the man got up early in the morning to leave. The woman's father said, "Refresh yourself. Wait until this afternoon." So the two men ate together.

[9]When the Levite, his slave woman, and his servant got up to leave, the father-in-law, the young woman's father, said, "It's almost night. The day is almost gone. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself. Tomorrow morning you can get up early and go home." [10]But the Levite did not want to stay another night. So he took his two saddled donkeys and his slave woman and traveled toward the city of Jebus (also called Jerusalem).

[11]As the day was almost over, they came near Jebus. So the servant said to his master, "Let's stop at this city of the Jebusites, and spend the night here."

[12]But his master said, "No. We won't go inside a foreign city. Those people are not Israelites. We will go on to the city of Gibeah." [13]He said, "Come on. Let's try to make it to Gibeah or Ramah so we can spend the night in one of those cities." [14]So they went on. The sun went down as they came near Gibeah,

which belongs to the tribe of Benjamin. 15They stopped there to spend the night. They came to the public square of the city and sat down, but no one invited them home to spend the night.

16Finally, in the evening an old man came in from his work in the fields. His home was in the mountains of Ephraim, but now he was living in Gibeah. (The people of Gibeah were from the tribe of Benjamin.) 17He saw the traveler in the public square and asked, “Where are you going? Where did you come from?”

18The Levite answered, “We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to my home in the mountains of Ephraim. I have been to Bethlehem in Judah, but now I am going to the Holy Tent of the LORD. No one has invited me to stay in his house. 19We already have straw and food for our donkeys and bread and wine for me, the young woman, and my servant. We don’t need anything.”

20The old man said, “You are welcome to stay at my house. Let me give you anything you need, but don’t spend the night in the public square.” 21So the old man took the Levite into his house, and he fed their donkeys. They washed their feet and had something to eat and drink.

22While they were enjoying themselves, some wicked men of the city surrounded the house and beat on the door. They shouted to the old man who owned the house, “Bring out the man who came to your house. We want to have sexual relations with him.”

23The owner of the house went outside and said to them, “No, my friends. Don’t be so evil. This man is a guest in my house. Don’t do this terrible thing! 24Look, here are my daughter, who has never had sexual relations before, and the man’s slave woman. I will bring them out to you now. Do anything you want with them, but don’t do such a terrible thing to this man.”

25But the men would not listen to him. So the Levite took his slave woman and sent her outside to them. They forced her to have sexual relations with them, and they abused her all night long. Then, at dawn, they let her go. 26She came back to the house where her master was staying and fell down at the door and lay there until daylight.

27In the morning when the Levite got up, he opened the door of the house and went outside to go on his way. But his slave woman was lying at the doorway of the house, with her hands on the doorsill. 28The Levite said to her, “Get up; let’s go.” But she did not answer. So he put her on his donkey and went home.

29When the Levite got home, he took a knife and cut his slave woman into twelve parts, limb by limb. Then he sent a part to each area of Israel. 30Everyone who saw this said, “Nothing like this has ever happened before, not since the people of Israel came out of Egypt. Think about it. Tell us what to do.”

## Psalm 51:6–9

6 You want me to be completely truthful,
so teach me wisdom.

7 Take away my sin, and I will be clean.
Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

8 Make me hear sounds of joy and gladness;
let the bones you crushed be happy again.

9 Turn your face from my sins
and wipe out all my guilt.

## Proverbs 14:33–35

33 Wisdom lives in those with understanding,
and even fools recognize it.

34 Doing what is right makes a nation great,
but sin will bring disgrace to any people.

35 A king is pleased with a wise servant,
but he will become angry with one who causes him shame.

## Luke 18:26–43

### *Who Can Be Saved?*

26 When the people heard this, they asked, “Then who can be

saved?”
27Jesus answered, “The things impossible for people are possible for God.”
28Peter said, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”
29Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, all those who have left houses, wives, brothers, parents, or children for the kingdom of God 30will get much more in this life. And in the age that is coming, they will have life forever.”

## *Jesus Will Rise from the Dead*

31Then Jesus took the twelve apostles aside and said to them, “We are going to Jerusalem. Everything the prophets wrote about the Son of Man will happen. 32He will be turned over to those who are evil. They will laugh at him, insult him, spit on him, 33beat him with whips, and kill him. But on the third day, he will rise to life again.” 34The apostles did not understand this; the meaning was hidden from them, and they did not realize what was said.

## *Jesus Heals a Blind Man*

35As Jesus came near the city of Jericho, a blind man was sitting beside the road, begging. 36When he heard the people coming down the road, he asked, “What is happening?”
37They told him, “Jesus, from Nazareth, is going by.”
38The blind man cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”
39The people leading the group warned the blind man to be quiet. But the blind man shouted even more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”
40Jesus stopped and ordered the blind man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, 41“What do you want me to do for you?”
He said, “Lord, I want to see.”
42Jesus said to him, “Then see. You are healed because you believed.”
43At once the man was able to see, and he followed Jesus, thanking God. All the people who saw this praised God.

# April 27

# God Makes Us Right Again

*Create in me a pure heart,God, and make my spirit right again.*

Psalm 51:10

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

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

from *The Applause of Heaven*

## Judges 20:1—21:25

### *The War Between Israel and Benjamin*

20 So all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba,[n] including the land of Gilead, joined together before the LORD in the city of Mizpah. 2The leaders of all the tribes of Israel took their places in the meeting of the people of God. There were 400,000 soldiers with swords. 3(The people of Benjamin heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the Israelites said to the Levite, "Tell us how this evil thing happened."

4So the husband of the murdered woman answered, "My slave woman and I came to Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night. 5During the night the men of Gibeah came after me. They surrounded the house and wanted to kill me. They forced my slave woman to have sexual relations and she died. 6I took her and cut her into parts and sent one part to each area of Israel because the people of Benjamin did this wicked and terrible thing in Israel. 7Now, all you Israelites, speak up. What is your

decision?”

8Then all the people stood up at the same time, saying,
“None of us will go home. Not one of us will go back to his
house! 9Now this is what we will do to Gibeah. We will throw
lots. 10That way we will choose ten men from every hundred
men from all the tribes of Israel, and we will choose a hundred
men from every thousand, and a thousand men from every ten
thousand. These will find supplies for the army. Then the army
will go to the city of Gibeah of Benjamin to repay them for the
terrible thing they have done in Israel.” 11So all the men of
Israel were united and gathered against the city.

12The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of
Benjamin demanding, “What is this evil thing some of your men
have done? 13Hand over the wicked men in Gibeah so that we
can put them to death. We must remove this evil from Israel.”

But the Benjaminites would not listen to their fellow
Israelites. 14The Benjaminites left their own cities and met at
Gibeah to fight the Israelites. 15In only one day the
Benjaminites got 26,000 soldiers together who were trained
with swords. They also had 700 chosen men from Gibeah.
16Seven hundred of these trained soldiers were left-handed,
each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss!

17The Israelites, except for the Benjaminites, gathered
400,000 soldiers with swords.

18The Israelites went up to the city of Bethel and asked God,
“Which tribe shall be first to attack the Benjaminites?”

The LORD answered, “Judah shall go first.”

19The next morning the Israelites got up and made a camp
near Gibeah. 20The men of Israel went out to fight the
Benjaminites and took their battle position at Gibeah. 21Then
the Benjaminites came out of Gibeah and killed 22,000
Israelites during the battle that day. 22–23The Israelites went
before the LORD and cried until evening. They asked the LORD,
“Shall we go to fight our relatives, the Benjaminites, again?”

The LORD answered, “Go up and fight them.” The men of
Israel encouraged each other. So they took the same battle
positions they had taken the first day.

24The Israelites came to fight the Benjaminites the second
day. 25The Benjaminites came out of Gibeah to attack the
Israelites. This time, the Benjaminites killed 18,000 Israelites,
all of whom carried swords.

26Then the Israelites went up to Bethel. There they sat down
and cried to the LORD and fasted all day until evening. They also
brought burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD.
27The Israelites asked the LORD a question. (In those days the
Ark of the Agreement with God was there at Bethel. 28A priest
named Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, served before
the Ark of the Agreement.) They asked, “Shall we go to fight our

relatives, the Benjaminites, again, or shall we stop fighting?”

The LORD answered, “Go, because tomorrow I will hand them over to you.”

29Then the Israelites set up ambushes all around Gibeah. 30They went to fight against the Benjaminites at Gibeah on the third day, getting into position for battle as they had done before. 31When the Benjaminites came out to fight them, the Israelites backed up and led the Benjaminites away from the city. The Benjaminites began to kill some of the Israelites as they had done before. About thirty Israelites were killed—some in the fields and some on the roads leading to Bethel and to Gibeah.

32The Benjaminites said, “We are winning as before!”

But the Israelites said, “Let’s run. Let’s trick them into going farther away from their city and onto the roads.”

33All the Israelites moved from their places and got into battle positions at a place named Baal Tamar. Then the Israelites ran out from their hiding places west of Gibeah. 34Ten thousand of the best trained soldiers from all of Israel attacked Gibeah. The battle was very hard. The Benjaminites did not know disaster was about to come to them. 35The LORD used the Israelites to defeat the Benjaminites. On that day the Israelites killed 25,100 Benjaminites, all armed with swords. 36Then the Benjaminites saw that they were defeated.

The Israelites had moved back because they were depending on the surprise attack they had set up near Gibeah. 37The men in hiding rushed into Gibeah, spread out, and killed everyone in the city with their swords. 38Now the Israelites had set up a signal with the men in hiding. The men in the surprise attack were to send up a cloud of smoke from the city. 39Then the army of Israel turned around in the battle.

The Benjaminites had killed about thirty Israelites. They were saying, “We are winning, as in the first battle!” 40But then a cloud of smoke began to rise from the city. The Benjaminites turned around and saw that the whole city was going up in smoke. 41Then the Israelites turned and began to fight. The Benjaminites were terrified because they knew that disaster was coming to them. 42So the Benjaminites ran away from the Israelites toward the desert, but they could not escape the battle. And the Israelites who came out of the cities killed them. 43They surrounded the Benjaminites and chased them and caught them in the area east of Gibeah. 44So 18,000 brave Benjaminite fighters were killed. 45The Benjaminites ran toward the desert to the rock of Rimmon, but the Israelites killed 5,000 Benjaminites along the roads. They chased them as far as Gidom and killed 2,000 more Benjaminites there.

46On that day 25,000 Benjaminites were killed, all of whom had fought bravely with swords. 47But 600 Benjaminites ran to

the rock of Rimmon in the desert, where they stayed for four months. 48Then the Israelites went back to the land of Benjamin and killed the people in every city and also the animals and everything they could find. And they burned every city they found.

## *Wives for the Men of Benjamin*

21 At Mizpah the men of Israel had sworn, “Not one of us will let his daughter marry a man from the tribe of Benjamin.”

2The people went to the city of Bethel and sat before God until evening, crying loudly. 3They said, “LORD, God of Israel, why has this terrible thing happened to us so that one tribe of Israel is missing today?”

4Early the next day the people built an altar and put burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to God on it.

5Then the Israelites asked, “Did any tribe of Israel not come here to meet with us in the presence of the LORD?” They asked this question because they had sworn that anyone who did not meet with them at Mizpah would be killed.

6The Israelites felt sorry for their relatives, the Benjaminites. They said, “Today one tribe has been cut off from Israel. 7We swore before the LORD that we would not allow our daughters to marry a Benjaminite. How can we make sure that the remaining men of Benjamin will have wives?” 8Then they asked, “Which one of the tribes of Israel did not come here to Mizpah?” They found that no one from the city of Jabesh Gilead had come. 9The people of Israel counted everyone, but there was no one from Jabesh Gilead.

10So the whole group of Israelites sent twelve thousand soldiers to Jabesh Gilead to kill the people with their swords, even the women and children.

11“This is what you must do: Kill every man in Jabesh Gilead and every married woman.” 12The soldiers found four hundred young unmarried women in Jabesh Gilead, so they brought them to the camp at Shiloh in Canaan.

13Then the whole group of Israelites sent a message to the men of Benjamin, who were at the rock of Rimmon, offering to make peace with them. 14So the men of Benjamin came back at that time. The Israelites gave them the women from Jabesh Gilead who had not been killed, but there were not enough women.

15The people of Israel felt sorry for the Benjaminites because the LORD had separated the tribes of Israel. 16The elders of the Israelites said, “The women of Benjamin have been killed. Where can we get wives for the men of Benjamin who are still alive? 17These men must have children to continue their families so a tribe in Israel will not die out. 18But we cannot

allow our daughters to marry them, because we swore, ‘Anyone who gives a wife to a man of Benjamin is cursed.’ 19We have an idea! There is a yearly festival of the LORD at Shiloh, which is north of the city of Bethel, east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem, and south of the city of Lebonah.”

20So the elders told the men of Benjamin, “Go and hide in the vineyards. 21Watch for the young women from Shiloh to come out to join the dancing. Then run out from the vineyards and take one of the young Shiloh women and return to the land of Benjamin. 22If their fathers or brothers come to us and complain, we will say: ‘Be kind to the men of Benjamin. We did not get wives for Benjamin during the war, and you did not give the women to the men from Benjamin. So you are not guilty.’”

23So that is what the Benjaminites did. While the young women were dancing, each man caught one of them, took her away, and married her. Then they went back to the land God had given them and rebuilt their cities and lived there.

24Then the Israelites went home to their own tribes and family groups, to their own land that God had given them.

25In those days Israel did not have a king. All the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

## Psalm 51:10–19

10Create in me a pure heart, God,
and make my spirit right again.

11Do not send me away from you
or take your Holy Spirit away from me.

12Give me back the joy of your salvation.
Keep me strong by giving me a willing spirit.

13Then I will teach your ways to those who do wrong,
and sinners will turn back to you.

14God, save me from the guilt of murder,
God of my salvation,
and I will sing about your goodness.

15 Lord, let me speak
so I may praise you.

16 You are not pleased by sacrifices, or I would give them.
You don't want burnt offerings.

17 The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit.
God, you will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry for sin.

18 Do whatever good you wish for Jerusalem.
Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then you will be pleased with right sacrifices and whole burnt offerings,
and bulls will be offered on your altar.

## Proverbs 15:1–3

15 A gentle answer will calm a person's anger,
but an unkind answer will cause more anger.

2 Wise people use knowledge when they speak,
but fools pour out foolishness.

3 The LORD's eyes see everything;
he watches both evil and good people.

## Luke 19:1–27

### *Zacchaeus Meets Jesus*

19 Jesus was going through the city of Jericho. 2 A man was there

named Zacchaeus, who was a very important tax collector, and he was wealthy. [3]He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because he was too short to see above the crowd. [4]He ran ahead to a place where Jesus would come, and he climbed a sycamore tree so he could see him. [5]When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down! I must stay at your house today.”

[6]Zacchaeus came down quickly and welcomed him gladly. [7]All the people saw this and began to complain, “Jesus is staying with a sinner!”

[8]But Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “I will give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times more.”

[9]Jesus said to him, “Salvation has come to this house today, because this man also belongs to the family of Abraham. [10]The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them.”

## *A Story About Three Servants*

[11]As the people were listening to this, Jesus told them a story because he was near Jerusalem and they thought God’s kingdom would appear immediately. [12]He said: “A very important man went to a country far away to be made a king and then to return home. [13]So he called ten of his servants and gave a coin[n] to each servant. He said, ‘Do business with this money until I get back.’ [14]But the people in the kingdom hated the man. So they sent a group to follow him and say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’

[15]“But the man became king. When he returned home, he said, ‘Call those servants who have my money so I can know how much they earned with it.’

[16]“The first servant came and said, ‘Sir, I earned ten coins with the one you gave me.’ [17]The king said to the servant, ‘Excellent! You are a good servant. Since I can trust you with small things, I will let you rule over ten of my cities.’

[18]“The second servant said, ‘Sir, I earned five coins with your one.’ [19]The king said to this servant, ‘You can rule over five cities.’

[20]“Then another servant came in and said to the king, ‘Sir, here is your coin which I wrapped in a piece of cloth and hid. [21]I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You even take money that you didn’t earn and gather food that you didn’t plant.’ [22]Then the king said to the servant, ‘I will condemn you by your own words, you evil servant. You knew that I am a hard man, taking money that I didn’t earn and gathering food that I didn’t plant. [23]Why then didn’t you put my money in the bank? Then when I came back, my money would have earned some interest.’

[24]“The king said to the men who were standing by, ‘Take the
coin away from this servant and give it to the servant who
earned ten coins.’ [25]They said, ‘But sir, that servant already has
ten coins.’ [26]The king said, ‘Those who have will be given more,
but those who do not have anything will have everything taken
away from them. [27]Now where are my enemies who didn’t want
me to be king? Bring them here and kill them before me.’”

# April 28

## Words of Hope

*As a tree gives fruit, healing words give life.*

Proverbs 15:4

Encourage those who are struggling. Don't know what to say? Then open your Bible … To the grief stricken: "God has said, 'I will never leave you; I will never abandon you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

To the guilt ridden: "Those who are in Christ Jesus are not judged guilty" (Romans 8:1).

To the jobless: "We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28).

To those who feel beyond God's grace: "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Your Bible is a basket of blessings. Won't you share one?

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Ruth 1:1—2:23

1 Long ago when the judges[n] ruled Israel, there was a shortage
of food in the land. 2So a man named Elimelech left the town of
Bethlehem in Judah to live in the country of Moab with his wife
and his two sons. His wife was named Naomi, and his two sons
were named Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathahites from
Bethlehem in Judah. When they came to Moab, they settled
there.

3Then Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died, and she was left
with her two sons. 4These sons married women from Moab. One
was named Orpah, and the other was named Ruth. Naomi and
her sons had lived in Moab about ten years 5when Mahlon and
Kilion also died. So Naomi was left alone without her husband
or her two sons.

6While Naomi was in Moab, she heard that the LORD had
come to help his people and had given them food again. So she

and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab and return home. 7Naomi and her daughters-in-law left the place where they had lived and started back to the land of Judah. 8But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back home, each of you to your own mother’s house. May the LORD be as kind to you as you have been to me and my sons who are now dead. 9May the LORD give you another happy home and a new husband.”

When Naomi kissed the women good-bye, they began to cry out loud. 10They said to her, “No, we want to go with you to your people.”

11But Naomi said, “My daughters, return to your own homes. Why do you want to go with me? I cannot give birth to more sons to give you new husbands; 12go back, my daughters, to your own homes. I am too old to have another husband. Even if I told myself, ‘I still have hope’ and had another husband tonight, and even if I had more sons, 13should you wait until they were grown into men? Should you live for so many years without husbands? Don’t do that, my daughters. My life is much too sad for you to share, because the LORD has been against me!”

14The women cried together out loud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law Naomi good-bye, but Ruth held on to her tightly.

15Naomi said to Ruth, “Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her own people and her own gods. Go back with her.”

## *Ruth Stays with Naomi*

16But Ruth said, “Don’t beg me to leave you or to stop following you. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. 17And where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. I ask the LORD to punish me terribly if I do not keep this promise: Not even death will separate us.”

18When Naomi saw that Ruth had firmly made up her mind to go with her, she stopped arguing with her. 19So Naomi and Ruth went on until they came to the town of Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, all the people became very excited. The women of the town said, “Is this really Naomi?”

20Naomi answered the people, “Don’t call me Naomi.[n] Call me Mara,[n] because the Almighty has made my life very sad. 21When I left, I had all I wanted, but now, the LORD has brought me home with nothing. Why should you call me Naomi when the LORD has spoken against me and the Almighty has given me so much trouble?”

22So Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth, the Moabite, returned from Moab and arrived at Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

## *Ruth Meets Boaz*

2 Now Naomi had a rich relative named Boaz, from Elimelech's
family.

2One day Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, "I am going to
the fields. Maybe someone will be kind enough to let me gather
the grain he leaves behind."

Naomi said, "Go, my daughter."

3So Ruth went to the fields and gathered the grain that the
workers cutting the grain had left behind. It just so happened
that the field belonged to Boaz, from Elimelech's family.

4Soon Boaz came from Bethlehem and greeted his workers,
"The LORD be with you!"

And the workers answered, "May the LORD bless you!"

5Then Boaz asked his servant in charge of the workers,
"Whose girl is that?"

6The servant answered, "She is the young Moabite woman
who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7She
said, 'Please let me follow the workers cutting grain and gather
what they leave behind.' She came and has remained here, from
morning until just now. She has stopped only a few moments to
rest in the shelter."

8Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Don't go to
gather grain for yourself in another field. Don't even leave this
field at all, but continue following closely behind my women
workers. 9Watch to see into which fields they go to cut grain
and follow them. I have warned the young men not to bother
you. When you are thirsty, you may go and drink from the water
jugs that the young men have filled."

10Then Ruth bowed low with her face to the ground and said
to him, "I am not an Israelite. Why have you been so kind to
notice me?"

11Boaz answered her, "I know about all the help you have
given your mother-in-law after your husband died. You left your
father and mother and your own country to come to a nation
where you did not know anyone. 12May the LORD reward you for
all you have done. May your wages be paid in full by the LORD,
the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for
shelter."

13Then Ruth said, "I hope I can continue to please you, sir.
You have said kind and encouraging words to me, your servant,
though I am not one of your servants."

14At mealtime Boaz told Ruth, "Come here. Eat some of our
bread and dip it in our sauce."

So Ruth sat down beside the workers. Boaz handed her some
roasted grain, and she ate until she was full; she even had some
food left over. 15When Ruth rose and went back to work, Boaz
commanded his workers, "Let her gather even around the piles

of cut grain. Don't tell her to go away. [16]In fact, drop some full heads of grain for her from what you have in your hands, and let her gather them. Don't tell her to stop."

[17]So Ruth gathered grain in the field until evening. Then she separated the grain from the chaff, and there was about one-half bushel of barley. [18]Ruth carried the grain into town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also took out the food that was left over from lunch and gave it to Naomi.

[19]Naomi asked her, "Where did you gather all this grain today? Where did you work? Blessed be whoever noticed you!"

Ruth told her mother-in-law whose field she had worked in. She said, "The man I worked with today is named Boaz."

[20]Naomi told her daughter-in-law, "The LORD bless him! He continues to be kind to us—both the living and the dead!" Then Naomi told Ruth, "Boaz is one of our close relatives,[n] one who should take care of us."

[21]Then Ruth, the Moabite, said, "Boaz also told me, 'Keep close to my workers until they have finished my whole harvest.'"

[22]But Naomi said to her daughter-in-law Ruth, "It is better for you to continue working with his women workers. If you work in another field, someone might hurt you." [23]So Ruth continued working closely with the workers of Boaz, gathering grain until the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished. And she continued to live with Naomi, her mother-in-law.

## Psalm 52:1–7

### *God Will Punish the Proud*

**For the director of music. A maskil of David. When Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, "David is in Ahimelech's house."**

52 Mighty warrior, why do you brag about the
evil you do?
God's love will continue forever.

[2]You think up evil plans.
Your tongue is like a sharp razor,

making up lies.

3 You love wrong more than right
and lies more than truth. *Selah*

4 You love words that bite
and tongues that lie.

5 But God will ruin you forever.
He will grab you and throw you out of your tent;
he will tear you away from the land of the living. *Selah*

6 Those who do right will see this and fear God.
They will laugh at you and say,

7 "Look what happened to the man
who did not depend on God

but depended on his money.
He grew strong by his evil plans."

## Proverbs 15:4–5

4 As a tree gives fruit, healing words give life,
but dishonest words crush the spirit.

5 Fools reject their parents' correction,
but anyone who accepts correction is wise.

## Luke 19:28–48

### *Jesus Enters Jerusalem as a King*

28 After Jesus said this, he went on toward Jerusalem. 29 As
Jesus came near Bethphage and Bethany, towns near the hill
called the Mount of Olives, he sent out two of his followers.
30 He said, “Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it,
you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden.
Untie it and bring it here to me. 31 If anyone asks you why you
are untying it, say that the Master needs it.”
32 The two followers went into town and found the colt just as
Jesus had told them. 33 As they were untying it, its owners came
out and asked the followers, “Why are you untying our colt?”
34 The followers answered, “The Master needs it.” 35 So they
brought it to Jesus, threw their coats on the colt’s back, and put
Jesus on it. 36 As Jesus rode toward Jerusalem, others spread
their coats on the road before him.
37 As he was coming close to Jerusalem, on the way down the
Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of followers began joyfully
shouting praise to God for all the miracles they had seen.
38 They said,

“God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

Psalm 118:26

There is peace in heaven and glory to God!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher,
tell your followers not to say these things.”
40 But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if my followers didn’t say
these things, then the stones would cry out.”

## *Jesus Cries for Jerusalem*

41 As Jesus came near Jerusalem, he saw the city and cried
for it, 42 saying, “I wish you knew today what would bring you
peace. But now it is hidden from you. 43 The time is coming
when your enemies will build a wall around you and will hold
you in on all sides. 44 They will destroy you and all your people,
and not one stone will be left on another. All this will happen
because you did not recognize the time when God came to save
you.”

## *Jesus Goes to the Temple*

45 Jesus went into the Temple and began to throw out the
people who were selling things there. 46 He said, “It is written in

the Scriptures, ‘My Temple will be a house for prayer.’[n] But you have changed it into a ‘hideout for robbers’!”[n]

47 Jesus taught in the Temple every day. The leading priests,
the experts on the law, and some of the leaders of the people
wanted to kill Jesus. 48 But they did not know how they could do
it, because all the people were listening closely to him.

# April 29

## God Sent Himself

*"I will send my son whom I love."*

Luke 20:13

Don't we love the word "with"? "Will you go *with* me?" we ask. "To the store, to the hospital, through my life?" God says he will. "I will be *with* you always," Jesus said before he ascended to heaven, "even until the end of this age" (Matthew 28:20). Search for restrictions on the promise; you'll find none. You won't find "I'll be with you if you behave … when you believe. I'll be with you on Sundays in worship … at mass." No, none of that. There's no withholding tax on God's "with" promise. He is *with* us.

*God* is with us.

Prophets weren't enough. Apostles wouldn't do. Angels won't suffice. God sent more than miracles and messages. He sent himself; he sent his Son. "The Word became a human and lived among us" (John 1:14).

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Ruth 3:1—4:22

#### *Naomi's Plan*

3 Then Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, said to her, "My daughter, I
must find a suitable home for you, one that will be good for you.
2 Now Boaz, whose young women you worked with, is our close
relative.[n] Tonight he will be working at the threshing floor.
3 Wash yourself, put on perfume, change your clothes, and go
down to the threshing floor. But don't let him know you're there
until he has finished his dinner. 4 Watch him so you will know
where he lies down to sleep. When he lies down, go and lift the
cover off his feet[n] and lie down. He will tell you what you should
do."

5 Then Ruth answered, “I will do everything you say.”
6 So Ruth went down to the threshing floor and did all her
mother-in-law told her to do. 7 After his evening meal, Boaz felt
good and went to sleep lying beside the pile of grain. Ruth went
to him quietly and lifted the cover from his feet and lay down.
8 About midnight Boaz was startled and rolled over. There
was a woman lying near his feet! 9 Boaz asked, “Who are you?”
She said, “I am Ruth, your servant girl. Spread your cover
over me, because you are a relative who is supposed to take
care of me.”[n]
10 Then Boaz said, “The LORD bless you, my daughter. This act
of kindness is greater than the kindness you showed to Naomi
in the beginning. You didn’t look for a young man to marry,
either rich or poor. 11 Now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will
do everything you ask, because all the people in our town know
you are a good woman. 12 It is true that I am a relative who is to
take care of you, but you have a closer relative than I. 13 Stay
here tonight, and in the morning we will see if he will take care
of you. If he decides to take care of you, that is fine. But if he
refuses, I will take care of you myself, as surely as the LORD
lives. So stay here until morning.”
14 So Ruth stayed near his feet until morning but got up while
it was still too dark to recognize anyone. Boaz thought, “People
in town must not know that the woman came here to the
threshing floor.” 15 So Boaz said to Ruth, “Bring me your shawl
and hold it open.”
So Ruth held her shawl open, and Boaz poured six portions
of barley into it. Boaz then put it on her head and went back to
the city.
16 When Ruth went back to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked,
“How did you do, my daughter?”
Ruth told Naomi everything that Boaz did for her. 17 She said,
“Boaz gave me these six portions of barley, saying, ‘You must
not go home without a gift for your mother-in-law.’”
18 Naomi answered, “Ruth, my daughter, wait here until you
see what happens. Boaz will not rest until he has finished doing
what he should do today.”

## *Boaz Marries Ruth*

4 Boaz went to the city gate and sat there until the close relative
he had mentioned passed by. Boaz called to him, “Come here,
friend, and sit down.” So the man came over and sat down.
2 Boaz gathered ten of the elders of the city and told them, “Sit
down here!” So they sat down.
3 Then Boaz said to the close relative, “Naomi, who has come
back from the country of Moab, wants to sell the piece of land
that belonged to our relative Elimelech. 4 So I decided to tell you

about it: If you want to buy back the land, then buy it in front of the people who are sitting here and in front of the elders of my people. But if you don't want to buy it, tell me, because you are the only one who can buy it, and I am next after you."

The close relative answered, "I will buy back the land."

5Then Boaz explained, "When you buy the land from Naomi, you must also marry Ruth, the Moabite, the dead man's wife. That way, the land will stay in the dead man's name."

6The close relative answered, "I can't buy back the land. If I did, I might harm what I can pass on to my own sons. I cannot buy the land back, so buy it yourself."

7Long ago in Israel when people traded or bought back something, one person took off his sandal and gave it to the other person. This was the proof of ownership in Israel.

8So the close relative said to Boaz, "Buy the land yourself," and he took off his sandal.

9Then Boaz said to the elders and to all the people, "You are witnesses today. I am buying from Naomi everything that belonged to Elimelech and Kilion and Mahlon. 10I am also taking Ruth, the Moabite who was the wife of Mahlon, as my wife. I am doing this so her dead husband's property will stay in his name and his name will not be separated from his family and his hometown. You are witnesses today."

11So all the people and elders who were at the city gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make this woman, who is coming into your home, like Rachel and Leah, who had many children and built up the people of Israel. May you become powerful in the district of Ephrathah and famous in Bethlehem. 12As Tamar gave birth to Judah's son Perez,[n] may the LORD give you many children through Ruth. May your family be great like his."

13So Boaz took Ruth home as his wife and had sexual relations with her. The LORD let her become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. 14The women told Naomi, "Praise the LORD who gave you this grandson. May he become famous in Israel. 15He will give you new life and will take care of you in your old age because of your daughter-in-law who loves you. She is better for you than seven sons, because she has given birth to your grandson."

16Naomi took the boy, held him in her arms, and cared for him. 17The neighbors gave the boy his name, saying, "This boy was born for Naomi." They named him Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David.

18This is the family history of Perez, the father of Hezron. 19Hezron was the father of Ram, who was the father of Amminadab. 20Amminadab was the father of Nahshon, who was the father of Salmon. 21Salmon was the father of Boaz, who was the father of Obed. 22Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse

was the father of David.

## Psalm 52:8–9

8 But I am like an olive tree
growing in God's Temple.

I trust God's love
forever and ever.

9 God, I will thank you forever for what you have done.
With those who worship you, I will trust you because you are good.

## Proverbs 15:6–7

6 Much wealth is in the houses of good people,
but evil people get nothing but trouble.

7 Wise people use their words to spread knowledge,
but there is no knowledge in the thoughts of fools.

## Luke 20:1–26

### *Jewish Leaders Question Jesus*

20 One day Jesus was in the Temple, teaching the people and telling them the Good News. The leading priests, teachers of the law, and elders came up to talk with him, 2 saying, "Tell us what authority you have to do these things? Who gave you this authority?"

3 Jesus answered, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me:

4When John baptized people, was that authority from God or
just from other people?”
5They argued about this, saying, “If we answer, ‘John’s
baptism was from God,’ Jesus will say, ‘Then why did you not
believe him?’ 6But if we say, ‘It was from other people,’ all the
people will stone us to death, because they believe John was a
prophet.” 7So they answered that they didn’t know where it
came from.
8Jesus said to them, “Then I won’t tell you what authority I
have to do these things.”

## *A Story About God’s Son*

9Then Jesus told the people this story: “A man planted a
vineyard and leased it to some farmers. Then he went away for
a long time. 10When it was time for the grapes to be picked, he
sent a servant to the farmers to get some of the grapes. But
they beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. 11Then
he sent another servant. They beat this servant also, and
showed no respect for him, and sent him away empty-handed.
12So the man sent a third servant. The farmers wounded him
and threw him out. 13The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What will
I do now? I will send my son whom I love. Maybe they will
respect him.’ 14But when the farmers saw the son, they said to
each other, ‘This son will inherit the vineyard. If we kill him, it
will be ours.’ 15So the farmers threw the son out of the vineyard
and killed him.
“What will the owner of this vineyard do to them? 16He will
come and kill those farmers and will give the vineyard to other
farmers.”
When the people heard this story, they said, “Let this never
happen!”
17But Jesus looked at them and said, “Then what does this
verse mean:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
became the cornerstone’?

Psalm 118:22

18Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken, and the
person on whom it falls, that person will be crushed!”
19The teachers of the law and the leading priests wanted to
arrest Jesus at once, because they knew the story was about
them. But they were afraid of what the people would do.

## *Is It Right to Pay Taxes or Not?*

[20]So they watched Jesus and sent some spies who acted as if they were sincere. They wanted to trap Jesus in saying something wrong so they could hand him over to the authority and power of the governor. [21]So the spies asked Jesus, “Teacher, we know that what you say and teach is true. You pay no attention to who people are, and you always teach the truth about God’s way. [22]Tell us, is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

[23]But Jesus, knowing they were trying to trick him, said, [24]“Show me a coin. Whose image and name are on it?”

They said, “Caesar’s.”

[25]Jesus said to them, “Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and give to God the things that are God’s.”

[26]So they were not able to trap Jesus in anything he said in the presence of the people. And being amazed at his answer, they became silent.

## April 30

# A Broken Heart?

*The Lord hates what evil people do, but he loves those who do what is right.*

Proverbs 15:9

Perhaps the wound is old. A parent abused you. A teacher slighted you. A mate betrayed you … And you are angry. Or perhaps the wound is fresh. The friend who owes you money just drove by in a new car. The boss who hired you with promises of promotions has forgotten how to pronounce your name … And you are hurt.

Part of you is broken, and the other part is bitter. Part of you wants to cry, and part of you wants to fight … There is a fire burning in your heart. It's the fire of anger …

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

Unfaithfulness is wrong. Revenge is bad. But the worst part of all is that, without forgiveness, bitterness is all that is left.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

## 1 Samuel 1:1—4:1a

### *Samuel's Birth*

1 There was a man named Elkanah son of Jeroham from
Ramathaim in the mountains of Ephraim. Elkanah was from the
family of Zuph. (Jeroham was Elihu's son. Elihu was Tohu's son,
and Tohu was the son of Zuph from the family group of
Ephraim.) 2Elkanah had two wives named Hannah and
Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

3Every year Elkanah left his town of Ramah and went up to
Shiloh to worship the LORD All-Powerful and to offer sacrifices to
him. Shiloh was where Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli,

served as priests of the LORD. 4When Elkanah offered sacrifices,
he always gave a share of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to
her sons and daughters. 5But Elkanah always gave a special
share of the meat to Hannah, because he loved Hannah and
because the LORD had kept her from having children. 6Peninnah
would tease Hannah and upset her, because the LORD had made
her unable to have children. 7This happened every year when
they went up to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. Peninnah would
upset Hannah until Hannah would cry and not eat anything.
8Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you
crying and why won't you eat? Why are you sad? Don't I mean
more to you than ten sons?"

9Once, after they had eaten their meal in Shiloh, Hannah got
up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair near the entrance
to the LORD's house. 10Hannah was so sad that she cried and
prayed to the LORD. 11She made a promise, saying, "LORD All-
Powerful, see how sad I am. Remember me and don't forget me.
If you will give me a son, I will give him back to you all his life,
and no one will ever cut his hair with a razor."[n]

12While Hannah kept praying, Eli watched her mouth. 13She
was praying in her heart so her lips moved, but her voice was
not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14and said to her, "Stop
getting drunk! Throw away your wine!"

15Hannah answered, "No, sir, I have not drunk any wine or
beer. I am a deeply troubled woman, and I was telling the LORD
about all my problems. 16Don't think I am an evil woman. I have
been praying because I have many troubles and am very sad."

17Eli answered, "Go! I wish you well. May the God of Israel
give you what you asked of him."

18Hannah said, "May I always please you." When she left and
ate something, she was not sad anymore.

19Early the next morning Elkanah's family got up and
worshiped the LORD. Then they went back home to Ramah.
Elkanah had sexual relations with his wife Hannah, and the
LORD remembered her. 20So Hannah became pregnant, and in
time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel,[n] saying,
"His name is Samuel because I asked the LORD for him."

## *Hannah Gives Samuel to God*

21Every year Elkanah went with his whole family to Shiloh to
offer sacrifices and to keep the promise he had made to God.
22But one time Hannah did not go with him. She told him,
"When the boy is old enough to eat solid food, I will take him to
Shiloh. Then I will give him to the LORD, and he will always live
there."

23Elkanah, Hannah's husband, said to her, "Do what you
think is best. You may stay home until the boy is old enough to

eat. May the LORD do what you have said." So Hannah stayed at home to nurse her son until he was old enough to eat.

24When Samuel was old enough to eat, Hannah took him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh, along with a three-year-old bull, one-half bushel of flour, and a leather bag filled with wine. 25After they had killed the bull for the sacrifice, Hannah brought Samuel to Eli. 26She said to Eli, "As surely as you live, sir, I am the same woman who stood near you praying to the LORD. 27I prayed for this child, and the LORD answered my prayer and gave him to me. 28Now I give him back to the LORD. He will belong to the LORD all his life." And he worshiped the LORD there.

## *Hannah Gives Thanks*

2 Hannah prayed:"The LORD has filled my heart with joy;
I feel very strong in the LORD.

I can laugh at my enemies;
I am glad because you have helped me!

2"There is no one holy like the LORD.
There is no God but you;
there is no Rock like our God.

3"Don't continue bragging,
don't speak proud words.

The LORD is a God who knows everything,
and he judges what people do.

4"The bows of warriors break,
but weak people become strong.

5Those who once had plenty of food now must work for food,
but people who were hungry are hungry no more.

The woman who could not have children now has seven,
but the woman who had many children now is sad.

6 “The LORD sends death,
and he brings to life.

He sends people to the grave,
and he raises them to life again.

7 The LORD makes some people poor,
and others he makes rich.

He makes some people humble,
and others he makes great.

8 The LORD raises the poor up from the dust,
and he lifts the needy from the ashes.

He lets the poor sit with princes
and receive a throne of honor.

“The foundations of the earth belong to the LORD,
and the LORD set the world upon them.

9 He protects those who are loyal to him,
but evil people will be silenced in darkness.
Power is not the key to success.

10 The LORD destroys his enemies;
he will thunder in heaven against them.

The LORD will judge all the earth.
He will give power to his king
and make his appointed king strong.”

## *Eli’s Evil Sons*

11 Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy continued to serve the LORD under Eli the priest.
12 Now Eli’s sons were evil men; they did not care about the LORD. 13 This is what the priests would normally do to the people:

Every time someone brought a sacrifice, the meat would be cooked in a pot. The priest's servant would then come carrying a fork that had three prongs. 14He would plunge the fork into the pot or the kettle. Whatever the fork brought out of the pot belonged to the priest. But this is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh to offer sacrifices. 15Even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come to the person offering sacrifices and say, "Give the priest some meat to roast. He won't accept boiled meat from you, only raw meat."

16If the one who offered the sacrifice said, "Let the fat be burned up first as usual, and then take anything you want," the priest's servant would answer, "No, give me the meat now. If you don't, I'll take it by force."

17The LORD saw that the sin of the servants was very great because they did not show respect for the offerings made to the LORD.

## *Samuel Grows Up*

18But Samuel obeyed the LORD. As a boy he wore a linen holy vest. 19Every year Samuel's mother made a little coat for him and took it to him when she went with her husband to Shiloh for the sacrifice. 20When Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, he would say, "May the LORD repay you with children through Hannah to take the place of the boy Hannah prayed for and gave back to the LORD." Then Elkanah and Hannah would go home. 21The LORD was kind to Hannah, so she became the mother of three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up serving the LORD.

22Now Eli was very old. He heard about everything his sons were doing to all the Israelites and how his sons had sexual relations with the women who served at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. 23Eli said to his sons, "Why do you do these evil things that the people tell me about? 24No, my sons. The LORD's people are spreading a bad report about you. 25If you sin against someone, God can help you. But if you sin against the LORD himself, no one can help you!" But Eli's sons would not listen to him, because the LORD had decided to put them to death.

26The boy Samuel grew physically. He pleased the LORD and the people.

27A man of God came to Eli and said, "This is what the LORD says: 'I clearly showed myself to the family of your ancestor Aaron when they were slaves to the king of Egypt. 28I chose them from all the tribes of Israel to be my priests. I wanted them to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear the holy vest. I also let the family of your ancestor have part of all the offerings sacrificed by the Israelites. 29So why don't you respect

the sacrifices and gifts? You honor your sons more than me. You grow fat on the best parts of the meat the Israelites bring to me.'

30"So the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I promised that your family and your ancestor's family would serve me always.' But now the LORD says: 'This must stop! I will honor those who honor me, but I will dishonor those who ignore me. 31The time is coming when I will destroy the descendants of both you and your ancestors. No man will grow old in your family. 32You will see trouble in my house. No matter what good things happen to Israel, there will never be an old man in your family. 33I will not totally cut off your family from my altar. But your eyes will cry and your heart be sad, because all your descendants will die.

34"'I will give you a sign. Both your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will die on the same day. 35I will choose a loyal priest for myself who will listen to me and do what I want. I will make his family continue, and he will always serve before my appointed king. 36Then everyone left in your family will come and bow down before him. They will beg for a little money or a little food and say, "Please give me a job as priest so I can have food to eat."'"

## *God Calls Samuel*

3 The boy Samuel served the LORD under Eli. In those days the LORD did not speak directly to people very often; there were very few visions.

2Eli's eyes were so weak he was almost blind. One night he was lying in bed. 3Samuel was also in bed in the LORD's house, where the Ark of the Agreement was. God's lamp was still burning.

4Then the LORD called Samuel, and Samuel answered, "I am here!" 5He ran to Eli and said, "I am here. You called me."

But Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." So Samuel went back to bed.

6The LORD called again, "Samuel!"

Samuel again went to Eli and said, "I am here. You called me."

Again Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed."

7Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the LORD had not spoken directly to him yet.

8The LORD called Samuel for the third time. Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "I am here. You called me."

Then Eli realized the LORD was calling the boy. 9So he told Samuel, "Go to bed. If he calls you again, say, 'Speak, LORD. I am your servant and I am listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in bed.

10The LORD came and stood there and called as he had

before, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel said, “Speak, LORD. I am your servant and I am listening.”

11 The LORD said to Samuel, “Watch, I am going to do
something in Israel that will shock those who hear about it. 12 At
that time I will do to Eli and his family everything I promised,
from beginning to end. 13 I told Eli I would punish his family
always, because he knew his sons were evil. They acted without
honor, but he did not stop them. 14 So I swore to Eli’s family,
‘Your guilt will never be removed by sacrifice or offering.’”

15 Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors
of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli about the
vision, 16 but Eli called to him, “Samuel, my son!”

Samuel answered, “I am here.”

17 Eli asked, “What did the LORD say to you? Don’t hide it from
me. May God punish you terribly if you hide from me anything
he said to you.” 18 So Samuel told Eli everything and did not
hide anything from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD. Let him
do what he thinks is best.”

19 The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up; he did not let
any of Samuel’s messages fail to come true. 20 Then all Israel,
from Dan to Beersheba,[n] knew Samuel was a true prophet of
the LORD. 21 And the LORD continued to show himself at Shiloh,
and he showed himself to Samuel through his word.

4 So, news about Samuel spread through all of Israel.

## Psalm 53:1–6

### *The Unbelieving Fool*

**For the director of music. By mahalath. A maskil of David.**

53 Fools say to themselves, “There is no God.”

Fools are evil and do terrible things;
none of them does anything good.

2 God looked down from heaven on all people
to see if anyone was wise,
if anyone was looking to God for help.

[3]But all have turned away.
Together, everyone has become evil;
none of them does anything good.
Not a single person.

[4]Don’t the wicked understand?
They destroy my people as if they were eating bread.
They do not ask God for help.

[5]The wicked are filled with terror
where there had been nothing to fear.
God will scatter the bones of your enemies.

You will defeat them,
because God has rejected them.

[6]I pray that victory will come to Israel from Mount Zion!
May God bring them back.
Then the people of Jacob will rejoice,
and the people of Israel will be glad.

## Proverbs 15:8–11

[8]The LORD hates the sacrifice that the wicked offer,
but he likes the prayers of honest people.

[9]The LORD hates what evil people do,
but he loves those who do what is right.

[10]The person who quits doing what is right will be punished,
and the one who hates to be corrected will die.

[11]The LORD knows what is happening in the world of the dead,
so he surely knows the thoughts of the living.

# Luke 20:27–47

## *Some Sadducees Try to Trick Jesus*

27 Some Sadducees, who believed people would not rise from
the dead, came to Jesus. 28 They asked, “Teacher, Moses wrote
that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children,
then that man must marry the widow and have children for his
brother. 29 Once there were seven brothers. The first brother
married and died, but had no children. 30 Then the second
brother married the widow, and he died. 31 And the third brother
married the widow, and he died. The same thing happened with
all seven brothers; they died and had no children. 32 Finally, the
woman died also. 33 Since all seven brothers had married her,
whose wife will she be when people rise from the dead?”

34 Jesus said to them, “On earth, people marry and are given
to someone to marry. 35 But those who will be worthy to be
raised from the dead and live again will not marry, nor will they
be given to someone to marry. 36 In that life they are like angels
and cannot die. They are children of God, because they have
been raised from the dead. 37 Even Moses clearly showed that
the dead are raised to life. When he wrote about the burning
bush,[n] he said that the Lord is ‘the God of Abraham, the God of
Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’[n] 38 God is the God of the living, not
the dead, because all people are alive to him.”

39 Some of the teachers of the law said, “Teacher, your
answer was good.” 40 No one was brave enough to ask him
another question.

## *Is the Christ the Son of David?*

41 Then Jesus said, “Why do people say that the Christ is the
Son of David? 42 In the book of Psalms, David himself says:

‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit by me at my right side,

43 until I put your enemies under your control.”’[n]

Psalm 110:1

[44]David calls the Christ ‘Lord,’ so how can the Christ be his son?”

## *Jesus Accuses Some Leaders*

[45]While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his followers, [46]“Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around wearing fancy clothes, and they love for people to greet them with respect in the marketplaces. They love to have the most important seats in the synagogues and at feasts. [47]But they cheat widows and steal their houses and then try to make themselves look good by saying long prayers. They will receive a greater punishment.”

# May 1

## One Word from His Lips

*"But none of these things can really harm you."*

Luke 21:18

"Listen, I have given you power … that is greater than the enemy has" (Luke 10:19). Many players appear on the stage of Gethsemane. Judas and his betrayal. Peter and his sword … The soldiers and their weapons. And though these are crucial, they aren't instrumental. The encounter is not between Jesus and the soldiers; it is between God and Satan. Satan dares to enter yet another garden, but God stands and Satan hasn't a prayer …

Satan falls in the presence of Christ. One word from his lips, and the finest army in the world collapsed.

Satan is silent in the proclamation of Christ. Not once did the enemy speak without Jesus' invitation. Before Christ, Satan has nothing to say.

Satan is powerless against the protection of Christ …

When Jesus says he will keep you safe, he means it. Hell will have to get through him to get to you. Jesus is able to protect you. When he says he will get you home, he will get you home.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

### 1 Samuel 4:1b—5:12

#### *The Philistines Capture the Ark of the Agreement*

At that time the Israelites went out to fight the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer and the Philistines at Aphek.
2 The Philistines went to meet the Israelites in battle. And as the battle spread, they defeated the Israelites, killing about four thousand soldiers on the battlefield. 3 When some Israelite soldiers went back to their camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD let the Philistines defeat us? Let's bring the

Ark of the Agreement with the LORD here from Shiloh and take it with us into battle. Then God will save us from our enemies."

4So the people sent men to Shiloh. They brought back the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD All-Powerful, who sits between the gold creatures with wings. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the Ark.

5When the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD came into the camp, all the Israelites gave a great shout of joy that made the ground shake. 6When the Philistines heard Israel's shout, they asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?"

Then the Philistines found out that the Ark of the LORD had come into the Hebrew camp. 7They were afraid and said, "A god has come into the Hebrew camp! We're in trouble! This has never happened before! 8How terrible it will be for us! Who can save us from these powerful gods? They are the ones who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of disasters in the desert. 9Be brave, Philistines! Fight like men! In the past they were our slaves. So fight like men, or we will become their slaves."

10So the Philistines fought hard and defeated the Israelites, and every Israelite soldier ran away to his own home. It was a great defeat for Israel, because thirty thousand Israelite soldiers were killed. 11The Ark of God was taken by the Philistines, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

12That same day a man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battle. He tore his clothes and put dust on his head to show his great sadness. 13When he arrived in Shiloh, Eli was by the side of the road. He was sitting there in a chair, watching, because he was worried about the Ark of God. When the Benjaminite entered Shiloh, he told the bad news. Then all the people in town cried loudly. 14Eli heard the crying and asked, "What's all this noise?"

The Benjaminite ran to Eli and told him what had happened. 15Eli was now ninety-eight years old, and he was blind. 16The Benjaminite told him, "I have come from the battle. I ran all the way here today."

Eli asked, "What happened, my son?"

17The Benjaminite answered, "Israel ran away from the Philistines, and the Israelite army has lost many soldiers. Your two sons are both dead, and the Philistines have taken the Ark of God."

18When he mentioned the Ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair. He fell beside the gate, broke his neck, and died, because he was old and fat. He had led Israel for forty years.

## *The Glory Is Gone*

19Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and was about to give birth. When she heard the news that the

Ark of God had been taken and that Eli, her father-in-law, and Phinehas, her husband, were both dead, she began to give birth to her child. The child was born, but the mother had much trouble in giving birth. 20As she was dying, the women who helped her said, “Don’t worry! You’ve given birth to a son!” But she did not answer or pay attention. 21She named the baby Ichabod,[n] saying, “Israel’s glory is gone.” She said this because the Ark of God had been taken and her father-in-law and husband were dead. 22She said, “Israel’s glory is gone, because the Ark of God has been taken away.”

## *Trouble for the Philistines*

5 After the Philistines had captured the Ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2They carried it into Dagon’s temple and put it next to Dagon. 3When the people of Ashdod rose early the next morning, they found that Dagon had fallen on his face on the ground before the Ark of the LORD. So they put Dagon back in his place. 4The next morning when they rose, they again found Dagon fallen on the ground before the Ark of the LORD. His head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only his body was still in one piece. 5So, even today, Dagon’s priests and others who enter his temple at Ashdod refuse to step on the doorsill.

6The LORD was hard on the people of Ashdod and their neighbors. He caused them to suffer and gave them growths on their skin. 7When the people of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, “The Ark of the God of Israel can’t stay with us. God is punishing us and Dagon our god.” 8The people of Ashdod called all five Philistine kings together and asked them, “What should we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?”

The rulers answered, “Move the Ark of the God of Israel to Gath.” So the Philistines moved it to Gath.

9But after they moved it to Gath, there was a great panic. The LORD was hard on that city also, and he gave both old and young people in Gath growths on their skin. 10Then the Philistines sent the Ark of God to Ekron.

But when it came into Ekron, the people of Ekron yelled, “Why are you bringing the Ark of the God of Israel to our city? Do you want to kill us and our people?” 11So they called all the kings of the Philistines together and said, “Send the Ark of the God of Israel back to its place before it kills us and our people!” All the people in the city were struck with terror because God was so hard on them there. 12The people who did not die were troubled with growths on their skin. So the people of Ekron cried loudly to heaven.

## Psalm 54:1–7

### *A Prayer for Help*

**For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A maskil of David when the Ziphites went to Saul and said, “We think David is hiding among our people.”**

54 God, save me because of who you are.By your strength
show that I am innocent.

2Hear my prayer, God;
listen to what I say.

3Strangers turn against me,
and cruel people want to kill me.
They do not care about God. *Selah*

4See, God will help me;
the LORD will support me.

5Let my enemies be punished with their own evil.
Destroy them because you are loyal to me.

6I will offer a sacrifice as a special gift to you.
I will thank you, LORD, because you are good.

7You have saved me from all my troubles,
and I have seen my enemies defeated.

## Proverbs 15:12–13

12Those who make fun of wisdom don’t like to be corrected;

they will not ask the wise for advice.

13 Happiness makes a person smile,
but sadness can break a person's spirit.

## Luke 21:1–19

### *True Giving*

21 As Jesus looked up, he saw some rich people putting their gifts into the Temple money box.[n] 2 Then he saw a poor widow putting two small copper coins into the box. 3 He said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people. 4 They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had to live on."

### *The Temple Will Be Destroyed*

5 Some people were talking about the Temple and how it was decorated with beautiful stones and gifts offered to God.

But Jesus said, 6 "As for these things you are looking at, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another. Every stone will be thrown down."

7 They asked Jesus, "Teacher, when will these things happen? What will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

8 Jesus said, "Be careful so you are not fooled. Many people will come in my name, saying, 'I am the One' and, 'The time has come!' But don't follow them. 9 When you hear about wars and riots, don't be afraid, because these things must happen first, but the end will come later."

10 Then he said to them, "Nations will fight against other nations, and kingdoms against other kingdoms. 11 In various places there will be great earthquakes, sicknesses, and a lack of food. Fearful events and great signs will come from heaven.

12 "But before all these things happen, people will arrest you and treat you cruelly. They will judge you in their synagogues and put you in jail and force you to stand before kings and governors, because you follow me. 13 But this will give you an opportunity to tell about me. 14 Make up your minds not to worry ahead of time about what you will say. 15 I will give you the wisdom to say things that none of your enemies will be able to stand against or prove wrong. 16 Even your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends will turn against you, and they will kill

some of you. [17]All people will hate you because you follow me.
[18]But none of these things can really harm you. [19]By continuing
to have faith you will save your lives.

# May 2

## The Final Gathering

*"That day might come on you suddenly ... So be ready all the time."*

Luke 21:34, 36

EVERY person who has ever lived will be present at that final gathering. Every heart that has ever beat. Every mouth that has ever spoken. On that day you will be surrounded by a sea of people. Rich, poor. Famous, unknown. Kings, bums. Brilliant, demented. All will be present. And all will be looking in one direction. All will be looking at him. Every human being.

"The Son of Man will come again in his great glory" (Matthew 25:31).

You won't look at anyone else. No side glances to see what others are wearing. No whispers about new jewelry or comments about who is present. At this, the greatest gathering in history, you will have eyes for only one—the Son of Man. Wrapped in splendor. Shot through with radiance. Imploded with light and magnetic in power.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### 1 Samuel 6:1—7:17

#### *The Ark of God Is Sent Home*

6 The Philistines kept the Ark of God in their land seven months.
2Then they called for their priests and magicians and said,
"What should we do with the Ark of the LORD? Tell us how to
send it back home!"

3The priests and magicians answered, "If you send back the
Ark of the God of Israel, don't send it back empty. You must give
a penalty offering. If you are then healed, you will know that it
was because of the Ark that you had such trouble."

4The Philistines asked, "What kind of penalty offering should

we send to Israel's God?"

They answered, "Make five gold models of the growths on your skin and five gold models of rats. The number of models must match the number of Philistine kings, because the same sickness has come on you and your kings. 5Make models of the growths and the rats that are ruining the country, and give honor to Israel's God. Then maybe he will stop being so hard on you, your gods, and your land. 6Don't be stubborn like the king of Egypt and the Egyptians. After God punished them terribly, they let the Israelites leave Egypt.

7"You must build a new cart and get two cows that have just had calves. These must be cows that have never had yokes on their necks. Hitch the cows to the cart, and take the calves home, away from their mothers. 8Put the Ark of the LORD on the cart and the gold models for the penalty offering in a box beside the Ark. Then send the cart straight on its way. 9Watch the cart. If it goes toward Beth Shemesh in Israel's own land, the LORD has given us this great sickness. But if it doesn't, we will know that Israel's God has not punished us. Our sickness just happened by chance."

10The Philistines did what the priests and magicians said. They took two cows that had just had calves and hitched them to the cart, but they kept their calves at home. 11They put the Ark of the LORD and the box with the gold rats and models of growths on the cart. 12Then the cows went straight toward Beth Shemesh. They stayed on the road, mooing all the way, and did not turn right or left. The Philistine kings followed the cows as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.

13Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley. When they looked up and saw the Ark of the LORD, they were very happy. 14The cart came to the field belonging to Joshua of Beth Shemesh and stopped near a large rock. The people of Beth Shemesh chopped up the wood of the cart. Then they sacrificed the cows as burnt offerings to the LORD. 15The Levites took down the Ark of the LORD and the box that had the gold models, and they put both on the large rock. That day the people of Beth Shemesh offered whole burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. 16After the five Philistine kings saw this, they went back to Ekron the same day.

17The Philistines had sent these gold models of the growths as penalty offerings to the LORD. They sent one model for each Philistine town: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. 18And the Philistines also sent gold models of rats. The number of rats matched the number of towns belonging to the Philistine kings, including both strong, walled cities and country villages. The large rock on which they put the Ark of the LORD is still there in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

19But some of the men of Beth Shemesh looked into the Ark of the Lord. So God killed seventy of them. The people of Beth

Shemesh cried because the LORD had struck them down. 20They said, “Who can stand before the LORD, this holy God? Whom will he strike next?”

21Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, “The Philistines have brought back the Ark of the LORD. Come down and take it to your city.”

7 The men of Kiriath Jearim came and took the Ark of the LORD to Abinadab’s house on a hill. There they made Abinadab’s son Eleazar holy for the LORD so he could guard the Ark of the LORD.

## *The Lord Saves the Israelites*

2The Ark stayed at Kiriath Jearim a long time—twenty years in all. And the people of Israel began to follow the LORD again. 3Samuel spoke to the whole group of Israel, saying, “If you’re turning back to the LORD with all your hearts, you must remove your foreign gods and your idols of Ashtoreth. You must give yourselves fully to the LORD and serve only him. Then he will save you from the Philistines.”

4So the Israelites put away their idols of Baal and Ashtoreth, and they served only the LORD.

5Samuel said, “All Israel must meet at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” 6So the Israelites met together at Mizpah. They drew water from the ground and poured it out before the LORD and fasted that day. They confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel served as judge of Israel at Mizpah.

7The Philistines heard the Israelites were meeting at Mizpah, so the Philistine kings came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard they were coming, they were afraid. 8They said to Samuel, “Don’t stop praying to the LORD our God for us! Ask him to save us from the Philistines!” 9Then Samuel took a baby lamb and offered it to the LORD as a whole burnt offering. He called to the LORD for Israel’s sake, and the LORD answered him.

10While Samuel was burning the offering, the Philistines came near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered against them with loud thunder. They were so frightened they became confused. So the Israelites defeated the Philistines in battle. 11The men of Israel ran out of Mizpah and chased the Philistines almost to Beth Car, killing the Philistines along the way.

## *Peace Comes to Israel*

12After this happened Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named the stone Ebenezer,[n] saying, “The LORD has helped us to this point.” 13So the Philistines were defeated and did not enter the Israelites’ land again.

The LORD was against the Philistines all Samuel's life.
14 Earlier the Philistines had taken towns from the Israelites, but
the Israelites won them back, from Ekron to Gath. They also
took back from the Philistines the lands near these towns. There
was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.
15 Samuel continued as judge of Israel all his life. 16 Every
year he went from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah and judged the
Israelites in all these towns. 17 But Samuel always went back to
Ramah, where his home was. There he judged Israel and built
an altar to the LORD.

## Psalm 55:1–8

### *A Prayer About a False Friend*

**For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A maskil of David.**

55 God, listen to my prayerand do not ignore my cry for help.

2 Pay attention to me and answer me.
I am troubled and upset

3 by what the enemy says
and how the wicked look at me.

They bring troubles down on me,
and in anger they attack me.

4 I am frightened inside;
the terror of death has attacked me.

5 I am scared and shaking,
and terror grips me.

6 I said, "I wish I had wings like a dove.

Then I would fly away and rest.

7 I would wander far away
and stay in the desert. *Selah*

8 I would hurry to my place of escape,
far away from the wind and storm.”

## Proverbs 15:14

14 People with understanding want more knowledge,
but fools just want more foolishness.

## Luke 21:20–38

### *Jerusalem Will Be Destroyed*

20 “When you see armies all around Jerusalem, you will know
it will soon be destroyed. 21 At that time, the people in Judea
should run away to the mountains. The people in Jerusalem
must get out, and those who are near the city should not go in.
22 These are the days of punishment to bring about all that is
written in the Scriptures. 23 How terrible it will be for women
who are pregnant or have nursing babies! Great trouble will
come upon this land, and God will be angry with these people.
24 They will be killed by the sword and taken as prisoners to all
nations. Jerusalem will be crushed by non-Jewish people until
their time is over.

### *Don’t Fear*

25 “There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On earth,
nations will be afraid and confused because of the roar and fury
of the sea. 26 People will be so afraid they will faint, wondering
what is happening to the world, because the powers of the
heavens will be shaken. 27 Then people will see the Son of Man
coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these
things begin to happen, look up and hold your heads high,

because the time when God will free you is near!”

## *Jesus’ Words Will Live Forever*

[29]Then Jesus told this story: “Look at the fig tree and all the other trees. [30]When their leaves appear, you know that summer is near. [31]In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that God’s kingdom is near.

[32]“I tell you the truth, all these things will happen while the people of this time are still living. [33]Earth and sky will be destroyed, but the words I have spoken will never be destroyed.

## *Be Ready All the Time*

[34]“Be careful not to spend your time feasting, drinking, or worrying about worldly things. If you do, that day might come on you suddenly, [35]like a trap on all people on earth. [36]So be ready all the time. Pray that you will be strong enough to escape all these things that will happen and that you will be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

[37]During the day, Jesus taught the people in the Temple, and at night he went out of the city and stayed on the Mount of Olives. [38]Every morning all the people got up early to go to the Temple to listen to him.

# May 3

## The Master Plan

*"What God has planned for the Son of Man will happen."*

Luke 22:22

The Cross was no accident. Jesus' death was not the result of a panicking, cosmological engineer. The Cross wasn't a tragic surprise. Calvary was not a knee-jerk response to a world plummeting toward destruction. It wasn't a patch-job or a stop-gap measure. The death of the Son of God was anything but an unexpected peril.

No, it was part of a plan. It was a calculated choice. "It was the LORD who decided to crush him" (Isaiah 53:10). The Cross was drawn into the original blueprint. It was written into the script. The moment the forbidden fruit touched the lips of Eve, the shadow of a cross appeared on the horizon. And between that moment and the moment the man with the mallet placed the spike against the wrist of God, a master plan was fulfilled.

from *God Came Near*

### 1 Samuel 8:1—9:27

### *Israel Asks for a King*

8 When Samuel was old, he made his sons judges for Israel. 2His
first son was named Joel, and his second son was named Abijah.
Joel and Abijah were judges in Beersheba. 3But Samuel's sons
did not live as he did. They tried to get money dishonestly, and
they accepted money secretly to make wrong judgments.

4So all the elders came together and met Samuel at Ramah.
5They said to him, "You're old, and your sons don't live as you
do. Give us a king to rule over us like all the other nations."

6When the elders said that, Samuel was not pleased. He
prayed to the LORD, 7and the LORD told Samuel, "Listen to
whatever the people say to you. They have not rejected you.

They have rejected me from being their king. [8]They are doing as they have always done. When I took them out of Egypt, they left me and served other gods. They are doing the same to you. [9]Now listen to the people, but warn them what the king who rules over them will do."

[10]So Samuel told those who had asked him for a king what the LORD had said. [11]Samuel said, "If you have a king ruling over you, this is what he will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and his horses, and they will run in front of the king's chariot. [12]The king will make some of your sons commanders over thousands or over fifties. He will make some of your other sons plow his ground and reap his harvest. He will take others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. [13]He will take your daughters to make perfume and cook and bake for him. [14]He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his servants. [15]He will take one-tenth of your grain and grapes and give it to his officers and servants. [16]He will take your male and female servants, your best cattle, and your donkeys and use them all for his own work. [17]He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. [18]When that time comes, you will cry out because of the king you chose. But the LORD will not answer you then."

[19]But the people would not listen to Samuel. They said, "No! We want a king to rule over us. [20]Then we will be the same as all the other nations. Our king will judge for us and go with us and fight our battles."

[21]After Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated their words to the LORD. [22]The LORD answered, "You must listen to them. Give them a king."

Then Samuel told the people of Israel, "Go back to your towns."

## *Saul Looks for His Father's Donkeys*

9 Kish, son of Abiel from the tribe of Benjamin, was an important man. (Abiel was the son of Zeror, who was the son of Becorath, who was the son of Aphiah of Benjamin.) [2]Kish had a son named Saul, who was a fine young man. There was no Israelite better than he. Saul stood a head taller than any other man in Israel.

[3]Now the donkeys of Saul's father, Kish, were lost. So Kish said to Saul, his son, "Take one of the servants, and go and look for the donkeys." [4]Saul went through the mountains of Ephraim and the land of Shalisha, but he and the servant could not find the donkeys. They went into the land of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. They went through the land of Benjamin, but they still did not find them. [5]When they arrived in

the area of Zuph, Saul said to his servant, “Let’s go back or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and will start worrying about us.”

6But the servant answered, “A man of God is in this town. People respect him because everything he says comes true. Let’s go into the town now. Maybe he can tell us something about the journey we have taken.”

7Saul said to his servant, “If we go into the town, what can we give him? The food in our bags is gone. We have no gift to give him. Do we have anything?”

8Again the servant answered Saul. “Look, I have one-tenth of an ounce of silver. Give it to the man of God. Then he will tell us about our journey.” 9(In the past, if someone in Israel wanted to ask something from God, he would say, “Let’s go to the seer.” We call the person a prophet today, but in the past he was called a seer.)

10Saul said to his servant, “That’s a good idea. Come, let’s go.” So they went toward the town where the man of God was.

11As Saul and the servant were going up the hill to the town, they met some young women coming out to get water. Saul and the servant asked them, “Is the seer here?”

12The young women answered, “Yes, he’s here. He’s ahead of you. Hurry now. He has just come to our town today, because the people will offer a sacrifice at the place of worship. 13As soon as you enter the town, you will find him before he goes up to the place of worship to eat. The people will not begin eating until the seer comes, because he must bless the sacrifice. After that, the guests will eat. Go now, and you should find him.”

## *Saul Meets Samuel*

14Saul and the servant went up to the town. Just as they entered it, they saw Samuel coming toward them on his way up to the place of worship.

15The day before Saul came, the LORD had told Samuel: 16“About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Appoint him to lead my people Israel. He will save my people from the Philistines. I have seen the suffering of my people, and I have listened to their cry.”

17When Samuel first saw Saul, the LORD said to Samuel, “This is the man I told you about. He will organize my people.”

18Saul approached Samuel at the gate and said, “Please tell me where the seer’s house is.”

19Samuel answered, “I am the seer. Go with me to the place of worship. Today you and your servant are to eat with me. Tomorrow morning I will answer all your questions and send you home. 20Don’t worry about the donkeys you lost three days ago, because they have been found. Soon all the wealth of Israel

will belong to you and your family.”

21 Saul answered, “But I am from the tribe of Benjamin, the
smallest tribe in Israel. And my family group is the smallest in
the tribe of Benjamin. Why are you saying such things?”

22 Then Samuel took Saul and his servant into a large room
and gave them a choice place at the table. About thirty guests
were there. 23 Samuel said to the cook, “Bring the meat I gave
you, the portion I told you to set aside.”

24 So the cook took the thigh and put it on the table in front
of Saul. Samuel said, “This is the meat saved for you. Eat it,
because it was set aside for you for this special time. As I said,
‘I had invited the people.’” So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

25 After they finished eating, they came down from the place
of worship and went to the town. Then Samuel talked with Saul
on the roof[n] of his house. 26 At dawn they got up, and Samuel
called to Saul on the roof. He said, “Get up, and I will send you
on your way.” So Saul got up and went out of the house with
Samuel. 27 As Saul, his servant, and Samuel were getting near
the edge of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to go
on ahead of us, but you stay, because I have a message from
God for you.”

## Psalm 55:9–14

9 Lord, destroy and confuse their words,
because I see violence and fighting in the city.

10 Day and night they are all around its walls,
and evil and trouble are everywhere inside.

11 Destruction is everywhere in the city;
trouble and lying never leave its streets.

12 It was not an enemy insulting me.
I could stand that.

It was not someone who hated me.
I could hide from him.

[13]But it is you, a person like me,
my companion and good friend.

[14]We had a good friendship
and walked together to God's Temple.

## Proverbs 15:15–17

[15]Every day is hard for those who suffer,
but a happy heart is like a continual feast.

[16]It is better to be poor and respect the LORD
than to be wealthy and have much trouble.

[17]It is better to eat vegetables with those who love you
than to eat meat with those who hate you.

## Luke 22:1–23

### *Judas Becomes an Enemy of Jesus*

22 It was almost time for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called
the Passover Feast. [2]The leading priests and teachers of the law
were trying to find a way to kill Jesus, because they were afraid
of the people.
[3]Satan entered Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' twelve apostles.
[4]Judas went to the leading priests and some of the soldiers who
guarded the Temple and talked to them about a way to hand
Jesus over to them. [5]They were pleased and agreed to give
Judas money. [6]He agreed and watched for the best time to hand
Jesus over to them when he was away from the crowd.

### *Jesus Eats the Passover Meal*

[7]The Day of Unleavened Bread came when the Passover
lambs had to be sacrificed. [8]Jesus said to Peter and John, "Go

and prepare the Passover meal for us toeat."
9They asked, "Where do you want us to prepare it?" 10Jesus said to them, "After you go into the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters, 11and tell the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says: "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover meal with my followers?"' 12Then he will show you a large, furnished room upstairs. Prepare the Passover meal there."
13So Peter and John left and found everything as Jesus had said. And they prepared the Passover meal.

## *The Lord's Supper*

14When the time came, Jesus and the apostles were sitting at the table. 15He said to them, "I wanted very much to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer. 16I will not eat another Passover meal until it is given its true meaning in the kingdom of God."
17Then Jesus took a cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take this cup and share it among yourselves. 18I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine[n] until God's kingdom comes."
19Then Jesus took some bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the apostles, saying, "This is my body,[n] which I am giving for you. Do this to remember me." 20In the same way, after supper, Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup is the new agreement that God makes with his people. This new agreement begins with my blood which is poured out for you.

## *Who Will Turn Against Jesus?*

21"But one of you will turn against me, and his hand is with mine on the table. 22What God has planned for the Son of Man will happen, but how terrible it will be for that one who turns against the Son of Man."
23Then the apostles asked each other which one of them would do that.

# May 4

# Removing Doubt

*"Who is more important: the one sitting at the table or the one serving? You think the one at the table is more important, but I am like a servant among you."*

Luke 22:27

In Jesus' day the washing of feet was a task reserved not just for servants but for the lowest of servants. Every circle has its pecking order, and the circle of household workers was no exception. The servant at the bottom of the totem pole was expected to be the one on his knees with the towel and basin.

In this case the one with the towel and basin is the king of the universe. Hands that shaped the stars now wash away filth. Fingers that formed mountains now massage toes. And the one before whom all nations will one day kneel now kneels before his disciples. Hours before his own death, Jesus' concern is singular. He wants his disciples to know how much he loves them. More than removing dirt, Jesus is removing doubt.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## 1 Samuel 10:1—11:15

### *Samuel Appoints Saul*

10 Samuel took a jar of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head. He
kissed Saul and said, "The LORD has appointed you to lead his
people. 2After you leave me today, you will meet two men near
Rachel's tomb on the border of Benjamin at Zelzah. They will
say to you, 'The donkeys you were looking for have been found.
But now your father has stopped thinking about his donkeys
and is worrying about you. He is asking, "What will I do about
my son?"'
3"Then you will go on until you reach the big tree at Tabor.
Three men on their way to worship God at Bethel will meet you

there. One man will be carrying three goats. Another will be carrying three loaves of bread. And the third will have a leather bag full of wine. [4]They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you must accept. [5]Then you will go to Gibeah of God, where a Philistine camp is. When you approach this town, a group of prophets will come down from the place of worship. They will be playing harps, tambourines, flutes, and lyres, and they will be prophesying. [6]Then the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you with power. You will prophesy with these prophets, and you will be changed into a different man. [7]After these signs happen, do whatever you find to do, because God will help you.

[8]"Go ahead of me to Gilgal. I will come down to you to offer whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. But you must wait seven days. Then I will come and tell you what to do."

## *Saul Made King*

[9]When Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart. All these signs came true that day. [10]When Saul and his servant arrived at Gibeah, Saul met a group of prophets. The Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied with the prophets. [11]When people who had known Saul before saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What has happened to Kish's son? Is even Saul one of the prophets?"

[12]A man who lived there said, "Who is the father of these prophets?" So this became a famous saying: "Is even Saul one of the prophets?" [13]When Saul finished prophesying, he entered the place of worship.

[14]Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, "Where have you been?"

Saul said, "We were looking for the donkeys. When we couldn't find them, we went to talk to Samuel."

[15]Saul's uncle asked, "Please tell me. What did Samuel say to you?"

[16]Saul answered, "He told us the donkeys had already been found." But Saul did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about his becoming king.

[17]Samuel called all the people of Israel to meet with the LORD at Mizpah. [18]He said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I led Israel out of Egypt. I saved you from Egypt's control and from other kingdoms that were troubling you.' [19]But now you have rejected your God. He saves you from all your troubles and problems, but you said, 'No! We want a king to rule over us.' Now come, stand before the LORD in your tribes and family groups."

[20]When Samuel gathered all the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin was picked. [21]Samuel had them pass by in family groups, and Matri's family was picked. Then he had each man

of Matri's family pass by, and Saul son of Kish was picked. But when they looked for Saul, they could not find him. 22They asked the LORD, "Has Saul come here yet?"

The LORD said, "Yes. He's hiding behind the baggage."

23So they ran and brought him out. When Saul stood among the people, he was a head taller than anyone else. 24Then Samuel said to the people, "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!"

25Samuel explained the rights and duties of the king and then wrote them in a book and put it before the LORD. Then he told the people to go to their homes.

26Saul also went to his home in Gibeah. God touched the hearts of certain brave men who went along with him. 27But some troublemakers said, "How can this man save us?" They disapproved of Saul and refused to bring gifts to him. But Saul kept quiet.

## *Nahash Troubles Jabesh Gilead*

11 About a month later Nahash the Ammonite and his army surrounded the city of Jabesh in Gilead. All the people of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you."

2But he answered, "I will make a treaty with you only if I'm allowed to poke out the right eye of each of you. Then all Israel will be ashamed!"

3The elders of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Give us seven days to send messengers through all Israel. If no one comes to help us, we will give ourselves up to you."

4When the messengers came to Gibeah where Saul lived and told the people the news, they cried loudly. 5Saul was coming home from plowing the fields with his oxen when he heard the people crying. He asked, "What's wrong with the people that they are crying?" Then they told Saul what the messengers from Jabesh had said. 6When Saul heard their words, God's Spirit rushed upon him with power, and he became very angry. 7So he took a pair of oxen and cut them into pieces. Then he gave the pieces of the oxen to messengers and ordered them to carry them through all the land of Israel.

The messengers said, "This is what will happen to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." So the people became very afraid of the LORD. They all came together as if they were one person. 8Saul gathered the people together at Bezek. There were three hundred thousand men from Israel and thirty thousand men from Judah.

9They said to the messengers who had come, "Tell the people at Jabesh Gilead this: 'Before the day warms up tomorrow, you will be saved.'" So the messengers went and reported this to

the people at Jabesh, and they were very happy. [10]The people said to Nahash the Ammonite, “Tomorrow we will come out to meet you. Then you can do anything you want to us.”

[11]The next morning Saul divided his soldiers into three groups. At dawn they entered the Ammonite camp and defeated them before the heat of the day. The Ammonites who escaped were scattered; no two of them were still together.

[12]Then the people said to Samuel, “Who didn’t want Saul as king? Bring them here and we will kill them!”

[13]But Saul said, “No! No one will be put to death today. Today the LORD has saved Israel!”

[14]Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let’s go to Gilgal. There we will again promise to obey the king.” [15]So all the people went to Gilgal, and there, before the LORD, the people made Saul king. They offered fellowship offerings to the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites had a great celebration.

## Psalm 55:15–23

[15]Let death take away my enemies.
Let them die while they are still young
because evil lives with them.

[16]But I will call to God for help,
and the LORD will save me.

[17]Morning, noon, and night I am troubled and upset,
but he will listen to me.

[18]Many are against me,
but he keeps me safe in battle.

[19]God who lives forever
will hear me and punish them. *Selah*

But they will not change;
they do not fear God.

[20]The one who was my friend attacks his friends
and breaks his promises.

[21]His words are slippery like butter,
but war is in his heart.

His words are smoother than oil,
but they cut like knives.

[22]Give your worries to the LORD,
and he will take care of you.
He will never let good people down.

[23]But, God, you will bring down
the wicked to the grave.

Murderers and liars will live
only half a lifetime.

But I will trust in you.

## Proverbs 15:18–20

[18]People with quick tempers cause trouble,
but those who control their tempers stop a quarrel.

[19]A lazy person's life is like a patch of thorns,
but an honest person's life is like a smooth highway.

[20]Wise children make their father happy,
but foolish children disrespect their mother.

## Luke 22:24–46

## *Be Like a Servant*

24 The apostles also began to argue about which one of them
was the most important. 25 But Jesus said to them, “The kings of
the non-Jewish people rule over them, and those who have
authority over others like to be called ‘friends of the people.’
26 But you must not be like that. Instead, the greatest among
you should be like the youngest, and the leader should be like
the servant. 27 Who is more important: the one sitting at the
table or the one serving? You think the one at the table is more
important, but I am like a servant among you.
28 “You have stayed with me through my struggles. 29 Just as
my Father has given me a kingdom, I also give you a kingdom
30 so you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom. And you
will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

## *Don’t Lose Your Faith!*

31 “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to test all of you as a
farmer sifts his wheat. 32 I have prayed that you will not lose
your faith! Help your brothers be stronger when you come back
to me.”
33 But Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to
prison and even to die with you!”
34 But Jesus said, “Peter, before the rooster crows this day,
you will say three times that you don’t know me.”

## *Be Ready for Trouble*

35 Then Jesus said to the apostles, “When I sent you out
without a purse, a bag, or sandals, did you need anything?”
They said, “No.”
36 He said to them, “But now if you have a purse or a bag,
carry that with you. If you don’t have a sword, sell your coat
and buy one. 37 The Scripture says, ‘He was treated like a
criminal,’[n] and I tell you this scripture must have its full
meaning. It was written about me, and it is happening now.”
38 His followers said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.”
He said to them, “That is enough.”

## *Jesus Prays Alone*

39 Jesus left the city and went to the Mount of Olives, as he
often did, and his followers went with him. 40 When he reached
the place, he said to them, “Pray for strength against

temptation.”

41Then Jesus went about a stone’s throw away from them. He
kneeled down and prayed, 42“Father, if you are willing, take
away this cup[n] of suffering. But do what you want, not what I
want.” 43Then an angel from heaven appeared to him to
strengthen him. 44Being full of pain, Jesus prayed even harder.
His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. 45When
he finished praying, he went to his followers and found them
asleep because of their sadness. 46Jesus said to them, “Why are
you sleeping? Get up and pray for strength against temptation.”

# May 5

## “God Is for Me”

*You have recorded my troubles. You have kept a list of my tears.*

Psalm 56:8

God knows you. He has written your name on his hand and keeps a list of your tears (Isaiah 49:16; Psalm 56:8) … God knows you. And he is near you! How far is the shepherd from the sheep (John 10:14)? The branch from the vine (John 15:5)? That’s how far God is from you. He is near. See how these four words look taped to your bathroom mirror: “God is on my side” (Psalm 56:9).

And his kingdom needs you. The poor need you; the lonely need you; the church needs you … the cause of God needs you. You are part of the purposes he is working out in the world (Ephesians 1:11). The kingdom needs you to discover and deploy your unique skill. Use it to make much out of God. Get the word out. God is with us; we are not alone.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## 1 Samuel 12:1—13:22

### *Samuel’s Farewell Speech*

12 Samuel said to all Israel, “I have done everything you wanted
me to do and have put a king over you. 2Now you have a king to
lead you. I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I
have been your leader since I was young. 3Here I am. If I have
done anything wrong, you must testify against me before the
LORD and his appointed king. Did I steal anyone’s ox or donkey?
Did I hurt or cheat anyone? Did I ever secretly accept money to
pretend not to see something wrong? If I did any of these
things, I will make it right.”

4The Israelites answered, “You have not cheated us, or hurt
us, or taken anything unfairly from anyone.”

5 Samuel said to them, “The LORD is a witness to what you
have said. His appointed king is also a witness today that you
did not find anything wrong in me.”
“He is our witness,” they said.
6 Then Samuel said to the people, “It is the LORD who chose
Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors out of Egypt.
7 Now, stand there, and I will remind you of all the good things
the LORD did for you and your ancestors.
8 “After Jacob entered Egypt, his descendants cried to the
LORD for help. So the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who took your
ancestors out of Egypt and brought them to live in this place.
9 “But they forgot the LORD their God. So he handed them
over as slaves to Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor,
and as slaves to the Philistines and the king of Moab. They all
fought against your ancestors. 10 Then your ancestors cried to
the LORD and said, ‘We have sinned. We have left the LORD and
served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now save us from our
enemies, and we will serve you.’ 11 So the LORD sent Gideon,[n]
Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel. He saved you from your enemies
around you, and you lived in safety. 12 But when you saw Nahash
king of the Ammonites coming against you, you said, ‘No! We
want a king to rule over us!’—even though the LORD your God
was your king. 13 Now here is the king you chose, the one you
asked for. The LORD has put him over you. 14 You must honor the
LORD and serve him. You must obey his word and not turn
against his commands. Both you and the king ruling over you
must follow the LORD your God. If you do, it will be well with
you. 15 But if you don’t obey the LORD, and if you turn against his
commands, he will be against you. He will do to you what he did
to your ancestors.
16 “Now stand still and see the great thing the LORD will do
before your eyes. 17 It is now the time of the wheat harvest.[n] I
will pray for the LORD to send thunder and rain. Then you will
know what an evil thing you did against the LORD when you
asked for a king.”
18 Then Samuel prayed to the LORD, and that same day the
LORD sent thunder and rain. So the people were very afraid of
the LORD and Samuel. 19 They said to Samuel, “Pray to the LORD
your God for us, your servants! Don’t let us die! We’ve added to
all our sins the evil of asking for a king.”
20 Samuel answered, “Don’t be afraid. It’s true that you did
wrong, but don’t turn away from the LORD. Serve the LORD with
all your heart. 21 Idols are of no use, so don’t worship them.
They can’t help you or save you. They are useless! 22 For his own
sake, the LORD won’t leave his people. Instead, he was pleased
to make you his own people. 23 I will surely not stop praying for
you, because that would be sinning against the LORD. I will teach
you what is good and right. 24 You must honor the LORD and truly

serve him with all your heart. Remember the wonderful things
he did for you! 25But if you are stubborn and do evil, he will
sweep you and your king away."
13 Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he was
king over Israel forty-two years.[n] 2Saul chose three thousand
men from Israel. Two thousand men stayed with him at
Micmash in the mountains of Bethel, and one thousand men
stayed with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. Saul sent the other
men in the army back home.
3Jonathan attacked the Philistine camp in Geba, and the
other Philistines heard about it. Saul said, "Let the Hebrews
hear what happened." So he told the men to blow trumpets
through all the land of Israel. 4All the Israelites heard the news.
The men said, "Saul has defeated the Philistine camp. Now the
Philistines will really hate us!" Then the Israelites were called
to join Saul at Gilgal.
5The Philistines gathered to fight Israel with three thousand[n]
chariots and six thousand men to ride in them. Their soldiers
were as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. The
Philistines went and camped at Micmash, which is east of Beth
Aven. 6When the Israelites saw that they were in trouble, they
went to hide in caves and bushes, among the rocks, and in pits
and wells. 7Some Hebrews even went across the Jordan River to
the land of Gad and Gilead.
But Saul stayed at Gilgal, and all the men in his army were
shaking with fear. 8Saul waited seven days, because Samuel had
said he would meet him then. But Samuel did not come to
Gilgal, and the soldiers began to leave.
9So Saul said, "Bring me the whole burnt offering and the
fellowship offerings." Then Saul offered the whole burnt
offering. 10Just as he finished, Samuel arrived, and Saul went to
greet him.
11Samuel asked, "What have you done?"
Saul answered, "I saw the soldiers leaving me, and you were
not here when you said you would be. The Philistines were
gathering at Micmash. 12Then I thought, 'The Philistines will
come against me at Gilgal, and I haven't asked for the LORD's
approval.' So I forced myself to offer the whole burnt offering."
13Samuel said, "You acted foolishly! You haven't obeyed the
command of the LORD your God. If you had obeyed him, the LORD
would have made your kingdom continue in Israel always, 14but
now your kingdom will not continue. The LORD has looked for
the kind of man he wants. He has appointed him to rule his
people, because you haven't obeyed his command."
15Then Samuel left Gilgal and went to Gibeah in Benjamin.
Saul counted the men who were still with him, and there were
about six hundred.

## *Hard Times for Israel*

16 Saul and his son Jonathan and the soldiers with him stayed
in Gibeah in the land of Benjamin. The Philistines made their
camp at Micmash. 17 Three groups went out from the Philistine
camp to make raids. One group went on the Ophrah road in the
land of Shual. 18 The second group went on the Beth Horon
road. The third group went on the border road that overlooks
the Valley of Zeboim toward the desert.
19 The whole land of Israel had no blacksmith because the
Philistines had said, "The Hebrews might make swords and
spears." 20 So all the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines
to have their plows, hoes, axes, and sickles sharpened. 21 The
Philistine blacksmiths charged about one-fourth of an ounce of
silver for sharpening plows and hoes. And they charged one-
eighth of an ounce of silver for sharpening picks, axes, and the
sticks used to guide oxen.
22 So when the battle came, the soldiers with Saul and
Jonathan had no swords or spears. Only Saul and his son
Jonathan had them.

# Psalm 56:1–13

## *Trusting God for Help*

**For the director of music. To the tune of "The Dove in the Distant Oak." A miktam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.**

56 God, be merciful to me because people are chasing me;
the battle has pressed me all day long.

2 My enemies have chased me all day;
there are many proud people fighting me.

3 When I am afraid,
I will trust you.

4 I praise God for his word.
I trust God, so I am not afraid.

What can human beings do to me?

5 All day long they twist my words;
all their evil plans are against me.

6 They wait. They hide.
They watch my steps,
hoping to kill me.

7 God, do not let them escape;
punish the foreign nations in your anger.

8 You have recorded my troubles.
You have kept a list of my tears.
Aren't they in your records?

9 On the day I call for help, my enemies will be defeated.
I know that God is on my side.

10 I praise God for his word to me;
I praise the LORD for his word.

11 I trust in God. I will not be afraid.
What can people do to me?

12 God, I must keep my promises to you.
I will give you my offerings to thank you,

13 because you have saved me from death.
You have kept me from being defeated.

So I will walk with God
in light among the living.

## Proverbs 15:21–23

21 A person without wisdom enjoys being foolish,
but someone with understanding does what is right.

22 Plans fail without good advice,
but they succeed with the advice of many others.

23 People enjoy giving good advice.
Saying the right word at the right time is so pleasing.

## Luke 22:47–71

### *Jesus Is Arrested*

47 While Jesus was speaking, a crowd came up, and Judas,
one of the twelve apostles, was leading them. He came close to
Jesus so he could kiss him.
48 But Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you using the kiss to give
the Son of Man to his enemies?”
49 When those who were standing around him saw what was
happening, they said, “Lord, should we strike them with our
swords?” 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high
priest and cut off his right ear.
51 Jesus said, “Stop! No more of this.” Then he touched the
servant’s ear and healed him.
52 Those who came to arrest Jesus were the leading priests,
the soldiers who guarded the Temple, and the elders. Jesus said
to them, “You came out here with swords and clubs as though I
were a criminal. 53 I was with you every day in the Temple, and
you didn’t arrest me there. But this is your time—the time when
darkness rules.”

### *Peter Says He Doesn’t Know Jesus*

54 They arrested Jesus, and led him away, and brought him
into the house of the high priest. Peter followed far behind
them. 55 After the soldiers started a fire in the middle of the
courtyard and sat together, Peter sat with them. 56 A servant girl
saw Peter sitting there in the firelight, and looking closely at
him, she said, “This man was also with him.”

[57]But Peter said this was not true; he said, “Woman, I don’t know him.”

[58]A short time later, another person saw Peter and said, “You are also one of them.”

But Peter said, “Man, I am not!”

[59]About an hour later, another man insisted, “Certainly this man was with him, because he is from Galilee, too.”

[60]But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you are talking about!”

At once, while Peter was still speaking, a rooster crowed. [61]Then the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. And Peter remembered what the Lord had said: “Before the rooster crows this day, you will say three times that you don’t know me.” [62]Then Peter went outside and cried painfully.

## *The People Make Fun of Jesus*

[63]The men who were guarding Jesus began making fun of him and beating him.

[64]They blindfolded him and said, “Prove that you are a prophet, and tell us who hit you.” [65]They said many cruel things to Jesus.

## *Jesus Before the Leaders*

[66]When day came, the council of the elders of the people, both the leading priests and the teachers of the law, came together and led Jesus to their highest court. [67]They said, “If you are the Christ, tell us.”

Jesus said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe me. [68]And if I ask you, you will not answer. [69]But from now on, the Son of Man will sit at the right hand of the powerful God.”

[70]They all said, “Then are you the Son of God?”

Jesus said to them, “You say that I am.”

[71]They said, “Why do we need witnesses now? We ourselves heard him say this.”

# May 6

## Love Doesn’t Brag

*The Lord will tear down the proud person’s house.*

Proverbs 15:25

The humble heart honors others. Is Jesus not our example? Content to be known as a carpenter. Happy to be mistaken for the gardener. He served his followers by washing their feet. He serves us by doing the same. Each morning he gifts us with beauty. Each Sunday he calls us to his table. Each moment he dwells in our hearts. And does he not speak of the day when he as “the master will dress himself to serve and tell the servants to sit at the table, and he will serve them” (Luke 12:37)?

If Jesus is so willing to honor us, can we not do the same for others? Make people a priority. Accept your part in his plan. Be quick to share the applause. And, most of all, regard others as more important than yourself. Love does. For love “does not brag, and it is not proud” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## 1 Samuel 13:23—15:35

### *Israel Defeats the Philistines*

23 A group from the Philistine army had gone out to the pass
at Micmash.
14 One day Jonathan, Saul’s son, said to the officer who carried
his armor, “Come, let’s go over to the Philistine camp on the
other side.” But Jonathan did not tell his father.
2 Saul was sitting under a pomegranate tree at the threshing
floor near Gibeah. He had about six hundred men with him.
3 One man was Ahijah who was wearing the holy vest. (Ahijah
was a son of Ichabod’s brother Ahitub. Ichabod was the son of
Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD’s priest in Shiloh.) No one
knew Jonathan had left.

4There was a steep slope on each side of the pass that
Jonathan planned to go through to reach the Philistine camp.
The cliff on one side was named Bozez, and the cliff on the
other side was named Seneh. 5One cliff faced north toward
Micmash. The other faced south toward Geba.

6Jonathan said to his officer who carried his armor, "Come.
Let's go to the camp of those men who are not circumcised.
Maybe the LORD will help us. The LORD can give us victory if we
have many people, or just a few."

7The officer who carried Jonathan's armor said to him, "Do
whatever you think is best. Go ahead. I'm with you."

8Jonathan said, "Then come. We will cross over to the
Philistines and let them see us. 9If they say to us, 'Stay there
until we come to you,' we will stay where we are. We won't go
up to them. 10But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up,
and the LORD will let us defeat them. This will be the sign for
us."

11When both Jonathan and his officer let the Philistines see
them, the Philistines said, "Look! The Hebrews are crawling out
of the holes they were hiding in!" 12The Philistines in the camp
shouted to Jonathan and his officer, "Come up to us. We'll teach
you a lesson!"

Jonathan said to his officer, "Climb up behind me, because
the LORD has given the Philistines to Israel!" 13So Jonathan
climbed up, using his hands and feet, and his officer climbed
just behind him. Jonathan struck down the Philistines as he
went, and his officer killed them as he followed behind him. 14In
that first fight Jonathan and his officer killed about twenty
Philistines over a half acre of ground.

15All the Philistine soldiers panicked—those in the camp and
those in the raiding party. The ground itself shook! God had
caused the panic.

16Saul's guards were at Gibeah in the land of Benjamin when
they saw the Philistine soldiers running in every direction.
17Saul said to his army, "Check to see who has left our camp."
When they checked, they learned that Jonathan and his officer
were gone.

18So Saul said to Ahijah the priest, "Bring the Ark of God."
(At that time it was with the Israelites.) 19While Saul was
talking to the priest, the confusion in the Philistine camp was
growing. Then Saul said to Ahijah, "Put your hand down!"

20Then Saul gathered his army and entered the battle. They
found the Philistines confused, striking each other with their
swords! 21Earlier, there were Hebrews who had served the
Philistines and had stayed in their camp, but now they joined
the Israelites with Saul and Jonathan. 22When all the Israelites
hidden in the mountains of Ephraim heard that the Philistine
soldiers were running away, they also joined the battle and

chased the Philistines. [23]So the LORD saved the Israelites that day, and the battle moved on past Beth Aven.

## *Saul Makes Another Mistake*

[24]The men of Israel were miserable that day because Saul had made an oath for all of them. He had said, “No one should eat food before evening and before I finish defeating my enemies. If he does, he will be cursed!” So no Israelite soldier ate food.

[25]Now the army went into the woods, where there was some honey on the ground. [26]They came upon some honey, but no one took any because they were afraid of the oath. [27]Jonathan had not heard the oath Saul had put on the army, so he dipped the end of his stick into the honey and lifted some out and ate it. Then he felt better. [28]Then one of the soldiers told Jonathan, “Your father made an oath for all the soldiers. He said any man who eats today will be cursed! That’s why they are so weak.”

[29]Jonathan said, “My father has made trouble for the land! See how much better I feel after just tasting a little of this honey! [30]It would have been much better for the men to eat the food they took from their enemies today. We could have killed many more Philistines!”

[31]That day the Israelites defeated the Philistines from Micmash to Aijalon. After that, they were very tired. [32]They had taken sheep, cattle, and calves from the Philistines. Now they were so hungry they killed the animals on the ground and ate them, without draining the blood from them! [33]Someone said to Saul, “Look! The men are sinning against the LORD. They’re eating meat without draining the blood from it!”

Saul said, “You have sinned! Roll a large stone over here now!” [34]Then he said, “Go to the men and tell them that each person must bring his ox and sheep to me and kill it here and eat it. Don’t sin against the LORD by eating meat without draining the blood from it.”

That night everyone brought his animals and killed them there. [35]Then Saul built an altar to the LORD. It was the first altar he had built to the LORD.

[36]Saul said, “Let’s go after the Philistines tonight and rob them. We won’t let any of them live!”

The men answered, “Do whatever you think is best.”

But the priest said, “Let’s ask God.”

[37]So Saul asked God, “Should I chase the Philistines? Will you let us defeat them?” But God did not answer Saul at that time. [38]Then Saul said to all the leaders of his army, “Come here. Let’s find out what sin has been done today. [39]As surely as the Lord lives who has saved Israel, even if my son Jonathan did the sin, he must die.” But no one in the army spoke.

40 Then Saul said to all the Israelites, “You stand on this side.
I and my son Jonathan will stand on the other side.”
The men answered, “Do whatever you think is best.”
41 Then Saul prayed to the LORD, the God of Israel, “Give me
the right answer.”
And Saul and Jonathan were picked; the other men went
free. 42 Saul said, “Now let us discover if it is I or Jonathan my
son who is guilty.” And Jonathan was picked.
43 Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.”
So Jonathan told Saul, “I only tasted a little honey from the
end of my stick. And must I die now?”
44 Saul said, “Jonathan, if you don’t die, may God punish me
terribly.”
45 But the soldiers said to Saul, “Must Jonathan die? Never!
He is responsible for saving Israel today! As surely as the LORD
lives, not even a hair of his head will fall to the ground! Today
Jonathan fought against the Philistines with God’s help!” So the
army saved Jonathan, and he did not die.
46 Then Saul stopped chasing the Philistines, and they went
back to their own land.

## *Saul Fights Israel’s Enemies*

47 When Saul became king over Israel, he fought against
Israel’s enemies all around. He fought Moab, the Ammonites,
Edom, the king of Zobah, and the Philistines. Everywhere Saul
went he defeated Israel’s enemies. 48 He fought bravely and
defeated the Amalekites. He saved the Israelites from their
enemies who had robbed them.
49 Saul’s sons were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malki-Shua. His older
daughter was named Merab, and his younger daughter was
named Michal. 50 Saul’s wife was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz.
The commander of his army was Abner son of Ner, Saul’s uncle.
51 Saul’s father Kish and Abner’s father Ner were sons of Abiel.
52 All Saul’s life he fought hard against the Philistines. When
he saw strong or brave men, he took them into his army.

## *Saul Rejected as King*

15 Samuel said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to appoint you king
over Israel. Now listen to his message. 2 This is what the LORD
All-Powerful says: ‘When the Israelites came out of Egypt, the
Amalekites tried to stop them from going to Canaan. So I will
punish them. 3 Now go, attack the Amalekites and destroy
everything they own as an offering to the LORD. Don’t let
anything live. Put to death men and women, children and small
babies, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”
4 So Saul called the army together at Telaim. There were two

hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah. [5]Then Saul went to the city of Amalek and set up an ambush in the ravine. [6]He said to the Kenites, “Go away. Leave the Amalekites so that I won’t destroy you with them, because you showed kindness to the Israelites when they came out of Egypt.” So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.

[7]Then Saul defeated the Amalekites. He fought them all the way from Havilah to Shur, at the border of Egypt. [8]He took King Agag of the Amalekites alive, but he killed all of Agag’s army with the sword. [9]Saul and the army let Agag live, along with the best sheep, fat cattle, and lambs. They let every good animal live, because they did not want to destroy them. But when they found an animal that was weak or useless, they killed it.

[10]Then the LORD spoke his word to Samuel: [11]“I am sorry I made Saul king, because he has stopped following me and has not obeyed my commands.” Samuel was upset, and he cried out to the LORD all night long.

[12]Early the next morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul. But the people told Samuel, “Saul has gone to Carmel, where he has put up a monument in his own honor. Now he has gone down to Gilgal.”

[13]When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said, “May the LORD bless you! I have obeyed the LORD’s commands.”

[14]But Samuel said, “Then why do I hear cattle mooing and sheep bleating?”

[15]Saul answered, “The soldiers took them from the Amalekites. They saved the best sheep and cattle to offer as sacrifices to the LORD your God, but we destroyed all the other animals.”

[16]Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.”

Saul answered, “Tell me.”

[17]Samuel said, “Once you didn’t think much of yourself, but now you have become the leader of the tribes of Israel. The LORD appointed you to be king over Israel. [18]And he sent you on a mission. He said, ‘Go and destroy those evil people, the Amalekites. Make war on them until all of them are dead.’ [19]Why didn’t you obey the LORD? Why did you take the best things? Why did you do what the LORD said was wrong?”

[20]Saul said, “But I did obey the LORD. I did what the LORD told me to do. I destroyed all the Amalekites, and I brought back Agag their king. [21]The soldiers took the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”

[22]But Samuel answered,

“What pleases the LORD more:
burnt offerings and sacrifices

or obedience to his voice?

It is better to obey than to sacrifice.
It is better to listen to God than to offer the fat of sheep.

[23]Disobedience is as bad as the sin of sorcery.
Pride is as bad as the sin of worshiping idols.

You have rejected the LORD's command.
Now he rejects you as king."

[24]Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I didn't obey the LORD's commands and your words. I was afraid of the people, and I did what they said. [25]Now, I beg you, forgive my sin. Come back with me so I may worship the LORD."

[26]But Samuel said to Saul, "I won't go back with you. You rejected the LORD's command, and now he rejects you as king of Israel."

[27]As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught his robe, and it tore. [28]Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors who is better than you. [29]The LORD is the Eternal One of Israel. He does not lie or change his mind. He is not a human being, so he does not change his mind."

[30]Saul answered, "I have sinned. But please honor me in front of the elders of my people and in front of the Israelites. Come back with me so that I can worship the LORD your God." [31]So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

[32]Then Samuel said, "Bring me King Agag of the Amalekites."

Agag came to Samuel in chains, but Agag thought, "Surely the threat of death has passed."

[33]Samuel said to him, "Your sword made other mothers lose their children. Now your mother will have no children." And Samuel cut Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal.

[34]Then Samuel left and went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah. [35]And Samuel never saw Saul again the rest of his life, but he was sad for Saul. And the LORD was very sorry he had made Saul king of Israel.

## Psalm 57:1–3

## *A Prayer in Troubled Times*

**For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." A miktam of David when he escaped from Saul in the cave.**

57 Be merciful to me, God; be merciful to me
because I come to you for protection.

Let me hide under the shadow of your wings
until the trouble has passed.

2I cry out to God Most High,
to the God who does everything for me.

3He sends help from heaven and saves me.
He punishes those who chase me. *Selah*
God sends me his love and truth.

# Proverbs 15:24–25

24Wise people's lives get better and better.
They avoid whatever would cause their death.

25The LORD will tear down the proud person's house,
but he will protect the widow's property.

# Luke 23:1–25

## *Pilate Questions Jesus*

23 Then the whole group stood up and led Jesus to Pilate.[n] 2They began to accuse Jesus, saying, "We caught this man telling things that mislead our people. He says that we should not pay

taxes to Caesar, and he calls himself the Christ, a king."

3Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Those are your words."

4Pilate said to the leading priests and the people, "I find nothing against this man."

5They were insisting, saying, "But Jesus makes trouble with the people, teaching all around Judea. He began in Galilee, and now he is here."

## *Pilate Sends Jesus to Herod*

6Pilate heard this and asked if Jesus was from Galilee. 7Since Jesus was under Herod's authority, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at that time. 8When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, because he had heard about Jesus and had wanted to meet him for a long time. He was hoping to see Jesus work a miracle. 9Herod asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus said nothing. 10The leading priests and teachers of the law were standing there, strongly accusing Jesus. 11After Herod and his soldiers had made fun of Jesus, they dressed him in a kingly robe and sent him back to Pilate. 12In the past, Pilate and Herod had always been enemies, but on that day they became friends.

## *Jesus Must Die*

13Pilate called the people together with the leading priests and the rulers. 14He said to them, "You brought this man to me, saying he makes trouble among the people. But I have questioned him before you all, and I have not found him guilty of what you say. 15Also, Herod found nothing wrong with him; he sent him back to us. Look, he has done nothing for which he should die. 16So, after I punish him, I will let him go free." [17Every year at the Passover Feast, Pilate had to release one prisoner to the people.][n]

18But the people shouted together, "Take this man away! Let Barabbas go free!" 19(Barabbas was a man who was in prison for his part in a riot in the city and for murder.)

20Pilate wanted to let Jesus go free and told this to the crowd. 21But they shouted again, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

22A third time Pilate said to them, "Why? What wrong has he done? I can find no reason to kill him. So I will have him punished and set him free."

23But they continued to shout, demanding that Jesus be crucified. Their yelling became so loud that 24Pilate decided to give them what they wanted. 25He set free the man who was in jail for rioting and murder, and he handed Jesus over to them to do with him as they wished.

# May 7

## Absurdities and Ironies

*“Father, I give you my life.” After Jesus said this, he died.*

Luke 23:46

As Christ gave his final breath, the earth gave a sudden stir. A rock rolled, and a soldier stumbled. Then, as suddenly as the silence was broken, the silence returned. And now all is quiet. The mocking has ceased. There is no one to mock.

The soldiers are busy with the business of cleaning up the dead. Two men have come. Dressed well and meaning well, they are given the body of Jesus.

And we are left with the relics of his death.

Three nails in a bin.

Three cross-shaped shadows.

A braided crown with scarlet tips.

Bizarre, isn’t it? The thought that this blood is not man’s blood but God’s?

Crazy, isn’t it? To think that these nails held your sins to a cross? …

Absurdities and ironies. The hill of Calvary is nothing if not both.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### 1 Samuel 16:1—17:58

#### *Samuel Goes to Bethlehem*

16 The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you continue to feel
sorry for Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel. Fill your
container with olive oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse who
lives in Bethlehem, because I have chosen one of his sons to be
king.”

2But Samuel said, “If I go, Saul will hear the news and will
try to kill me.”

The LORD said, “Take a young calf with you. Say, ‘I have come to offer a sacrifice to the LORD.’ 3Invite Jesse to the sacrifice. Then I will tell you what to do. You must appoint the one I show you.”

4Samuel did what the LORD told him to do. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of Bethlehem shook with fear. They met him and asked, “Are you coming in peace?”

5Samuel answered, “Yes, I come in peace. I have come to make a sacrifice to the LORD. Set yourselves apart to the LORD and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he set Jesse and his sons apart to the LORD, and he invited them to come to the sacrifice.

6When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab, and he thought, “Surely the LORD has appointed this person standing here before him.”

7But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don’t look at how handsome Eliab is or how tall he is, because I have not chosen him. God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

8Then Jesse called Abinadab and told him to pass by Samuel. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this man either.” 9Then Jesse had Shammah pass by. But Samuel said, “No, the LORD has not chosen this one.” 10Jesse had seven of his sons pass by Samuel. But Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.”

11Then he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

Jesse answered, “I still have the youngest son. He is out taking care of the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him. We will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

12So Jesse sent and had his youngest son brought in. He was a fine boy, tanned, and handsome.

The LORD said to Samuel, “Go, appoint him, because he is the one.”

13So Samuel took the container of olive oil and poured it on Jesse’s youngest son to appoint him in front of his brothers. From that day on, the LORD’s Spirit worked in David. Samuel then went back to Ramah.

## *David Serves Saul*

14But the LORD’s Spirit had left Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

15Saul’s servants said to him, “See, an evil spirit from God is troubling you. 16Give us the command to look for someone who can play the harp. When the evil spirit from God troubles you, he will play, and you will feel better.”

17So Saul said to his servants, “Find someone who can play

well and bring him to me."

18One of the servants said, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem play the harp. He is brave and courageous. He is a good speaker and handsome, and the LORD is with him."

19Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse, saying, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep." 20So Jesse loaded a donkey with bread, a leather bag full of wine, and a young goat, and he sent them with his son David to Saul.

21When David came to Saul, he began to serve him. Saul liked David and made him the officer who carried his armor. 22Saul sent a message to Jesse, saying, "Let David stay and serve me because I like him."

23When the evil spirit from God troubled Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then the evil spirit would leave him, and Saul would feel better.

## *David and Goliath*

17 The Philistines gathered their armies for war. They met at Socoh in Judah and camped at Ephes Dammim between Socoh and Azekah. 2Saul and the Israelites gathered in the Valley of Elah and camped there and took their positions to fight the Philistines. 3The Philistines controlled one hill while the Israelites controlled another. The valley was between them.

4The Philistines had a champion fighter from Gath named Goliath. He was about nine feet, four inches tall. He came out of the Philistine camp 5with a bronze helmet on his head and a coat of bronze armor that weighed about one hundred twenty-five pounds. 6He wore bronze protectors on his legs, and he had a bronze spear on his back. 7The wooden part of his larger spear was like a weaver's rod, and its blade weighed about fifteen pounds. The officer who carried his shield walked in front of him.

8Goliath stood and shouted to the Israelite soldiers, "Why have you taken positions for battle? I am a Philistine, and you are Saul's servants! Choose a man and send him to fight me. 9If he can fight and kill me, we will be your servants. But if I can kill him, you will be our servants." 10Then he said, "Today I stand and dare the army of Israel! Send one of your men to fight me!" 11When Saul and the Israelites heard the Philistine's words, they were very scared.

12Now David was the son of Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons. In Saul's time Jesse was an old man. 13His three oldest sons followed Saul to the war. The first son was Eliab, the second was Abinadab, and the third was Shammah. 14David was the youngest. Jesse's three oldest sons followed Saul, 15but David went back and forth from Saul to Bethlehem, where he took care of his father's sheep.

16For forty days the Philistine came out every morning and
evening and stood before the Israelite army.
17Jesse said to his son David, “Take this half bushel of cooked
grain and ten loaves of bread to your brothers in the camp.
18Also take ten pieces of cheese to the commander and to your
brothers. See how your brothers are and bring back some proof
to show me that they are all right. 19Your brothers are with Saul
and the army in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the
Philistines.”
20Early in the morning David left the sheep with another
shepherd. He took the food and left as Jesse had told him. When
David arrived at the camp, the army was going out to their
battle positions, shouting their war cry. 21The Israelites and
Philistines were lining up their men to face each other in battle.
22David left the food with the man who kept the supplies and
ran to the battle line to talk to his brothers. 23While he was
talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath,
came out. He shouted things against Israel as usual, and David
heard him. 24When the Israelites saw Goliath, they were very
much afraid and ran away.
25They said, “Look at this man! He keeps coming out to
challenge Israel. The king will give much money to whoever
kills him. He will also let whoever kills him marry his daughter.
And his father’s family will not have to pay taxes in Israel.”
26David asked the men who stood near him, “What will be
done to reward the man who kills this Philistine and takes away
the shame from Israel? Who does this uncircumcised Philistine
think he is? Does he think he can speak against the armies of
the living God?”
27The Israelites told David what would be done for the man
who would kill Goliath.
28When David’s oldest brother Eliab heard David talking with
the soldiers, he was angry with David. He asked David, “Why
did you come here? Who’s taking care of those few sheep of
yours in the desert? I know you are proud and wicked at heart.
You came down here just to watch the battle.”
29David asked, “Now what have I done wrong? Can’t I even
talk?” 30When he turned to other people and asked the same
questions, they gave him the same answer as before. 31Yet what
David said was told to Saul, and he sent for David.
32David said to Saul, “Don’t let anyone be discouraged. I,
your servant, will go and fight this Philistine!”
33Saul answered, “You can’t go out against this Philistine and
fight him. You’re only a boy. Goliath has been a warrior since he
was a young man.”
34But David said to Saul, “I, your servant, have been keeping
my father’s sheep. When a lion or bear came and took a sheep
from the flock, 35I would chase it. I would attack it and save the

sheep from its mouth. When it attacked me, I caught it by its fur and hit it and killed it. 36I, your servant, have killed both a lion and a bear! This uncircumcised Philistine will be like them, because he has spoken against the armies of the living God. 37The LORD who saved me from a lion and a bear will save me from this Philistine."

Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you." 38Saul put his own clothes on David. He put a bronze helmet on his head and dressed him in armor. 39David put on Saul's sword and tried to walk around, but he was not used to all the armor Saul had put on him.

He said to Saul, "I can't go in this, because I'm not used to it." Then David took it all off. 40He took his stick in his hand and chose five smooth stones from a stream. He put them in his shepherd's bag and grabbed his sling. Then he went to meet the Philistine.

41At the same time, the Philistine was coming closer to David. The man who held his shield walked in front of him. 42When Goliath looked at David and saw that he was only a boy, tanned and handsome, he looked down on David with disgust. 43He said, "Do you think I am a dog, that you come at me with a stick?" He used his gods' names to curse David. 44He said to David, "Come here. I'll feed your body to the birds of the air and the wild animals!"

45But David said to him, "You come to me using a sword and two spears. But I come to you in the name of the LORD All-Powerful, the God of the armies of Israel! You have spoken against him. 46Today the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll kill you and cut off your head. Today I'll feed the bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds of the air and the wild animals. Then all the world will know there is a God in Israel! 47Everyone gathered here will know the LORD does not need swords or spears to save people. The battle belongs to him, and he will hand you over to us."

48As Goliath came near to attack him, David ran quickly to meet him. 49He took a stone from his bag, put it into his sling, and slung it. The stone hit the Philistine and went deep into his forehead, and Goliath fell facedown on the ground.

50So David defeated the Philistine with only a sling and a stone. He hit him and killed him. He did not even have a sword in his hand. 51Then David ran and stood beside him. He took Goliath's sword out of its holder and killed him by cutting off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they turned and ran. 52The men of Israel and Judah shouted and chased the Philistines all the way to the entrance of the city of Gath and to the gates of Ekron.

The Philistines' bodies lay on the Shaaraim road as far as

Gath and Ekron. [53]The Israelites returned after chasing the Philistines and robbed their camp. [54]David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem and put Goliath's weapons in his own tent.

[55]When Saul saw David go out to meet Goliath, Saul asked Abner, commander of the army, "Abner, who is that young man's father?"

Abner answered, "As surely as you live, my king, I don't know."

[56]The king said, "Find out whose son he is."

[57]When David came back from killing Goliath, Abner brought him to Saul. David was still holding Goliath's head.

[58]Saul asked him, "Young man, who is your father?"

David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

## Psalm 57:4–11

[4]Enemies, like lions, are all around me;
I must lie down among them.

Their teeth are like spears and arrows,
their tongues as sharp as swords.

[5]God is supreme over the skies;
his majesty covers the earth.

[6]They set a trap for me.
I am very worried.

They dug a pit in my path,
but they fell into it themselves. *Selah*

[7]My heart is steady, God; my heart is steady.
I will sing and praise you.

[8]Wake up, my soul.
Wake up, harp and lyre!

I will wake up the dawn.

9 Lord, I will praise you among the nations;
I will sing songs of praise about you to all the nations.

10 Your great love reaches to the skies,
your truth to the clouds.

11 God, you are supreme above the skies.
Let your glory be over all the earth.

## Proverbs 15:26

26 The LORD hates evil thoughts
but is pleased with kind words.

## Luke 23:26–56

### *Jesus Is Crucified*

26 As they led Jesus away, Simon, a man from Cyrene, was coming in from the fields. They forced him to carry Jesus' cross and to walk behind him.

27 A large crowd of people was following Jesus, including some women who were sad and crying for him. 28 But Jesus turned and said to them, "Women of Jerusalem, don't cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. 29 The time is coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the women who cannot have children and who have no babies to nurse.' 30 Then people will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' And they will say to the hills, 'Cover us!' 31 If they act like this now when life is good, what will happen when bad times come?"[n]

32 There were also two criminals led out with Jesus to be put to death. 33 When they came to a place called the Skull, the soldiers crucified Jesus and the criminals—one on his right and the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them,

because they don't know what they are doing."[n]

The soldiers threw lots to decide who would get his clothes.
35 The people stood there watching. And the leaders made fun of
Jesus, saying, "He saved others. Let him save himself if he is
God's Chosen One, the Christ."

36 The soldiers also made fun of him, coming to Jesus and
offering him some vinegar. 37 They said, "If you are the king of
the Jews, save yourself!" 38 At the top of the cross these words
were written: this is the king of the jews.

39 One of the criminals on a cross began to shout insults at
Jesus: "Aren't you the Christ? Then save yourself and us."

40 But the other criminal stopped him and said, "You should
fear God! You are getting the same punishment he is. 41 We are
punished justly, getting what we deserve for what we did. But
this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus,
remember me when you come into your kingdom."

43 Jesus said to him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be
with me in paradise."[n]

## *Jesus Dies*

44 It was about noon, and the whole land became dark until
three o'clock in the afternoon, 45 because the sun did not shine.
The curtain in the Temple[n] was torn in two. 46 Jesus cried out in
a loud voice, "Father, I give you my life." After Jesus said this,
he died.

47 When the army officer there saw what happened, he
praised God, saying, "Surely this was a good man!"

48 When all the people who had gathered there to watch saw
what happened, they returned home, beating their chests
because they were so sad. 49 But those who were close friends of
Jesus, including the women who had followed him from Galilee,
stood at a distance and watched.

## *Joseph Takes Jesus' Body*

50 There was a good and religious man named Joseph who
was a member of the council. 51 But he had not agreed to the
other leaders' plans and actions against Jesus. He was from the
town of Arimathea and was waiting for the kingdom of God to
come. 52 Joseph went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. 53 He
took the body down from the cross, wrapped it in cloth, and put
it in a tomb that was cut out of a wall of rock. This tomb had
never been used before. 54 This was late on Preparation Day, and
when the sun went down, the Sabbath day would begin.

55 The women who had come from Galilee with Jesus followed
Joseph and saw the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid. 56 Then

the women left to prepare spices and perfumes.

On the Sabbath day they rested, as the law of Moses commanded.

# May 8

## A Symbol of Love

*“He is not here; he has risen from the dead.”*

Luke 24:6

when John arrived at the empty tomb the burial wraps had not been ripped off and thrown down. They were still in their original state! The linens were undisturbed. The graveclothes were still rolled and folded.

How could this be? …

If for some reason friends or foes had unwrapped the body, would they have been so careful as to dispose of the clothing in such an orderly fashion? Of course not! But if neither friend nor foe took the body, who did? …

Through the rags of death, John saw the power of life. Odd, don’t you think, that God would use something as sad as a burial wrap to change a life?

But God is given to such practices:

In his hand empty wine jugs at a wedding become a symbol of power.

The coin of a widow becomes a symbol of generosity.

And a tool of death is a symbol of his love.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### 1 Samuel 18:1—19:24

#### *Saul Fears David*

18 When David finished talking with Saul, Jonathan felt very
close to David. He loved David as much as he loved himself.
2 Saul kept David with him from that day on and did not let him
go home to his father’s house. 3 Jonathan made an agreement
with David, because he loved David as much as himself. 4 He
took off his coat and gave it to David, along with his armor,
including his sword, bow, and belt.

5 Saul sent David to fight in different battles, and David was
very successful. Then Saul put David over the soldiers, which
pleased Saul's officers and all the other people.
6 After David had killed the Philistine, he and the men
returned home. Women came out from all the towns of Israel to
meet King Saul. They sang songs of joy, danced, and played
tambourines and stringed instruments. 7 As they played, they
sang,

"Saul has killed thousands of his enemies,
but David has killed tens of thousands."

8 The women's song upset Saul, and he became very angry.
He thought, "The women say David has killed tens of thousands,
but they say I have killed only thousands. The only thing left for
him to have is the kingdom!" 9 So Saul watched David closely
from then on, because he was jealous.
10 The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and
he prophesied in his house. David was playing the harp as he
usually did, but Saul had a spear in his hand. 11 He threw the
spear, thinking, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David escaped
from him twice.
12 The LORD was with David but had left Saul. So Saul was
afraid of David. 13 He sent David away and made him
commander of a thousand soldiers. So David led them in battle.
14 He had great success in everything he did because the LORD
was with him. 15 When Saul saw that David was very successful,
he feared David even more. 16 But all the people of Israel and
Judah loved David because he led them well in battle.

## *Saul's Daughter Marries David*

17 Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab. I
will let you marry her. All I ask is that you remain brave and
fight the LORD's battles." Saul thought, "I won't have to kill
David. The Philistines will do that."
18 But David answered Saul, saying, "Who am I? My family is
not important enough for me to become the king's son-in-law."
19 So, when the time came for Saul's daughter Merab to marry
David, Saul gave her instead to Adriel of Meholah.
20 Now Saul's other daughter, Michal, loved David. When
they told Saul, he was pleased. 21 He thought, "I will let her
marry David. Then she will be a trap for him, and the Philistines
will defeat him." So Saul said to David a second time, "You may
become my son-in-law."
22 And Saul ordered his servants to talk with David in private
and say, "Look, the king likes you. His servants love you. You

should be his son-in-law.”

23Saul’s servants said these words to David, but David answered, “Do you think it is easy to become the king’s son-in-law? I am poor and unimportant.”

24When Saul’s servants told him what David had said, 25Saul said, “Tell David, ‘The king doesn’t want money for the bride. All he wants is a hundred Philistine foreskins to get even with his enemies.’” Saul planned to let the Philistines kill David.

26When Saul’s servants told this to David, he was pleased to become the king’s son-in-law. 27So he and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines. David brought all their foreskins to Saul so he could be the king’s son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal for his wife. 28Saul saw that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David. 29So he grew even more afraid of David, and he was David’s enemy all his life.

30The Philistine commanders continued to go out to fight the Israelites, but every time, David was more skillful than Saul’s officers. So he became famous.

## *Saul Tries to Kill David*

19 Saul told his son Jonathan and all his servants to kill David, but Jonathan liked David very much. 2So he warned David, “My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Watch out in the morning. Hide in a secret place. 3I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are hiding, and I’ll talk to him about you. Then I’ll let you know what I find out.”

4When Jonathan talked to Saul his father, he said good things about David. Jonathan said, “The king should do no wrong to your servant David since he has done nothing wrong to you. What he has done has helped you greatly. 5David risked his life when he killed Goliath the Philistine, and the LORD won a great victory for all Israel. You saw it and were happy. Why would you do wrong against David? He’s innocent. There’s no reason to kill him!”

6Saul listened to Jonathan and then made this promise: “As surely as the LORD lives, David won’t be put to death.”

7So Jonathan called to David and told him everything that had been said. He brought David to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

8When war broke out again, David went out to fight the Philistines. He defeated them, and they ran away from him.

9But once again an evil spirit from the LORD rushed upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. David was playing the harp. 10Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, but David jumped out of the way. So Saul’s spear went into the wall, and David ran away that night.

[11]Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, saying, "Tonight you must run for your life. If you don't, you will be dead in the morning." [12]So she let David down out of a window, and he ran away and escaped. [13]Then Michal took an idol, laid it on the bed, covered it with clothes, and put goats' hair at its head.

[14]Saul sent messengers to take David prisoner, but Michal said, "He is sick."

[15]Saul sent them back to see David, saying, "Bring him to me on his bed so I can kill him."

[16]When the messengers entered David's house, they found just an idol on the bed with goats' hair on its head.

[17]Saul said to Michal, "Why did you trick me this way? You let my enemy go so he could run away!"

Michal answered Saul, "David told me if I did not help him escape, he would kill me."

[18]After David had escaped from Saul, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him everything Saul had done to him. Then David and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. [19]Saul heard that David was in Naioth at Ramah. [20]So he sent messengers to capture him. But they met a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there leading them. So the Spirit of God entered Saul's men, and they also prophesied.

[21]When Saul heard the news, he sent more messengers, but they also prophesied. Then he sent messengers a third time, but they also prophesied. [22]Finally, Saul himself went to Ramah, to the well at Secu. He asked, "Where are Samuel and David?"

The people answered, "In Naioth at Ramah."

[23]When Saul went to Naioth at Ramah, the Spirit of God also rushed upon him. And he walked on, prophesying until he came to Naioth at Ramah. [24]He took off his robes and prophesied in front of Samuel. He lay that way all day and all night. That is why people ask, "Is even Saul one of the prophets?"

## Psalm 58:1–11

### *Unfair Judges*

**For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." A miktam of David.**

58 Do you rulers really say what is right?Do you judge people

fairly?

2 No, in your heart you plan evil;
you think up violent crimes in the land.

3 From birth, evil people turn away from God;
they wander off and tell lies as soon as they are born.

4 They are like poisonous snakes,
like deaf cobras that stop up their ears

5 so they cannot hear the music of the snake charmer
no matter how well he plays.

6 God, break the teeth in their mouths!
Tear out the fangs of those lions, LORD!

7 Let them disappear like water that flows away.
Let them be cut short like a broken arrow.

8 Let them be like snails that melt as they move.
Let them be like a child born dead who never saw the sun.

9 His anger will blow them away alive
faster than burning thorns can heat a pot.

10 Good people will be glad when they see him get even.
They will wash their feet in the blood of the wicked.

11 Then people will say,
"There really are rewards for doing what is right.
There really is a God who judges the world."

## Proverbs 15:27–30

27 Greedy people bring trouble to their families,
but the person who can't be paid to do wrong will live.

28 Good people think before they answer,
but the wicked simply pour out evil.

29 The LORD does not listen to the wicked,
but he hears the prayers of those who do right.

30 Good news makes you feel better.
Your happiness will show in your eyes.

## Luke 24:1–35

### *Jesus Rises from the Dead*

24 Very early on the first day of the week, at dawn, the women
came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. 2 They
found the stone rolled away from the entrance of the tomb, 3 but
when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.
4 While they were wondering about this, two men in shining
clothes suddenly stood beside them. 5 The women were very
afraid and bowed their heads to the ground. The men said to
them, "Why are you looking for a living person in this place for
the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen from the dead. Do you
remember what he told you in Galilee? 7 He said the Son of Man
must be handed over to sinful people, be crucified, and rise
from the dead on the third day." 8 Then the women remembered
what Jesus had said.

9 The women left the tomb and told all these things to the
eleven apostles and the other followers. 10 It was Mary
Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and some other
women who told the apostles everything that had happened at
the tomb. 11 But they did not believe the women, because it
sounded like nonsense. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb.
Bending down and looking in, he saw only the cloth that Jesus'
body had been wrapped in. Peter went away to his home,
wondering about what had happened.

## *Jesus on the Road to Emmaus*

13 That same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a town
named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They
were talking about everything that had happened. 15 While they
were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and began
walking with them, 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.
17 Then he said, "What are these things you are talking about
while you walk?"

The two followers stopped, looking very sad. 18 The one
named Cleopas answered, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem
who does not know what just happened there?"

19 Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about?"

They said, "About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet who
said and did many powerful things before God and all the
people. 20 Our leaders and the leading priests handed him over
to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. 21 But we were
hoping that he would free Israel. Besides this, it is now the third
day since this happened. 22 And today some women among us
amazed us. Early this morning they went to the tomb, 23 but they
did not find his body there. They came and told us that they had
seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive! 24 So some
of our group went to the tomb, too. They found it just as the
women said, but they did not see Jesus."

25 Then Jesus said to them, "You are foolish and slow to
believe everything the prophets said. 26 They said that the Christ
must suffer these things before he enters his glory." 27 Then
starting with what Moses and all the prophets had said about
him, Jesus began to explain everything that had been written
about himself in the Scriptures.

28 They came near the town of Emmaus, and Jesus acted as if
he were going farther. 29 But they begged him, "Stay with us,
because it is late; it is almost night." So he went in to stay with
them.

30 When Jesus was at the table with them, he took some
bread, gave thanks, divided it, and gave it to them. 31 And then,
they were allowed to recognize Jesus. But when they saw who
he was, he disappeared. 32 They said to each other, "It felt like a
fire burning in us when Jesus talked to us on the road and
explained the Scriptures to us."

33 So the two followers got up at once and went back to
Jerusalem. There they found the eleven apostles and others
gathered. 34 They were saying, "The Lord really has risen from
the dead! He showed himself to Simon."

35 Then the two followers told what had happened on the
road and how they recognized Jesus when he divided the bread.

# May 9

# Jesus Dispels Doubt

*They were fearful and terrified … But Jesus said, "Why are you troubled? … It is I myself!"*

Luke 24:37–39

They had betrayed their Master. When Jesus needed them they had scampered. And now they were having to deal with the shame. Seeking forgiveness, but not knowing where to look for it, the disciples came back. They gravitated to that same upper room that contained the sweet memories of broken bread and symbolic wine …

They came back. Each with a scrapbook full of memories and a thin thread of hope. Each knowing that it is all over, but in his heart hoping that the impossible will happen once more. "If I had just one more chance" …

And just when the gloom gets good and thick, just when their wishful thinking is falling victim to logic, just when someone says, "How I'd give my immortal soul to see him one more time," a familiar face walks through the wall.

My, what an ending. Or, better said, what a beginning!

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## 1 Samuel 20:1—21:15

### *Jonathan Helps David*

20 Then David ran away from Naioth in Ramah. He went to
Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What is my crime?
How did I sin against your father? Why is he trying to kill me?"

2 Jonathan answered, "No! You won't die! See, my father
doesn't do anything great or small without first telling me. Why
would he keep this from me? It's not true!"

3 But David took an oath, saying, "Your father knows very
well that you like me. He says to himself, 'Jonathan must not

know about it, or he will tell David.' As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I am only a step away from death!"

4Jonathan said to David, "I'll do anything you want me to do."

5So David said, "Look, tomorrow is the New Moon festival. I am supposed to eat with the king, but let me hide in the field until the third evening. 6If your father notices I am gone, tell him, 'David begged me to let him go to his hometown of Bethlehem. Every year at this time his family group offers a sacrifice.' 7If your father says, 'Fine,' I am safe. But if he becomes angry, you will know that he wants to hurt me. 8Jonathan, be loyal to me, your servant. You have made an agreement with me before the LORD. If I am guilty, you may kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?"

9Jonathan answered, "No, never! If I learn that my father plans to hurt you, I will warn you!"

10David asked, "Who will let me know if your father answers you unkindly?"

11Then Jonathan said, "Come, let's go out into the field." So the two of them went out into the field.

12Jonathan said to David, "I promise this before the LORD, the God of Israel: At this same time the day after tomorrow, I will find out how my father feels. If he feels good toward you, I will send word to you and let you know. 13But if my father plans to hurt you, I will let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD punish me terribly if I don't do this. And may the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. 14But show me the kindness of the LORD as long as I live so that I may not die. 15You must never stop showing your kindness to my family, even when the LORD has destroyed all your enemies from the earth."

16So Jonathan made an agreement with David. He said, "May the LORD hold David's enemies responsible." 17And Jonathan asked David to repeat his promise of love for him, because he loved David as much as he loved himself.

18Jonathan said to David, "Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. Your seat will be empty, so my father will miss you. 19On the third day go to the place where you hid when this trouble began. Wait by the rock Ezel. 20On the third day I will shoot three arrows to the side of the rock as if I am shooting at a target. 21Then I will send a boy to find the arrows. If I say to him, 'The arrows are near you; bring them here,' you may come out of hiding. You are safe. As the LORD lives, there is no danger. 22But if I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' you must go, because the LORD is sending you away. 23Remember what we talked about. The LORD is a witness between you and me forever."

24So David hid in the field. When the New Moon festival came, the king sat down to eat. 25He sat where he always sat, near the wall. Jonathan sat across from him, and Abner sat next

to Saul, but David's place was empty. [26]That day Saul said nothing. He thought, "Maybe something has happened to David so that he is unclean." [27]But the next day was the second day of the month, and David's place was still empty. So Saul said to Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the feast yesterday or today?"

[28]Jonathan answered, "David begged me to let him go to Bethlehem. [29]He said, 'Let me go, because our family has a sacrifice in the town, and my brother has ordered me to be there. Now if I am your friend, please let me go to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."

[30]Then Saul became very angry with Jonathan. He said, "You son of a wicked, worthless woman! I know you are on the side of David son of Jesse! You bring shame on yourself and on your mother who gave birth to you. [31]As long as Jesse's son lives, you will never be king or have a kingdom. Now send for David and bring him to me. He must die!"

[32]Jonathan asked his father, "Why should David be killed? What wrong has he done?" [33]Then Saul threw his spear at Jonathan, trying to kill him. So Jonathan knew that his father really wanted to kill David. [34]Jonathan was very angry and left the table. That second day of the month he refused to eat. He was ashamed of his father and upset over David.

[35]The next morning Jonathan went out to the field to meet David as they had agreed. He had a young boy with him. [36]Jonathan said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." When he ran, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him. [37]The boy ran to the place where Jonathan's arrow fell, but Jonathan called, "The arrow is beyond you!" [38]Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and brought it back to his master. [39](The boy knew nothing about what this meant; only Jonathan and David knew.) [40]Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and told him, "Go back to town."

[41]When the boy left, David came out from the south side of the rock. He bowed facedown on the ground before Jonathan three times. Then David and Jonathan kissed each other and cried together, but David cried the most.

[42]Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace. We have promised by the Lord that we will be friends. We said, 'The LORD will be a witness between you and me, and between our descendants always.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to town.

## *David Goes to See Ahimelech*

[21] David went to Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech shook with fear when he saw David, and he asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"

2 David answered him, “The king gave me a special order. He
told me, ‘No one must know what I am sending you to do or
what I told you to do.’ I told my men where to meet me. 3 Now,
what food do you have with you? Give me five loaves of bread or
anything you find.”
4 The priest said to David, “I don’t have any plain bread here,
but I do have some holy bread.[n] You may eat it if your men have
kept themselves from women.”
5 David answered, “No women have been near us for days.
My men always keep themselves holy, even when we do
ordinary work. And this is especially true when the work is
holy.”
6 So the priest gave David the holy bread from the presence
of God because there was no other. Each day the holy bread
was replaced with hot bread.
7 One of Saul’s servants happened to be there that day. He
had been held there before the LORD. He was Doeg the Edomite,
the chief of Saul’s shepherds.
8 David asked Ahimelech, “Do you have a spear or sword
here? The king’s business was very important, so I left without
my sword or any other weapon.”
9 The priest answered, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine,
the one you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here. It is wrapped in
a cloth behind the holy vest. If you want it, you may take it.
There’s no other sword here but that one.”
David said, “There is no other sword like it. Give it to me.”

## *David Goes to Gath*

10 That day David ran away from Saul and went to Achish
king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, “This is
David, the king of the Israelites. He’s the man they dance and
sing about, saying:

‘Saul has killed thousands of his enemies,
but David has killed tens of thousands.’”

12 David paid attention to these words and was very much
afraid of Achish king of Gath. 13 So he pretended to be crazy in
front of Achish and his servants. While he was with them, he
acted like a madman and clawed on the doors of the gate and
let spit run down his beard.
14 Achish said to his servants, “Look at the man! He’s crazy!
Why do you bring him to me? 15 I have enough madmen. I don’t
need you to bring him here to act like this in front of me! Don’t
let him in my house!”

## Psalm 59:1–5

### *A Prayer for Protection*

**For the director of music. To the tune of “Do Not Destroy.” A miktam of David when Saul sent men to watch David’s house to kill him.**

59 God, save me from my enemies.Protect me from those who come
against me.

2Save me from those who do evil
and from murderers.

3Look, they are waiting to ambush me.
Cruel people attack me,
but I have not sinned or done wrong, LORD.

4I have done nothing wrong, but they are ready to attack me.
Wake up to help me, and look.

5You are the LORD God All-Powerful, the God of Israel.
Arise and punish those people.
Do not give those traitors any mercy. *Selah*

## Proverbs 15:31–33

31If you listen to correction to improve your life,
you will live among the wise.

32Those who refuse correction hate themselves,
but those who accept correction gain understanding.

[33]Respect for the LORD will teach you wisdom.
If you want to be honored, you must be humble.

## Luke 24:36–53

### *Jesus Appears to His Followers*

[36]While the two followers were telling this, Jesus himself stood right in the middle of them and said, “Peace be with you.”
[37]They were fearful and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. [38]But Jesus said, “Why are you troubled? Why do you doubt what you see? [39]Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have a living body as you see I have.”
[40]After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and feet. [41]While they still could not believe it because they were amazed and happy, Jesus said to them, “Do you have any food here?” [42]They gave him a piece of broiled fish. [43]While the followers watched, Jesus took the fish and ate it.
[44]He said to them, “Remember when I was with you before? I said that everything written about me must happen—everything in the law of Moses, the books of the prophets, and the Psalms.”
[45]Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46]He said to them, “It is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day [47]and that a change of hearts and lives and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all nations, starting at Jerusalem. [48]You are witnesses of these things. [49]I will send you what my Father has promised, but you must stay in Jerusalem until you have received that power from heaven.”

### *Jesus Goes Back to Heaven*

[50]Jesus led his followers as far as Bethany, and he raised his hands and blessed them. [51]While he was blessing them, he was separated from them and carried into heaven. [52]They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem very happy. [53]They stayed in the Temple all the time, praising God.

# May 10

# A Cross-Shaped Shadow

*John said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

John 1:29

Jesus was born crucified. Whenever he became conscious of who he was, he also became conscious of what he had to do. The cross-shaped shadow could always be seen. And the screams of hell's imprisoned could always be heard.

This explains the glint of determination on his face as he turned to go to Jerusalem for the last time. He was on his death march (Luke 9:51).

This explains the resoluteness in the words, "The Father loves me because I give my life so that I can take it back again. No one takes it away from me; I give my own life freely" (John 10:17–18) ...

So call it what you wish: An act of grace. A plan of redemption. A martyr's sacrifice. But whatever you call it, don't call it an accident. It was anything but that.

from *God Came Near*

## 1 Samuel 22:1—23:29

### *David at Adullam and Mizpah*

22 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his
brothers and other relatives heard that he was there, they went
to see him. 2Everyone who was in trouble, or who owed money,
or who was unsatisfied gathered around David, and he became
their leader. About four hundred men were with him.

3From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and spoke to the
king of Moab. He said, "Please let my father and mother come
and stay with you until I learn what God is going to do for me."
4So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with

him as long as David was hiding in the stronghold.

5But the prophet Gad said to David, “Don’t stay in the stronghold. Go to the land of Judah.” So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

## *Saul Destroys Ahimelech’s Family*

6Saul heard that David and his men had been seen. Saul was sitting under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, and all his officers were standing around him. He had a spear in his hand. 7Saul said to them, “Listen, men of Benjamin! Do you think the son of Jesse will give all of you fields and vineyards? Will David make you commanders over thousands of men or hundreds of men? 8You have all made plans against me! No one tells me when my son makes an agreement with the son of Jesse! No one cares about me! No one tells me when my son has encouraged my servant to ambush me this very day!”

9Doeg the Edomite, who was standing there with Saul’s officers, said, “I saw the son of Jesse. He came to see Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. 10Ahimelech prayed to the LORD for David and gave him food and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”

11Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and for all of Ahimelech’s relatives who were priests at Nob. And they all came to the king. 12Saul said to Ahimelech, “Listen now, son of Ahitub.”

Ahimelech answered, “Yes, master.”

13Saul said, “Why are you and Jesse’s son against me? You gave him bread and a sword! You prayed to God for him. David has turned against me and is waiting to attack me even now!”

14Ahimelech answered, “You have no other servant who is as loyal as David, your own son-in-law and captain of your bodyguards. Everyone in your house respects him. 15That was not the first time I prayed to God for David. Don’t blame me or any of my relatives. I, your servant, know nothing about what is going on.”

16But the king said, “Ahimelech, you and all your relatives must die!” 17Then he told the guards at his side, “Go and kill the priests of the LORD, because they are on David’s side. They knew he was running away, but they didn’t tell me.”

But the king’s officers refused to kill the priests of the LORD.

18Then the king ordered Doeg, “Go and kill the priests.” So Doeg the Edomite went and killed the priests. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen holy vest. 19He also killed the people of Nob, the city of the priests. With the sword he killed men, women, children, babies, cattle, donkeys, and sheep.

20But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech, who was the son of Ahitub, escaped. He ran away and joined David. 21He told David

that Saul had killed the LORD's priests. 22Then David told him, "Doeg the Edomite was there at Nob that day. I knew he would surely tell Saul. So I am responsible for the death of all your father's family. 23Stay with me. Don't be afraid. The man who wants to kill you also wants to kill me. You will be safe with me."

## *David Saves the People of Keilah*

23 Someone told David, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and stealing grain from the threshing floors."

2David asked the LORD, "Should I go and fight these Philistines?"

The LORD answered him, "Go. Attack them, and save Keilah."

3But David's men said to him, "We're afraid here in Judah. We will be more afraid if we go to Keilah where the Philistine army is."

4David again asked the LORD, and the LORD answered, "Go down to Keilah. I will help you defeat the Philistines." 5So David and his men went to Keilah and fought the Philistines and took their cattle. David killed many Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. 6(Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the holy vest with him when he came to David at Keilah.)

## *Saul Chases David*

7Someone told Saul that David was now at Keilah. Saul said, "God has handed David over to me! He has trapped himself, because he has entered a town with gates and bars." 8Saul called all his army together for battle, and they prepared to go down to Keilah to attack David and his men.

9David learned Saul was making evil plans against him. So he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the holy vest." 10David prayed, "LORD, God of Israel, I have heard that Saul plans to come to Keilah to destroy the town because of me. 11Will the leaders of Keilah hand me over to Saul? Will Saul come down to Keilah, as I heard? LORD, God of Israel, tell me, your servant!"

The LORD answered, "Saul will come down."

12Again David asked, "Will the leaders of Keilah hand me and my men over to Saul?"

The LORD answered, "They will."

13So David and his six hundred men left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul found out that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

14David stayed in the desert hideouts and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Every day Saul looked for David, but the LORD did not surrender David to him.

15While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he

learned that Saul was coming to kill him. [16]But Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and strengthened his faith in God. [17]Jonathan told him, "Don't be afraid, because my father won't touch you. You will be king of Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." [18]The two of them made an agreement before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David stayed at Horesh.

[19]The people from Ziph went to Saul at Gibeah and told him, "David is hiding in our land. He's at the hideouts of Horesh, on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon. [20]Now, our king, come down anytime you want. It's our duty to hand David over to you."

[21]Saul answered, "The LORD bless you for helping me. [22]Go and learn more about him. Find out where he is staying and who has seen him there. I have heard that he is clever. [23]Find all the hiding places he uses, and come back and tell me everything. Then I'll go with you. If David is in the area, I will track him down among all the families in Judah."

[24]So they went back to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of Maon[n] in the desert area south of Jeshimon. [25]Saul and his men went to look for David, but David heard about it and went down to a rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard that, he followed David into the Desert of Maon.

[26]Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side. They were hurrying to get away from Saul, because Saul and his men were closing in on them. [27]But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Come quickly! The Philistines are attacking our land!" [28]So Saul stopped chasing David and went to challenge the Philistines. That is why people call this place Rock of Parting. [29]David also left the Desert of Maon and stayed in the hideouts of En Gedi.

## Psalm 59:6–17

[6]They come back at night.
Like dogs they growl and roam around the city.

[7]Notice what comes from their mouths.
Insults come from their lips,
because they say, "Who's listening?"

[8]But, LORD, you laugh at them;
you make fun of all of them.

[9]God, my strength, I am looking to you,
because God is my defender.

[10]My God loves me, and he goes in front of me.
He will help me defeat my enemies.

[11]Lord, our protector, do not kill them, or my people will forget.
With your power scatter them and defeat them.

[12]They sin by what they say;
they sin with their words.

They curse and tell lies,
so let their pride trap them.

[13]Destroy them in your anger;
destroy them completely!

Then they will know
that God rules over Israel
and to the ends of the earth. *Selah*

[14]They come back at night.
Like dogs they growl
and roam around the city.

[15]They wander about looking for food,
and they howl if they do not find enough.

[16]But I will sing about your strength.
In the morning I will sing about your love.

You are my defender,
my place of safety in times of trouble.

17 God, my strength, I will sing praises to you.
God, my defender, you are the God who loves me.

## Proverbs 16:1–2

16 People may make plans in their minds,but only the LORD can make them come
true.

2 You may believe you are doing right,
but the LORD will judge your reasons.

## John 1:1–34

### *Christ Comes to the World*

1 In the beginning there was the Word.[n] The Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were made by him, and nothing was made without him. 4 In him there was life, and that life was the light of all people. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered[n] it.

6 There was a man named John[n] who was sent by God. 7 He came to tell people the truth about the Light so that through him all people could hear about the Light and believe. 8 John was not the Light, but he came to tell people the truth about the Light. 9 The true Light that gives light to all was coming into the world!

10 The Word was in the world, and the world was made by him, but the world did not know him. 11 He came to the world that was his own, but his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who did accept him and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God. 13 They did not become his children in any human way—by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God.

14 The Word became a human and lived among us. We saw his
glory—the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father—and
he was full of grace and truth. 15 John tells the truth about him
and cries out, saying, “This is the One I told you about: ‘The
One who comes after me is greater than I am, because he was
living before me.’”
16 Because he was full of grace and truth, from him we all
received one gift after another. 17 The law was given through
Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No
one has ever seen God. But God the only Son is very close to the
Father,[n] and he has shown us what God is like.

## *John Tells People About Jesus*

19 Here is the truth John[n] told when the leaders in Jerusalem
sent priests and Levites to ask him, “Who are you?”
20 John spoke freely and did not refuse to answer. He said, “I
am not the Christ.”
21 So they asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”[n]
He answered, “No, I am not.”
“Are you the Prophet?”[n] they asked.
He answered, “No.”
22 Then they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to tell
those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”
23 John told them in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“I am the voice of one
calling out in the desert:

‘Make the road straight for the Lord.’”

Isaiah 40:3

24 Some Pharisees who had been sent asked John: 25 “If you
are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet, why do you baptize
people?”
26 John answered, “I baptize with water, but there is one here
with you that you don’t know about. 27 He is the One who comes
after me. I am not good enough to untie the strings of his
sandals.”
28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the
Jordan River, where John was baptizing people.
29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him. John said,
“Look, the Lamb of God,[n] who takes away the sin of the world!
30 This is the One I was talking about when I said, ‘A man will
come after me, but he is greater than I am, because he was
living before me.’ 31 Even I did not know who he was, although I

came baptizing with water so that the people of Israel would know who he is."

32–33Then John said, "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven in the form of a dove and rest on him. Until then I did not know who the Christ was. But the God who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and rest on a man; he is the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34I have seen this happen, and I tell you the truth: This man is the Son of God."[n]

# May 11

## Come and See

*Nathanael said to Philip, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip answered, "Come and see."*

John 1:46

Nathanael's question still lingers, even two thousand years later … Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Come and see. Come and see the changed lives:

the alcoholic now dry,
the embittered now joyful,
the shamed now forgiven …
marriages rebuilt, the orphans embraced,
the imprisoned inspired …

Come and see the pierced hand of God touch the most common heart, wipe the tear from the wrinkled face, and forgive the ugliest sin.

Come and see. He avoids no seeker. He ignores no probe. He fears no search. Come and see.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

### 1 Samuel 24:1—25:44

### *David Shames Saul*

24 After Saul returned from chasing the Philistines, he was told,
"David is in the Desert of En Gedi." 2So he took three thousand
chosen men from all Israel and began looking for David and his
men near the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

3Saul came to the sheep pens beside the road. A cave was
there, and he went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men
were hiding far back in the cave. 4The men said to David,
"Today is the day the LORD spoke of when he said, 'I will give
your enemy over to you. Do anything you want with him.'"

Then David crept up to Saul and quietly cut off a corner of

Saul's robe. [5]Later David felt guilty because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. [6]He said to his men, "May the LORD keep me from doing such a thing to my master! Saul is the LORD's appointed king. I should not do anything against him, because he is the LORD's appointed king!" [7]David used these words to stop his men; he did not let them attack Saul. Then Saul left the cave and went his way.

[8]When David came out of the cave, he shouted to Saul, "My master and king!" Saul looked back, and David bowed facedown on the ground. [9]He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when people say, 'David wants to harm you'? [10]You have seen something with your own eyes today. The LORD put you in my power in the cave. They said I should kill you, but I was merciful. I said, 'I won't harm my master, because he is the LORD's appointed king.' [11]My father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe, but I didn't kill you. Now understand and know I am not planning any evil against you. I did nothing wrong to you, but you are hunting me to kill me. [12]May the LORD judge between us, and may he punish you for the wrong you have done to me! But I am not against you. [13]There is an old saying: 'Evil things come from evil people.' But I am not against you. [14]Whom is the king of Israel coming out against? Whom are you chasing? It's as if you are chasing a dead dog or a flea. [15]May the LORD be our judge and decide between you and me. May he support me and show that I am right. May he save me from you!"

[16]When David finished saying these words, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he cried loudly. [17]He said, "You are a better man than I am. You have been good to me, but I have done wrong to you. [18]You told me what good things you did. The LORD handed me over to you, but you did not kill me. [19]People don't normally let an enemy get away like this, do they? May the LORD reward you because you were good to me today. [20]I know you will surely be king, and you will rule the kingdom of Israel. [21]Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill my descendants and that you won't wipe out my name from my father's family."

[22]So David made the promise to Saul. Then Saul went back home, and David and his men went up to their hideout.

## *Nabal Insults David*

[25] Now Samuel died, and all the Israelites met and had a time of sadness for him. Then they buried him at his home in Ramah.

David moved to the Desert of Maon.[n] [2]A man in Maon who had land at Carmel was very rich. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was cutting the wool off his sheep at Carmel. [3]His name was Nabal, and he was a descendant of

Caleb. His wife was named Abigail. She was wise and beautiful, but Nabal was cruel and mean.

4While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was cutting the wool from his sheep. 5So he sent ten young men and told them, “Go to Nabal at Carmel, and greet him for me. 6Say to Nabal, ‘May you and your family and all who belong to you have good health! 7I have heard that you are cutting the wool from your sheep. When your shepherds were with us, we did not harm them. All the time your shepherds were at Carmel, we stole nothing from them. 8Ask your servants, and they will tell you. We come at a happy time, so be kind to my young men. Please give anything you can find for them and for your son David.’”

9When David’s men arrived, they gave the message to Nabal, but Nabal insulted them. 10He answered them, “Who is David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many slaves are running away from their masters today! 11I have bread and water, and I have meat that I killed for my servants who cut the wool. But I won’t give it to men I don’t know.”

12David’s men went back and told him all Nabal had said. 13Then David said to them, “Put on your swords!” So they put on their swords, and David put on his also. About four hundred men went with David, but two hundred men stayed with the supplies.

14One of Nabal’s servants said to Abigail, Nabal’s wife, “David sent messengers from the desert to greet our master, but Nabal insulted them. 15These men were very good to us. They did not harm us. They stole nothing from us during all the time we were out in the field with them. 16Night and day they protected us. They were like a wall around us while we were with them caring for the sheep. 17Now think about it, and decide what you can do. Terrible trouble is coming to our master and all his family. Nabal is such a wicked man that no one can even talk to him.”

18Abigail hurried. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two leather bags full of wine, five cooked sheep, a bushel of cooked grain, a hundred cakes of raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs and put all these on donkeys. 19Then she told her servants, “Go on. I’ll follow you.” But she did not tell her husband.

20Abigail rode her donkey and came down toward the mountain hideout. There she met David and his men coming down toward her.

21David had just said, “It’s been useless! I watched over Nabal’s property in the desert. I made sure none of his sheep was missing. I did good to him, but he has paid me back with evil. 22May God punish my enemies even more. I will not leave one of Nabal’s men alive until morning.”

[23]When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed facedown on the ground before him. [24]She fell at David's feet and said, "My master, let the blame be on me! Please let me talk to you. Listen to what I say. [25]My master, don't pay attention to this worthless man Nabal. He is like his name. His name means 'fool,' and he is truly a fool. But I, your servant, didn't see the men you sent. [26]The LORD has kept you from killing and punishing anyone. As surely as the LORD lives and as surely as you live, may your enemies become like Nabal! [27]I have brought a gift to you for the men who follow you. [28]Please forgive my wrong. The LORD will certainly let your family have many kings, because you fight his battles. As long as you live, may you do nothing bad. [29]Someone might chase you to kill you, but the LORD your God will keep you alive. He will throw away your enemies' lives as he would throw a stone from a sling. [30]The LORD will keep all his promises of good things for you. He will make you leader over Israel. [31]Then you won't feel guilty or troubled because you killed innocent people and punished them. Please remember me when the LORD brings you success."

[32]David answered Abigail, "Praise the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me. [33]May you be blessed for your wisdom. You have kept me from killing or punishing people today. [34]As surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, he has kept me from hurting you. If you hadn't come quickly to meet me, not one of Nabal's men would have lived until morning."

[35]Then David accepted Abigail's gifts. He told her, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words, and I will do what you have asked."

## *Nabal's Death*

[36]When Abigail went back to Nabal, he was in the house, eating like a king. He was very drunk and in a good mood. So she told him nothing until the next morning. [37]In the morning when he was not drunk, his wife told him everything. His heart stopped, and he became like stone. [38]About ten days later the LORD struck Nabal and he died.

[39]When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praise the LORD! Nabal insulted me, but the LORD has supported me! He has kept me from doing wrong. The LORD has punished Nabal for his wrong."

Then David sent a message to Abigail, asking her to be his wife. [40]His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, "David sent us to take you so you can become his wife."

[41]Abigail bowed facedown on the ground and said, "I am your servant. I'm ready to serve you and to wash the feet of my master's servants." [42]Abigail quickly got on a donkey and went

with David's messengers, with her five maids following her. And she became David's wife.

43David also had married Ahinoam of Jezreel. So they were both David's wives. 44Saul's daughter Michal was also David's wife, but Saul had given her to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

## Psalm 60:1–5

### *A Prayer After a Defeat*

**For the director of music. To the tune of "Lily of the Agreement." A miktam of David. For teaching. When David fought the Arameans of Northwest Mesopotamia and Zobah, and when Joab returned and defeated twelve thousand Edomites at the Valley of Salt.**

60 God, you have rejected us and scattered us.You have been angry, but please come
back to us.

2You made the earth shake and crack.
Heal its breaks because it is shaking.

3You have given your people trouble.
You made us unable to walk straight, like people drunk with wine.

4You have raised a banner to gather those who fear you.
Now they can stand up against the enemy.

*Selah*

5Answer us and save us by your power
so the people you love will be rescued.

## Proverbs 16:3

3 Depend on the LORD in whatever you do,
and your plans will succeed.

## John 1:35–51

### *The First Followers of Jesus*

35 The next day John[n] was there again with two of his
followers. 36 When he saw Jesus walking by, he said, “Look, the
Lamb of God!”[n]
37 The two followers heard John say this, so they followed
Jesus. 38 When Jesus turned and saw them following him, he
asked, “What are you looking for?”
They said, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” (“Rabbi” means
“Teacher.”)
39 He answered, “Come and see.” So the two men went with
Jesus and saw where he was staying and stayed there with him
that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.
40 One of the two men who followed Jesus after they heard
John speak about him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. 41 The
first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and say to
him, “We have found the Messiah.” (“Messiah” means “Christ.”)
42 Then Andrew took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and
said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas.”
(“Cephas” means “Peter.”[n])
43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found
Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”
44 Philip was from the town of Bethsaida, where Andrew and
Peter lived. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have
found the man that Moses wrote about in the law, and the
prophets also wrote about him. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph,
from Nazareth.”
46 But Nathanael said to Philip, “Can anything good come
from Nazareth?”
Philip answered, “Come and see.”
47 As Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said, “Here
is truly an Israelite. There is nothing false in him.”
48 Nathanael asked, “How do you know me?”
Jesus answered, “I saw you when you were under the fig
tree, before Philip told you about me.”
49 Then Nathanael said to Jesus, “Teacher, you are the Son of
God; you are the King of Israel.”

[50]Jesus said to Nathanael, “Do you believe simply because I
told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater
things than that.” [51]And Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth,
you will all see heaven open and ‘angels of God going up and
coming down’[n] on the Son of Man.”

## May 12

# He Cares About You

*When he tasted it, the water had become wine.*

John 2:9

"Anyone who is having troubles should pray" (James 5:13). Have you taken your disappointments to God? You've shared them with your neighbor, your relatives, your friends. But have you taken them to God? James says, "Anyone who is having troubles should pray" (James 5:13).

Before you go anywhere else with your disappointments, go to God.

Maybe you don't want to trouble God with your hurts. *After all, he's got famines and pestilence and wars; he won't care about my little struggles,* you think. Why don't you let him decide that? He cared enough about a wedding to provide the wine. He cared enough about Peter's tax payment to give him a coin. He cared enough about the woman at the well to give her answers. "He cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7).

from *Traveling Light*

## 1 Samuel 26:1—27:12

### *David Shames Saul Again*

26 The people of Ziph went to Saul at Gibeah and said to him,
"David is hiding on the hill of Hakilah opposite Jeshimon."

2So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph with three
thousand chosen men of Israel to look for David there. 3Saul
made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah opposite
Jeshimon, but David stayed in the desert. When he heard Saul
had followed him, 4he sent out spies and learned for certain
that Saul had come to Hakilah.

5Then David went to the place where Saul had camped. He
saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's

army, were sleeping. Saul was sleeping in the middle of the camp with all the army around him.

6David asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, "Who will go down into Saul's camp with me?"

Abishai answered, "I'll go with you."

7So that night David and Abishai went into Saul's camp. Saul was asleep in the middle of the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the army were sleeping around Saul. 8Abishai said to David, "Today God has handed your enemy over to you. Let me pin Saul to the ground with my spear. I'll only have to do it once. I won't need to hit him twice."

9But David said to Abishai, "Don't kill Saul! No one can harm the LORD's appointed king and still be innocent! 10As surely as the LORD lives, the LORD himself will punish Saul. Maybe Saul will die naturally, or maybe he will go into battle and be killed. 11But may the LORD keep me from harming his appointed king! Take the spear and water jug that are near Saul's head. Then let's go."

12So David took the spear and water jug that were near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw them or knew about it or woke up, because the LORD had put them sound asleep.

13David crossed over to the other side of the hill and stood on top of the mountain far from Saul's camp. They were a long way away from each other. 14David shouted to the army and to Abner son of Ner, "Won't you answer me, Abner?"

Abner answered, "Who is calling for the king? Who are you?"

15David said, "You're the greatest man in Israel. Isn't that true? Why didn't you guard your master the king? Someone came into your camp to kill your master the king! 16You have not done well. As surely as the LORD lives, you and your men should die. You haven't guarded your master, the LORD's appointed king. Look! Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?"

17Saul knew David's voice. He said, "Is that your voice, David my son?"

David answered, "Yes, it is, my master and king." 18David also said, "Why are you chasing me, my master? What wrong have I done? What evil am I guilty of? 19My master and king, listen to me. If the LORD made you angry with me, let him accept an offering. But if people did it, may the LORD curse them! They have made me leave the land the LORD gave me. They have told me, 'Go and serve other gods.' 20Now don't let me die far away from the LORD's presence. The king of Israel has come out looking for a flea! You're just hunting a bird in the mountains!"

21Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Today you respected my life, so I will not try to hurt you. I have been very stupid and foolish."

22David answered, "Here is your spear. Let one of your

young men come here and get it. 23The LORD rewards us for the
things we do right and for our loyalty to him. The LORD handed
you over to me today, but I wouldn't harm the LORD's appointed
king. 24As I respected your life today, may the LORD also respect
my life and save me from all trouble."

25Then Saul said to David, "You are blessed, my son David.
You will do great things and succeed."

So David went on his way, and Saul went back home.

## *David Lives with the Philistines*

27 But David thought to himself, "Saul will catch me someday.
The best thing I can do is escape to the land of the Philistines.
Then he will give up looking for me in Israel, and I can get away
from him."

2So David and his six hundred men left Israel and went to
Achish son of Maoch, king of Gath. 3David, his men, and their
families made their home in Gath with Achish. David had his
two wives with him—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel,
the widow of Nabal. 4When Saul heard that David had run away
to Gath, he stopped looking for him.

5Then David said to Achish, "If you are pleased with me, give
me a place in one of the country towns where I can live. I don't
need to live in the royal city with you."

6That day Achish gave David the town of Ziklag, and Ziklag
has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since. 7David lived in
the Philistine land a year and four months.

8David and his men raided the people of Geshur, Girzi, and
Amalek. (These people had lived for a long time in the land that
reached to Shur and Egypt.) 9When David fought them, he
killed all the men and women and took their sheep, cattle,
donkeys, camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish.

10Achish would ask David, "Where did you go raiding today?"
And David would tell him that he had gone to the southern part
of Judah, or Jerahmeel, or to the land of the Kenites. 11David
never brought a man or woman alive to Gath. He thought, "If
we bring people alive, they may tell Achish, 'This is what David
really did.'" David did this all the time he lived in the Philistine
land. 12So Achish trusted David and said to himself, "David's
own people, the Israelites, now hate him very much. He will
serve me forever."

## Psalm 60:6–12

[6]God has said from his Temple,
“When I win, I will divide Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Succoth.

[7]Gilead and Manasseh are mine.
Ephraim is like my helmet.
Judah holds my royal scepter.

[8]Moab is like my washbowl.
I throw my sandals at Edom.
I shout at Philistia.”

[9]Who will bring me to the strong, walled city?
Who will lead me to Edom?

[10]God, surely you have rejected us;
you do not go out with our armies.

[11]Help us fight the enemy.
Human help is useless,

[12]but we can win with God’s help.
He will defeat our enemies.

## Proverbs 16:4–5

[4]The LORD makes everything go as he pleases.
He has even prepared a day of disaster for evil people.

[5]The LORD hates those who are proud.
They will surely be punished.

## John 2:1–25

## *The Wedding at Cana*

2 Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in
Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2and Jesus and his followers
were also invited to the wedding. 3When all the wine was gone,
Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

4Jesus answered, "Dear woman, why come to me? My time
has not yet come."

5His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you
to do."

6In that place there were six stone water jars that the Jews
used in their washing ceremony.[n] Each jar held about twenty or
thirty gallons.

7Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." So they
filled the jars to the top.

8Then he said to them, "Now take some out and give it to the
master of the feast."

So they took the water to the master. 9When he tasted it, the
water had become wine. He did not know where the wine came
from, but the servants who had brought the water knew. The
master of the wedding called the bridegroom 10and said to him,
"People always serve the best wine first. Later, after the guests
have been drinking awhile, they serve the cheaper wine. But
you have saved the best wine till now."

11So in Cana of Galilee Jesus did his first miracle. There he
showed his glory, and his followers believed in him.

## *Jesus in the Temple*

12After this, Jesus went to the town of Capernaum with his
mother, brothers, and followers. They stayed there for just a few
days. 13When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover Feast,
Jesus went to Jerusalem. 14In the Temple he found people
selling cattle, sheep, and doves. He saw others sitting at tables,
exchanging different kinds of money. 15Jesus made a whip out of
cords and forced all of them, both the sheep and cattle, to leave
the Temple. He turned over the tables and scattered the money
of those who were exchanging it. 16Then he said to those who
were selling pigeons, "Take these things out of here! Don't
make my Father's house a place for buying and selling!"

17When this happened, the followers remembered what was
written in the Scriptures: "My strong love for your Temple
completely controls me."[n]

18Some of his people said to Jesus, "Show us a miracle to
prove you have the right to do these things."

19Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will build
it again in three days."

[20]They answered, “It took forty-six years to build this Temple! Do you really believe you can build it again in three days?”

[21](But the temple Jesus meant was his own body. [22]After Jesus was raised from the dead, his followers remembered that Jesus had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and the words Jesus had said.)

[23]When Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, many people believed in him because they saw the miracles he did. [24]But Jesus did not believe in them because he knew them all. [25]He did not need anyone to tell him about people, because he knew what was in people’s minds.

# May 13

## Because of Our Need

*"God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him."*

John 3:17

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

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

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

from *The Great House of God*

## 1 Samuel 28:1–25

### *Saul and the Medium of Endor*

28 Later, the Philistines gathered their armies to fight against
Israel. Achish said to David, "You understand that you and your
men must join my army."

2 David answered, "You will see for yourself what I, your
servant, can do!"

Achish said, "Fine, I'll make you my permanent bodyguard."

3 Now Samuel was dead, and all the Israelites had shown
their sadness for him. They had buried Samuel in his hometown
of Ramah.

And Saul had forced out the mediums and fortune-tellers

from the land.

4The Philistines came together and made camp at Shunem.
Saul gathered all the Israelites and made camp at Gilboa.
5When he saw the Philistine army, he was afraid, and his heart
pounded with fear. 6He prayed to the LORD, but the LORD did not
answer him through dreams, Urim, or prophets. 7Then Saul said
to his servants, “Find me a woman who is a medium so I may go
and ask her what will happen.”

His servants answered, “There is a medium in Endor.”

8Then Saul put on other clothes to disguise himself, and at
night he and two of his men went to see the woman. Saul said
to her, “Talk to a spirit for me. Bring up the person I name.”

9But the woman said to him, “Surely you know what Saul has
done. He has forced the mediums and fortune-tellers from the
land. You are trying to trap me and get me killed.”

10Saul made a promise to the woman in the name of the
LORD. He said, “As surely as the LORD lives, you won’t be
punished for this.”

11The woman asked, “Whom do you want me to bring up?”

He answered, “Bring up Samuel.”

12When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed. She said,
“Why have you tricked me? You are Saul!”

13The king said to the woman, “Don’t be afraid! What do you
see?”

The woman said, “I see a spirit coming up out of the
ground.”

14Saul asked, “What does he look like?”

The woman answered, “An old man wearing a coat is coming
up.”

Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed facedown on
the ground.

15Samuel asked Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by
bringing me up?”

Saul said, “I am greatly troubled. The Philistines are fighting
against me, and God has left me. He won’t answer me anymore,
either by prophets or in dreams. That’s why I called for you. Tell
me what to do.”

16Samuel said, “The LORD has left you and has become your
enemy. So why do you call on me? 17He has done what he said
he would do—the things he said through me. He has torn the
kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your
neighbors, David. 18You did not obey the LORD; you did not show
the Amalekites how angry he was with them. That’s why he has
done this to you today. 19The LORD will hand over both Israel and
you to the Philistines. Tomorrow you and your sons will be with
me. The LORD will hand over the army of Israel to the
Philistines.”

20Saul quickly fell flat on the ground and was afraid of what
Samuel had said. He was also very weak because he had eaten

nothing all that day and night.

21 Then the woman came to Saul and saw that he was really
frightened. She said, “Look, I, your servant, have obeyed you. I
have risked my life and done what you told me to do. 22 Now
please listen to me. Let me give you some food so you may eat
and have enough strength to go on your way.”

23 But Saul refused, saying, “I won’t eat.”

His servants joined the woman in asking him to eat, and he listened to them. So he got up from the ground and sat on the bed.

24 At the house the woman had a fat calf, which she quickly
killed. She took some flour and mixed dough with her hands.
Then she baked some bread without yeast. 25 She put the food
before them, and they ate. That same night they got up and left.

## Psalm 61:1–3

### *A Prayer for Protection*

**For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Of David.**

61 God, hear my cry;listen to my prayer.

2 I call to you from the ends of the earth
when I am afraid.

Carry me away to a high mountain.

3 You have been my protection,
like a strong tower against my enemies.

## Proverbs 16:6

6 Love and truth bring forgiveness of sin.
By respecting the LORD you will avoid evil.

# John 3:1–21

## *Nicodemus Comes to Jesus*

3 There was a man named Nicodemus who was one of the
Pharisees and an important Jewish leader. 2One night
Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we know you are
a teacher sent from God, because no one can do the miracles
you do unless God is with him.”

3Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born
again, you cannot be in God’s kingdom.”

4Nicodemus said, “But if a person is already old, how can he
be born again? He cannot enter his mother’s womb again. So
how can a person be born a second time?”

5But Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless you are
born from water and the Spirit, you cannot enter God’s
kingdom. 6Human life comes from human parents, but spiritual
life comes from the Spirit. 7Don’t be surprised when I tell you,
‘You must all be born again.’ 8The wind blows where it wants to
and you hear the sound of it, but you don’t know where the
wind comes from or where it is going. It is the same with every
person who is born from the Spirit.”

9Nicodemus asked, “How can this happen?”

10Jesus said, “You are an important teacher in Israel, and you
don’t understand these things? 11I tell you the truth, we talk
about what we know, and we tell about what we have seen, but
you don’t accept what we tell you. 12I have told you about
things here on earth, and you do not believe me. So you will not
believe me if I tell you about things of heaven. 13The only one
who has ever gone up to heaven is the One who came down
from heaven—the Son of Man.[n]

14“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert,[n] the Son of
Man must also be lifted up. 15So that everyone who believes can
have eternal life in him.

16“God loved the world so much that he gave his one and
only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but
have eternal life. 17God did not send his Son into the world to
judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him.
18People who believe in God’s Son are not judged guilty. Those
who do not believe have already been judged guilty, because
they have not believed in God’s one and only Son. 19They are
judged by this fact: The Light has come into the world, but they
did not want light. They wanted darkness, because they were
doing evil things. 20All who do evil hate the light and will not
come to the light, because it will show all the evil things they

do. [21]But those who follow the true way come to the light, and it
shows that the things they do were done through God.”

# May 14

## Too Incredible

*"The One who comes from above is greater than all."*

John 3:31

The idea that a virgin would be selected by God to bear himself … The notion that God would don a scalp and toes and two eyes … The thought that the King of the universe would sneeze and burp and get bit by mosquitoes … It's too incredible. Too revolutionary. We would never create such a Savior. We aren't that daring.

When we create a redeemer, we keep him safely distant in his faraway castle. We allow him only the briefest of encounters with us. We permit him to swoop in and out with his sleigh before we can draw too near. We wouldn't ask him to take up residence in the midst of a contaminated people. In our wildest imaginings we wouldn't conjure a king who becomes one of us.

But God did.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## 1 Samuel 29:1—31:13

### *David Goes Back to Ziklag*

29 The Philistines gathered all their soldiers at Aphek. Israel
camped by the spring at Jezreel. 2The Philistine kings were
marching with their groups of a hundred and a thousand men.
David and his men were marching behind Achish. 3The
Philistine commanders asked, "What are these Hebrews doing
here?"

Achish told them, "This is David. He served Saul king of Israel, but he has been with me for over a year now. I have found nothing wrong in David since the time he left Saul."

4But the Philistine commanders were angry with Achish and said, "Send David back to the city you gave him. He cannot go

with us into battle. If he does, we'll have an enemy in our own camp. He could please his king by killing our own men. 5David is the one the Israelites dance and sing about, saying:

'Saul has killed thousands of his enemies,
but David has killed tens of thousands.'"

6So Achish called David and said to him, "As surely as the LORD lives, you are loyal. I would be pleased to have you serve in my army. Since the day you came to me, I have found no wrong in you. But the other kings don't trust you. 7Go back in peace. Don't do anything to displease the Philistine kings."

8David asked, "What wrong have I done? What evil have you found in me from the day I came to you until now? Why can't I go fight your enemies, my Lord and king?"

9Achish answered, "I know you are as good as an angel from God. But the Philistine commanders have said, 'David must not go with us into battle.' 10Early in the morning you and your master's servants should leave. Get up as soon as it is light and go."

11So David and his men got up early in the morning and went back to the country of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

## *David's War with the Amalekites*

30 On the third day, when David and his men arrived at Ziklag, he found that the Amalekites had raided southern Judah and Ziklag, attacking Ziklag and burning it. 2They captured the women and everyone, young and old, but they had not killed anyone. They had only taken them away.

3When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found the town had been burned and their wives, sons, and daughters had been taken as prisoners. 4Then David and his army cried loudly until they were too weak to cry anymore. 5David's two wives had also been taken—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal from Carmel. 6The men in the army were threatening to kill David with stones, which greatly upset David. Each man was sad and angry because his sons and daughters had been captured, but David found strength in the LORD his God. 7David said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring me the holy vest."

8Then David asked the LORD, "Should I chase the people who took our families? Will I catch them?"

The LORD answered, "Chase them. You will catch them, and you will succeed in saving your families."

9David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some of the men stayed. 10David and four

hundred men kept up the chase. The other two hundred men stayed behind because they were too tired to cross the ravine.

[11]They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave the Egyptian some water to drink and some food to eat. [12]And they gave him a piece of a fig cake and two clusters of raisins. Then he felt better, because he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and nights.

[13]David asked him, “Who is your master? Where do you come from?”

He answered, “I’m an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. Three days ago my master left me, because I was sick. [14]We had raided the southern area of the Kerethites, the land of Judah, and the southern area of Caleb. We burned Ziklag, as well.”

[15]David asked him, “Can you lead me to the people who took our families?”

He answered, “Yes, if you promise me before God that you won’t kill me or give me back to my master. Then I will take you to them.”

[16]So the Egyptian led David to the Amalekites. They were lying around on the ground, eating and drinking and celebrating with the things they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. [17]David fought them from sunset until the evening of the next day. None of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode off on their camels. [18]David got his two wives back and everything the Amalekites had taken. [19]Nothing was missing. David brought back everyone, young and old, sons and daughters. He recovered the valuable things and everything the Amalekites had taken. [20]David took all the sheep and cattle, and his men made these animals go in front, saying, “They are David’s prize.”

[21]Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too tired to follow him, who had stayed at the Besor Ravine. They came out to meet David and the people with him. When he came near, David greeted the men at the ravine.

[22]But the evil men and troublemakers among those who followed David said, “Since these two hundred men didn’t go with us, we shouldn’t give them any of the things we recovered. Just let each man take his wife and children and go.”

[23]David answered, “No, my brothers. Don’t do that after what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and given us the enemy who attacked us. [24]Who will listen to what you say? The share will be the same for the one who stayed with the supplies as for the one who went into battle. All will share alike.” [25]David made this an order and rule for Israel, which continues even today.

[26]When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent some of the things he had taken from the Amalekites to his friends, the leaders of Judah. He said, “Here is a present for you from the things we took from the LORD’s enemies.”

[27]David also sent some things to the leaders in Bethel, Ramoth in the southern part of Judah, Jattir, [28]Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa, [29]Racal, the cities of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites, [30]Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach, [31]Hebron, and to the people in all the other places where he and his men had been.

## *The Death of Saul*

[31] The Philistines fought against Israel, and the Israelites ran away from them. Many Israelites were killed on Mount Gilboa. [2]The Philistines fought hard against Saul and his sons, killing his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua. [3]The fighting was heavy around Saul. The archers shot him, and he was badly wounded. [4]He said to the officer who carried his armor, “Pull out your sword and kill me. Then those uncircumcised men won’t make fun of me and kill me.” But Saul’s officer refused, because he was afraid. So Saul took his own sword and threw himself on it. [5]When the officer saw that Saul was dead, he threw himself on his own sword, and he died with Saul. [6]So Saul, his three sons, and the officer who carried his armor died together that day.

[7]When the Israelites who lived across the Jezreel Valley and those who lived across the Jordan River saw how the Israelite army had run away, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they left their cities and ran away. Then the Philistines came and lived there.

[8]The next day when the Philistines came to take all the valuable things from the dead soldiers, they found Saul and his three sons dead on Mount Gilboa. [9]They cut off Saul’s head and took off his armor. Then they sent messengers through all the land of the Philistines to tell the news in the temple of their idols and to their people. [10]They put Saul’s armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and hung his body on the wall of Beth Shan.

[11]When the people living in Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, [12]the brave men of Jabesh marched all night and came to Beth Shan. They removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and brought them to Jabesh. There they burned the bodies. [13]They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh. Then the people of Jabesh fasted for seven days.

## Psalm 61:4–8

4 Let me live in your Holy Tent forever.
Let me find safety in the shelter of your wings.

*Selah*

5 God, you have heard my promises.
You have given me what belongs to those who fear you.

6 Give the king a long life;
let him live many years.

7 Let him rule in the presence of God forever.
Protect him with your love and truth.

8 Then I will praise your name forever,
and every day I will keep my promises.

## Proverbs 16:7–9

7 When people live so that they please the LORD,
even their enemies will make peace with them.

8 It is better to be poor and right
than to be wealthy and dishonest.

9 People may make plans in their minds,
but the LORD decides what they will do.

## John 3:22–36

### *Jesus and John the Baptist*

22 After this, Jesus and his followers went into the area of Judea, where he stayed with his followers and baptized people.

23 John was also baptizing in Aenon, near Salim, because there
was plenty of water there. People were going there to be
baptized. 24 (This was before John was put into prison.)

25 Some of John's followers had an argument with a Jew
about religious washing.[n] 26 So they came to John and said,
"Teacher, remember the man who was with you on the other
side of the Jordan River, the one you spoke about so much? He
is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

27 John answered, "A man can get only what God gives him.
28 You yourselves heard me say, 'I am not the Christ, but I am
the one sent to prepare the way for him.' 29 The bride belongs
only to the bridegroom. But the friend who helps the
bridegroom stands by and listens to him. He is thrilled that he
gets to hear the bridegroom's voice. In the same way, I am
really happy. 30 He must become greater, and I must become
less important.

## *The One Who Comes from Heaven*

31 "The One who comes from above is greater than all. The
one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and talks about
things on the earth. But the One who comes from heaven is
greater than all. 32 He tells what he has seen and heard, but no
one accepts what he says. 33 Whoever accepts what he says has
proven that God is true. 34 The One whom God sent speaks the
words of God, because God gives him the Spirit fully. 35 The
Father loves the Son and has given him power over everything.
36 Those who believe in the Son have eternal life, but those who
do not obey the Son will never have life. God's anger stays on
them."

# May 15

## God Is Your Home

*"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."*

John 4:24

Don't think you are separated from God, he at the top end of a great ladder, you at the other. Dismiss any thought that God is on Venus while you are on earth. Since God is Spirit (John 4:24), he is next to you: God himself is our roof. God himself is our wall. And God himself is our foundation.

Moses knew this. "Lord," he prayed, "you have been our home since the beginning" (Psalm 90:1). What a powerful thought: God as your home. Your home is the place where you can kick off your shoes and eat pickles and crackers and not worry about what people think when they see you in your bathrobe.

Your home is familiar to you. No one has to tell you how to locate your bedroom … God can be equally familiar to you. With time you can learn where to go for nourishment, where to hide for protection, where to turn for guidance. Just as your earthly house is a place of refuge, so God's house is a place of peace. God's house has never been plundered, his walls have never been breached.

from *The Great House of God*

## 2 Samuel 1:1—3:1

### *David Learns About Saul's Death*

1 Now Saul was dead. After David had defeated the Amalekites,
he returned to Ziklag and stayed there two days. 2On the third
day a young man from Saul's camp came to Ziklag. To show his
sadness, his clothes were torn and he had dirt on his head. He
came and bowed facedown on the ground before David.

3 David asked him, “Where did you come from?”

The man answered, “I escaped from the Israelite camp.”

4 David asked him, “What happened? Please tell me!”

The man answered, “The people have run away from the battle, and many of them have fallen and are dead. Saul and his son Jonathan are dead also.”

5 David asked him, “How do you know Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?”

6 The young man answered, “I happened to be on Mount Gilboa. There I saw Saul leaning on his spear. The Philistine chariots and the men riding in them were coming closer to Saul. 7 When he looked back and saw me, he called to me. I answered him, ‘Here I am!’

8 “Then Saul asked me, ‘Who are you?’

“I told him, ‘I am an Amalekite.’

9 “Then Saul said to me, ‘Please come here and kill me. I am badly hurt and am almost dead already.’

10 “So I went over and killed him. He had been hurt so badly I knew he couldn’t live. Then I took the crown from his head and the bracelet from his arm, and I have brought them here to you, my master.”

11 Then David tore his clothes to show his sorrow, and all the men with him did also. 12 They were very sad and cried and fasted until evening. They cried for Saul and his son Jonathan and for all the people of the LORD and for all the Israelites who had died in the battle.

## *David Orders the Amalekite Killed*

13 David asked the young man who brought the report, “Where are you from?”

The young man answered, “I am the son of a foreigner, an Amalekite.”

14 David asked him, “Why were you not afraid to kill the LORD’s appointed king?”

15 Then David called one of his men and told him, “Go! Kill the Amalekite!” So the Israelite killed him. 16 David had said to the Amalekite, “You are responsible for your own death. You confessed by saying, ‘I have killed the LORD’s appointed king.’”

## *David’s Song About Saul and Jonathan*

17 David sang a funeral song about Saul and his son Jonathan, 18 and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this song. It is called “The Bow,” and it is written in the Book of Jashar:

19 “Israel, your leaders have been killed on the hills.
How the mighty have fallen in battle!

20 Don’t tell it in Gath.
Don’t announce it in the streets of Ashkelon.

If you do, the Philistine women will be happy.
The daughters of the Philistines will rejoice.

21 “May there be no dew or rain on the mountains of Gilboa,
and may their fields produce no grain,

because there the mighty warrior’s shield was dishonored.
Saul’s shield will no longer be rubbed with oil.

22 Jonathan’s bow did not fail
to kill many soldiers.

Saul’s sword did not fail
to wound many strong men.

23 “We loved Saul and Jonathan
and enjoyed them while they lived.
They are together even in death.

They were faster than eagles.
They were stronger than lions.

24 “You daughters of Israel, cry for Saul.
Saul clothed you with red dresses
and put gold decorations on them.

25 “How the mighty have fallen in battle!
Jonathan is dead on Gilboa’s hills.

26 I cry for you, my brother Jonathan.

I enjoyed your friendship so much.

Your love to me was wonderful,
better than the love of women.

27 “How the mighty have fallen!
The weapons of war are gone.”

## *David Is Made King of Judah*

2 Later, David prayed to the LORD, saying, “Should I go up to any
of the cities of Judah?”
The LORD said to David, “Go.”
David asked, “Where should I go?”
The LORD answered, “To Hebron.”
2 So David went up to Hebron with his two wives: Ahinoam
from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel.
3 David also brought his men and their families, and they all
made their homes in the cities of Hebron. 4 Then the men of
Judah came to Hebron and appointed David king over Judah.
They told David that the men of Jabesh Gilead had buried
Saul. 5 So David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead
and said to them, “The LORD bless you. You have shown loyalty
to your master Saul by burying him. 6 May the LORD now be loyal
and true to you. I will also treat you well because you have done
this. 7 Now be strong and brave. Saul your master is dead, and
the people of Judah have appointed me their king.”

## *War Between Judah and Israel*

8 Abner son of Ner was the commander of Saul’s army. Abner
took Saul’s son Ish-Bosheth to Mahanaim 9 and made him king
of Gilead, Ashuri, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel.
10 Saul’s son Ish-Bosheth was forty years old when he became
king over Israel, and he ruled two years. But the people of
Judah followed David. 11 David was king in Hebron for seven
years and six months.
12 Abner son of Ner and the servants of Ish-Bosheth son of
Saul left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon. 13 Joab son of Zeruiah
and David’s men also went there and met Abner and Ish-
Bosheth’s men at the pool of Gibeon. Abner’s group sat on one
side of the pool; Joab’s group sat on the other.
14 Abner said to Joab, “Let the young men have a contest
here.”
Joab said, “Yes, let them have a contest.”

15 Then the men got up and were counted—twelve from the
people of Benjamin for Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, and twelve from
David's men. 16 Each man grabbed the one opposite him by the
head and stabbed him in the side with a knife. So the men fell
down together. For that reason, that place in Gibeon is called
the Field of Knives. 17 That day there was a terrible battle, and
David's men defeated Abner and the Israelites.

## *Abner Kills Asahel*

18 Zeruiah's three sons, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, were
there. Now Asahel was a fast runner, as fast as a deer in the
field. 19 Asahel chased Abner, going straight toward him.
20 Abner looked back and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?"

Asahel said, "Yes, it is."

21 Then Abner said to Asahel, "Turn to your right or left and
catch one of the young men and take his armor." But Asahel
refused to stop chasing him.

22 Abner again said to Asahel, "Stop chasing me! If you don't
stop, I'll have to kill you! Then I won't be able to face your
brother Joab again!"

23 But Asahel refused to stop chasing Abner. So using the
back end of his spear, Abner stabbed Asahel in the stomach, and
the spear came out of his back. Asahel died right there, and
everyone stopped when they came to the place where Asahel's
body lay.

24 But Joab and Abishai continued chasing Abner. As the sun
was going down, they arrived at the hill of Ammah, near Giah
on the way to the desert near Gibeon. 25 The men of Benjamin
came to Abner, and all stood together at the top of the hill.

26 Abner shouted to Joab, "Must the sword kill forever?
Surely you must know this will only end in sadness! Tell the
people to stop chasing their own brothers!"

27 Then Joab said, "As surely as God lives, if you had not said
anything, the people would have chased their brothers until
morning." 28 Then Joab blew a trumpet, and his people stopped
chasing the Israelites. They did not fight them anymore.

29 Abner and his men marched all night through the Jordan
Valley. They crossed the Jordan River, and after marching all
day, arrived at Mahanaim.

30 After he had stopped chasing Abner, Joab came back and
gathered the people together. Asahel and nineteen of David's
men were missing. 31 But David's men had killed three hundred
sixty Benjaminites who had followed Abner. 32 David's men took
Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father at Bethlehem.
Then Joab and his men marched all night. The sun came up as
they reached Hebron.

3 There was a long war between the people who supported

Saul’s family and those who supported David’s family. The supporters of David’s family became stronger and stronger, but the supporters of Saul’s family became weaker and weaker.

## Psalm 62:1–4

### *Trust Only in God*

**For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.**

62 I find rest in God;only he can save me.

2He is my rock and my salvation.
He is my defender;
I will not be defeated.

3How long will you attack someone?
Will all of you kill that person?
Who is like a leaning wall, like a fence ready to fall?

4They are planning to make that person fall.
They enjoy telling lies.

With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse. *Selah*

## Proverbs 16:10–12

10The words of a king are like a message from God,
so his decisions should be fair.

11The LORD wants honest balances and scales;
all the weights are his work.

12 Kings hate those who do wrong,
because governments only continue if they are fair.

## John 4:1–42

### *Jesus and a Samaritan Woman*

4 The Pharisees heard that Jesus was making and baptizing
more followers than John, 2 although Jesus himself did not
baptize people, but his followers did. 3 Jesus knew that the
Pharisees had heard about him, so he left Judea and went back
to Galilee. 4 But on the way he had to go through the country of
Samaria.

5 In Samaria Jesus came to the town called Sychar, which is
near the field Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was
there. Jesus was tired from his long trip, so he sat down beside
the well. It was about twelve o'clock noon. 7 When a Samaritan
woman came to the well to get some water, Jesus said to her,
"Please give me a drink." 8 (This happened while Jesus' followers
were in town buying some food.)

9 The woman said, "I am surprised that you ask me for a
drink, since you are a Jewish man and I am a Samaritan
woman." (Jewish people are not friends with Samaritans.[n])

10 Jesus said, "If you only knew the free gift of God and who it
is that is asking you for water, you would have asked him, and
he would have given you living water."

11 The woman said, "Sir, where will you get this living water?
The well is very deep, and you have nothing to get water with.
12 Are you greater than Jacob, our father, who gave us this well
and drank from it himself along with his sons and flocks?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be
thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give will never
be thirsty. The water I give will become a spring of water
gushing up inside that person, giving eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so I will
never be thirsty again and will not have to come back here to
get more water."

16 Jesus told her, "Go get your husband and come back here."

17 The woman answered, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You are right to say you have no husband.
18 Really you have had five husbands, and the man you live with
now is not your husband. You told the truth."

19 The woman said, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.
20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that

Jerusalem is the place where people must worship."

21 Jesus said, "Believe me, woman. The time is coming when
neither in Jerusalem nor on this mountain will you actually
worship the Father. 22 You Samaritans worship something you
don't understand. We understand what we worship, because
salvation comes from the Jews. 23 The time is coming when the
true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, and
that time is here already. You see, the Father too is actively
seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those
who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming."
(Messiah is the One called Christ.) "When the Messiah comes,
he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus said, "I am he—I, the one talking to you."

27 Just then his followers came back from town and were
surprised to see him talking with a woman. But none of them
asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to town.
She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me
everything I ever did. Do you think he might be the Christ?"
30 So the people left the town and went to see Jesus.

31 Meanwhile, his followers were begging him, "Teacher, eat
something."

32 But Jesus answered, "I have food to eat that you know
nothing about."

33 So the followers asked themselves, "Did somebody already
bring him food?"

34 Jesus said, "My food is to do what the One who sent me
wants me to do and to finish his work. 35 You have a saying,
'Four more months till harvest.' But I tell you, open your eyes
and look at the fields ready for harvest now. 36 Already, the one
who harvests is being paid and is gathering crops for eternal
life. So the one who plants and the one who harvests celebrate
at the same time. 37 Here the saying is true, 'One person plants,
and another harvests.' 38 I sent you to harvest a crop that you
did not work on. Others did the work, and you get to finish up
their work."[n]

39 Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus
because of what the woman said: "He told me everything I ever
did." 40 When the Samaritans came to Jesus, they begged him to
stay with them, so he stayed there two more days. 41 And many
more believed because of the things he said.

42 They said to the woman, "First we believed in Jesus
because of what you said, but now we believe because we heard
him ourselves. We know that this man really is the Savior of the
world."

# May 16

## God, Our Defender

*He is my defender; I will not be defeated.*

Psalm 62:6

HERE is a big question. What is God doing when you are in a bind? When the lifeboat springs a leak? When the rip cord snaps? When the last penny is gone before the last bill is paid? …

I know what we are doing. Nibbling on nails like corn on the cob. Pacing floors. Taking pills …

But what does God do? …

He fights for us. He steps into the ring and points us to our corner and takes over. "Remain calm; the LORD will fight for you" (Exodus 14:14).

His job is to fight. Our job is to trust.

Just trust. Not direct. Or question … Our job is to pray and wait.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## 2 Samuel 3:2—4:12

### *David's Sons*

2 Sons were born to David at Hebron. The first was Amnon,
whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel. 3 The second son was
Kileab, whose mother was Abigail, the widow of Nabal from
Carmel. The third son was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah
daughter of Talmai, the king of Geshur. 4 The fourth son was
Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith. The fifth son was
Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital. 5 The sixth son was
Ithream, whose mother was Eglah, David's wife. These sons
were born to David at Hebron.

### *Abner Joins David*

6During the war between the supporters of Saul's family and
the supporters of David's family, Abner made himself a main
leader among the supporters of Saul.
7Saul once had a slave woman named Rizpah, who was the
daughter of Aiah. Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, "Why did you have
sexual relations with my father's slave woman?"
8Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said,
and he replied, "I have been loyal to Saul and his family and
friends! I didn't hand you over to David. I am not a traitor
working for Judah! But now you are saying I did something
wrong with this woman! 9May God help me if I don't join David!
I will make sure that what the LORD promised does happen! 10I
will take the kingdom from the family of Saul and make David
king of Israel and Judah, from Dan to Beersheba!"[n]
11Ish-Bosheth couldn't say anything to Abner, because he
was afraid of him.
12Then Abner sent messengers to ask David, "Who is going
to rule the land? Make an agreement with me, and I will help
you unite all Israel."
13David answered, "Good! I will make an agreement with
you, but I ask you one thing. I will not meet with you unless you
bring Saul's daughter Michal to me." 14Then David sent
messengers to Saul's son Ish-Bosheth, saying, "Give me my wife
Michal. She was promised to me, and I killed a hundred
Philistines to get her."
15So Ish-Bosheth sent men to take Michal from her husband
Paltiel son of Laish. 16Michal's husband went with her, crying as
he followed her to Bahurim. But Abner said to Paltiel, "Go back
home." So he went home.
17Abner sent this message to the elders of Israel: "You have
been wanting to make David your king. 18Now do it! The LORD
said of David, 'Through my servant David, I will save my people
Israel from the Philistines and all their enemies.'"
19Abner also said these things to the people of Benjamin. He
then went to Hebron to tell David what the Benjaminites and
Israel wanted to do. 20Abner came with twenty men to David at
Hebron. There David prepared a feast for them. 21Abner said to
David, "My master and king, I will go and bring all the Israelites
to you. Then they will make an agreement with you so you will
rule over all Israel as you wanted." So David let Abner go, and
he left in peace.

## *Abner's Death*

22Just then Joab and David's men came from a battle,
bringing many valuable things they had taken from the enemy.
David had let Abner leave in peace, so he was not with David at

Hebron. 23When Joab and all his army arrived at Hebron, the army said to Joab, “Abner son of Ner came to King David, and David let him leave in peace.”

24Joab came to the king and said, “What have you done? Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he’s gone. 25You know Abner son of Ner! He came to trick you! He came to learn about everything you are doing!”

26After Joab left David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know this. 27When Abner arrived at Hebron, Joab took him aside into the gateway. He acted as though he wanted to talk with Abner in private, but Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and Abner died. Abner had killed Joab’s brother Asahel, so Joab killed Abner to pay him back.

28Later when David heard the news, he said, “My kingdom and I are innocent forever of the death of Abner son of Ner. The LORD knows this. 29Joab and his family are responsible for this. May his family always have someone with sores or with a skin disease. May they always have someone who must lean on a crutch. May some of his family be killed in war. May they always have someone without food to eat.”

30(Joab and his brother Abishai killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.)

31Then David said to Joab and to all the people with Joab, “Tear your clothes and put on rough cloth to show how sad you are. Cry for Abner.” King David himself followed the body of Abner. 32They buried Abner in Hebron, and David and all the people cried at Abner’s grave.

33King David sang this funeral song for Abner.

“Did Abner die like a fool?
34 His hands were not tied.
His feet were not in chains.

He fell at the hands of evil men.”

Then all the people cried again for Abner. 35They came to encourage David to eat while it was still day. But he made a promise, saying, “May God punish me terribly if I eat bread or anything else before the sun sets!”

36All the people saw what happened, and they agreed with what the king was doing, just as they agreed with everything he did. 37That day all the people of Judah and Israel understood that David did not order the killing of Abner son of Ner.

38David said to his officers, “You know that a great man died today in Israel. 39Even though I am the appointed king, I feel

empty. These sons of Zeruiah are too much for me. May the LORD give them the punishment they should have."

## *Ish-Bosheth's Death*

4 When Ish-Bosheth son of Saul heard that Abner had died at
Hebron, he was shocked and all Israel became frightened. 2Two
men who were captains in Saul's army came to Ish-Bosheth.
One was named Baanah, and the other was named Recab. They
were the sons of Rimmon of Beeroth, who was a Benjaminite.
(The town Beeroth belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. 3The
people of Beeroth ran away to Gittaim, and they still live there
as foreigners today.)

4(Saul's son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, who
was crippled in both feet. He was five years old when the news
came from Jezreel that Saul and Jonathan were dead.
Mephibosheth's nurse had picked him up and run away. But as
she hurried to leave, she dropped him, and now he was lame.)

5Recab and Baanah, sons of Rimmon from Beeroth, went to
Ish-Bosheth's house in the afternoon while he was taking a nap.
6–7They went into the middle of the house as if to get some
wheat. Ish-Bosheth was lying on his bed in his bedroom. Then
Recab and Baanah stabbed him in the stomach, killed him, cut
off his head, and took it with them. They escaped and traveled
all night through the Jordan Valley. 8When they arrived at
Hebron, they gave his head to David and said to the king, "Here
is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, your enemy. He tried to
kill you! Today the LORD has paid back Saul and his family for
what they did to you!"

9David answered Recab and his brother Baanah, the sons of
Rimmon of Beeroth, "As surely as the LORD lives, he has saved
me from all trouble! 10Once a man thought he was bringing me
good news. When he told me, 'Saul is dead!' I seized him and
killed him at Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his
news! 11So even more I must put you evil men to death because
you have killed an innocent man on his own bed in his own
house!"

12So David commanded his men to kill Recab and Baanah.
They cut off the hands and feet of Recab and Baanah and hung
them over the pool of Hebron. Then they took Ish-Bosheth's
head and buried it in Abner's tomb at Hebron.

## Psalm 62:5–12

5 I find rest in God;
only he gives me hope.

6 He is my rock and my salvation.
He is my defender;
I will not be defeated.

7 My honor and salvation come from God.
He is my mighty rock and my protection.

8 People, trust God all the time.
Tell him all your problems,
because God is our protection. *Selah*

9 The least of people are only a breath,
and even the greatest are just a lie.

On the scales, they weigh nothing;
together they are only a breath.

10 Do not trust in force.
Stealing is of no use.

Even if you gain more riches,
don't put your trust in them.

11 God has said this,
and I have heard it over and over:
God is strong.

12 The Lord is loving.
You reward people for what they have done.

## Proverbs 16:13–15

13 Kings like honest people;
they value someone who speaks the truth.

14 An angry king can put someone to death,
so a wise person will try to make him happy.

15 A smiling king can give people life;
his kindness is like a spring shower.

## John 4:43–54

### *Jesus Heals an Officer's Son*

43 Two days later, Jesus left and went to Galilee. 44 (Jesus had
said before that a prophet is not respected in his own country.)
45 When Jesus arrived in Galilee, the people there welcomed
him. They had seen all the things he did at the Passover Feast in
Jerusalem, because they had been there, too.

46 Jesus went again to visit Cana in Galilee where he had
changed the water into wine. One of the king's important
officers lived in the city of Capernaum, and his son was sick.
47 When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he
went to Jesus and begged him to come to Capernaum and heal
his son, because his son was almost dead. 48 Jesus said to him,
"You people must see signs and miracles before you will believe
in me."

49 The officer said, "Sir, come before my child dies."

50 Jesus answered, "Go. Your son will live."

The man believed what Jesus told him and went home. 51 On
the way the man's servants came and met him and told him,
"Your son is alive."

52 The man asked, "What time did my son begin to get well?"

They answered, "Yesterday at one o'clock the fever left him."

53 The father knew that one o'clock was the exact time that
Jesus had said, "Your son will live." So the man and all the
people who lived in his house believed in Jesus.

54 That was the second miracle Jesus did after coming from
Judea to Galilee.

# May 17

## Working Well

*“My Father never stops working, and so I keep working, too.”*

John 5:17

God views work worthy of its own engraved commandment: “You must work for six days, but on the seventh day you must rest” (Exodus 34:21). We like the second half of that verse. But emphasis on the day of rest might cause us to miss the command to work: “You must work six days.” Whether you work at home or in the marketplace, your work matters to God.

And your work matters to society. We need you! Cities need plumbers. Nations need soldiers. Stoplights break. Bones break. We need people to repair the first and set the second. Someone has to raise kids, raise cane, and manage the kids who raise Cain.

Whether you log on or lace up for the day, you imitate God. Jehovah himself worked for the first six days of creation. Jesus said, “My Father never stops working, and so I keep working, too.”

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### 2 Samuel 5:1—6:23

#### *David Is Made King of Israel*

5 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said
to him, “Look, we are your own family. 2Even when Saul was
king, you were the one who led Israel in battle. The LORD said to
you, ‘You will be a shepherd for my people Israel. You will be
their leader.’”

3So all the elders of Israel came to King David at Hebron,
and he made an agreement with them in Hebron in the
presence of the LORD. Then they poured oil on David to make
him king over Israel.

4David was thirty years old when he became king, and he
ruled forty years. 5He was king over Judah in Hebron for seven
years and six months, and he was king over all Israel and Judah
in Jerusalem for thirty-three years.
6When the king and his men went to Jerusalem to attack the
Jebusites who lived there, the Jebusites said to David, “You can’t
get inside our city. Even the blind and the crippled can stop
you.” They thought David could not enter their city. 7But David
did take the city of Jerusalem with its strong walls, and it
became the City of David.
8That day David said to his men, “To defeat the Jebusites you
must go through the water tunnel. Then you can reach those
‘crippled’ and ‘blind’ enemies. This is why people say, ‘The blind
and the crippled may not enter the palace.’”
9So David lived in the strong, walled city and called it the
City of David. David built more buildings around it, beginning
where the land was filled in. He also built more buildings inside
the city. 10He became stronger and stronger, because the LORD
God All-Powerful was with him.
11Hiram king of the city of Tyre sent messengers to David,
along with cedar logs, carpenters, and stonecutters. They built
a palace for David. 12Then David knew that the LORD really had
made him king of Israel and that the LORD had made his
kingdom great because the LORD loved his people Israel.
13After he came from Hebron, David took for himself more
slave women and wives in Jerusalem. More sons and daughters
were born to David. 14These are the names of the sons born to
David in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon,
15Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, 16Elishama, Eliada, and
Eliphelet.

## *David Defeats the Philistines*

17When the Philistines heard that David had been made king
over Israel, all the Philistines went to look for him. But when
David heard the news, he went down to the stronghold. 18The
Philistines came and camped in the Valley of Rephaim. 19David
asked the LORD, “Should I attack the Philistines? Will you hand
them over to me?”
The LORD said to David, “Go! I will certainly hand them over
to you.”
20So David went to Baal Perazim and defeated the Philistines
there. David said, “Like a flood of water, the LORD has broken
through my enemies in front of me.” So David named the place
Baal Perazim.[n] 21The Philistines left their idols behind at Baal
Perazim, so David and his men carried them away.
22Once again the Philistines came and camped at the Valley
of Rephaim. 23When David prayed to the LORD, he answered,

“Don’t attack the Philistines from the front. Instead, go around
and attack them in front of the balsam trees. 24When you hear
the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, act
quickly. I, the LORD, will have gone ahead of you to defeat the
Philistine army.” 25So David did what the LORD commanded. He
defeated the Philistines and chased them all the way from
Gibeon to Gezer.

## *The Ark Is Brought to Jerusalem*

6 David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel—thirty
thousand of them. 2Then he and all his people went to Baalah in
Judah[n] to bring back the Ark of God. The Ark is called by the
Name, the name of the LORD All-Powerful, whose throne is
between the gold creatures with wings. 3They put the Ark of
God on a new cart and brought it out of Abinadab’s house on
the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, led the new cart
4which had the Ark of God on it. Ahio was walking in front of it.
5David and all the Israelites were celebrating in the presence of
the LORD. They were playing wooden instruments: lyres, harps,
tambourines, rattles, and cymbals.

6When David’s men came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the
oxen stumbled. So Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark of God.
7The LORD was angry with Uzzah and killed him because of what
he did. So Uzzah died there beside the Ark of God. 8David was
angry because the LORD had killed Uzzah. Now that place is
called the Punishment of Uzzah.

9David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, “How can
the Ark of the LORD come to me now?” 10So David would not
move the Ark of the LORD to be with him in Jerusalem. Instead,
he took it to the house of Obed-Edom, a man from Gath. 11The
Ark of the LORD stayed in Obed-Edom’s house for three months,
and the LORD blessed Obed-Edom and all his family.

12The people told David, “The LORD has blessed the family of
Obed-Edom and all that belongs to him, because the Ark of God
is there.” So David went and brought it up from Obed-Edom’s
house to Jerusalem with joy. 13When the men carrying the Ark
of the LORD had walked six steps, David sacrificed a bull and a
fat calf. 14Then David danced with all his might before the LORD.
He had on a holy linen vest. 15David and all the Israelites
shouted with joy and blew the trumpets as they brought the Ark
of the LORD to the city.

16As the Ark of the LORD came into the city, Saul’s daughter
Michal looked out the window. When she saw David jumping
and dancing in the presence of the LORD, she hated him.

17David put up a tent for the Ark of the LORD, and then the
Israelites put it in its place inside the tent. David offered whole
burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD.

18When David finished offering the whole burnt offerings and
the fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of
the LORD All-Powerful. 19David gave a loaf of bread, a cake of
dates, and a cake of raisins to every Israelite, both men and
women. Then all the people went home.

20David went back to bless the people in his home, but Saul's
daughter Michal came out to meet him. She said, "With what
honor the king of Israel acted today! You took off your clothes in
front of the servant girls of your officers like one who takes off
his clothes without shame!"

21Then David said to Michal, "I did it in the presence of the
LORD. The LORD chose me, not your father or anyone from Saul's
family. The LORD appointed me to be over Israel. So I will
celebrate in the presence of the LORD. 22Maybe I will lose even
more honor, and maybe I will be brought down in my own
opinion, but the girls you talk about will honor me!"

23And Saul's daughter Michal had no children to the day she
died.

## Psalm 63:1–11

### *Wishing to Be Near God*

**A psalm of David when he was in the desert of Judah.**

63 God, you are my God.I search for you.

I thirst for you
like someone in a dry, empty land
where there is no water.

2I have seen you in the Temple
and have seen your strength and glory.

3Because your love is better than life,
I will praise you.

4I will praise you as long as I live.
I will lift up my hands in prayer to your name.

[5]I will be content as if I had eaten the best foods.
My lips will sing, and my mouth will praise you.

[6]I remember you while I’m lying in bed;
I think about you through the night.

[7]You are my help.
Because of your protection, I sing.

[8]I stay close to you;
you support me with your right hand.

[9]Some people are trying to kill me,
but they will go down to the grave.

[10]They will be killed with swords
and eaten by wild dogs.

[11]But the king will rejoice in his God.
All who make promises in his name will praise him,
but the mouths of liars will be shut.

## Proverbs 16:16–17

[16]It is better to get wisdom than gold,
and to choose understanding rather than silver!

[17]Good people stay away from evil.
By watching what they do, they protect their lives.

## John 5:1–18

## *Jesus Heals a Man at a Pool*

5 Later Jesus went to Jerusalem for a special feast. 2In
Jerusalem there is a pool with five covered porches, which is
called Bethesda[n] in the Hebrew language.[n] This pool is near the
Sheep Gate. 3Many sick people were lying on the porches
beside the pool. Some were blind, some were crippled, and
some were paralyzed [, and they waited for the water to move.
4Sometimes an angel of the Lord came down to the pool and
stirred up the water. After the angel did this, the first person to
go into the pool was healed from any sickness he had].[n] 5A man
was lying there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6When
Jesus saw the man and knew that he had been sick for such a
long time, Jesus asked him, "Do you want to be well?"

7The sick man answered, "Sir, there is no one to help me get
into the pool when the water starts moving. While I am coming
to the water, someone else always gets in before me."

8Then Jesus said, "Stand up. Pick up your mat and walk."
9And immediately the man was well; he picked up his mat and
began to walk.

The day this happened was a Sabbath day. 10So the Jews said
to the man who had been healed, "Today is the Sabbath. It is
against our law for you to carry your mat on the Sabbath day."

11But he answered, "The man who made me well told me,
'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

12Then they asked him, "Who is the man who told you to pick
up your mat and walk?"

13But the man who had been healed did not know who it was,
because there were many people in that place, and Jesus had
left.

14Later, Jesus found the man at the Temple and said to him,
"See, you are well now. Stop sinning so that something worse
does not happen to you."

15Then the man left and told his people that Jesus was the
one who had made him well.

16Because Jesus was doing this on the Sabbath day, some evil
people began to persecute him. 17But Jesus said to them, "My
Father never stops working, and so I keep working, too."

18This made them try still harder to kill him. They said, "First
Jesus was breaking the law about the Sabbath day. Now he says
that God is his own Father, making himself equal with God!"

# May 18

## The Heart of Jesus

*"The Son does whatever the Father does."*

John 5:19

The crowning attribute of Christ was this: his heart was spiritual. His thoughts reflected his intimate relationship with the Father. "I am in the Father and the Father is in me," he stated (John 14:11) ...

Jesus took his instructions from God. It was his habit to go to worship (Luke 4:16). It was his practice to memorize Scripture (Luke 4:4). Luke says Jesus "often slipped away to be alone so he could pray" (Luke 5:16). His times of prayer guided him. He once returned from prayer and announced it was time to move to another city (Mark 1:35–38). Another time of prayer resulted in the selection of the disciples (Luke 6:12–13). Jesus was led by an unseen hand ...

The heart of Jesus was spiritual.

from *Just Like Jesus*

### 2 Samuel 7:1—8:18

#### *David Wants to Build a Temple*

7 King David was living in his palace, and the LORD had given
him peace from all his enemies around him. 2Then David said to
Nathan the prophet, "Look, I am living in a palace made of
cedar wood, but the Ark of God is in a tent!"

3Nathan said to the king, "Go and do what you really want to
do, because the LORD is with you."

4But that night the LORD spoke his word to Nathan, 5"Go and
tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Will you build
a house for me to live in? 6From the time I brought the
Israelites out of Egypt until now I have not lived in a house. I
have been moving around all this time with a tent as my home.

7As I have moved with the Israelites, I have never said to the
tribes, whom I commanded to take care of my people Israel,
“Why haven’t you built me a house of cedar?”’
8“You must tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD All-
Powerful says: I took you from the pasture and from tending the
sheep and made you leader of my people Israel. 9I have been
with you everywhere you have gone and have defeated your
enemies for you. I will make you as famous as any of the great
people on the earth. 10Also I will choose a place for my people
Israel, and I will plant them so they can live in their own homes.
They will not be bothered anymore. Wicked people will no
longer bother them as they have in the past 11when I chose
judges for my people Israel. But I will give you peace from all
your enemies. I also tell you that I will make your descendants
kings of Israel after you.
12“‘When you die and join your ancestors, I will make one of
your sons the next king, and I will set up his kingdom. 13He will
build a house for me, and I will let his kingdom rule always. 14I
will be his father, and he will be my son. When he sins, I will use
other people to punish him. They will be my whips. 15I took
away my love from Saul, whom I removed before you, but I will
never stop loving your son. 16But your family and your kingdom
will continue always before me. Your throne will last forever.’”
17Nathan told David everything God had said in this vision.

## *David Prays to God*

18Then King David went in and sat in front of the LORD. David
said, “Lord God, who am I? What is my family? Why did you
bring me to this point? 19But even this is not enough for you,
Lord God. You have also made promises about my future family.
This is extraordinary, Lord God.
20“What more can I say to you, Lord God, since you know me,
your servant, so well! 21You have done this great thing because
you said you would and because you wanted to, and you have
let me know about it. 22This is why you are great, Lord God!
There is no one like you. There is no God except you. We have
heard all this ourselves! 23There is no nation like your people
Israel. They are the only people on earth that God chose to be
his own. You made your name well known. You did great and
wonderful miracles for them. You went ahead of them and
forced other nations and their gods out of the land. You freed
your people from slavery in Egypt. 24You made the people of
Israel your very own people forever, and, LORD, you are their
God.
25“Now, LORD God, keep the promise forever that you made
about my family and me, your servant. Do what you have said.
26Then you will be honored always, and people will say, ‘The

LORD All-Powerful is God over Israel!' And the family of your servant David will continue before you.

27"LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, you have said to me, 'I will make your family great.' So I, your servant, am brave enough to pray to you. 28Lord God, you are God, and your words are true. And you have promised these good things to me, your servant. 29Please, bless my family. Let it continue before you always. Lord God, you have said so. With your blessing let my family always be blessed."

## *David Wins Many Wars*

8 Later, David defeated the Philistines, conquered them, and took the city of Metheg Ammah.

2He also defeated the people of Moab. He made them lie on the ground, and then he used a rope to measure them. Those who were measured within two rope lengths were killed, but those who were within the next rope length were allowed to live. So the people of Moab became servants of David and gave him the payment he demanded.

3David also defeated Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to take control again at the Euphrates River. 4David captured one thousand chariots, seven thousand men who rode in chariots, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He crippled all but a hundred of the chariot horses.

5Arameans from Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, but David killed twenty-two thousand of them. 6Then David put groups of soldiers in Damascus in Aram. The Arameans became David's servants and gave him the payment he demanded. The LORD gave David victory everywhere he went.

7David took the shields of gold that had belonged to Hadadezer's officers and brought them to Jerusalem. 8David also took many things made of bronze from Tebah and Berothai, which had been cities under Hadadezer's control.

9Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the army of Hadadezer. 10So Toi sent his son Joram to greet and congratulate King David for defeating Hadadezer. (Hadadezer had been at war with Toi.) Joram brought items made of silver, gold, and bronze. 11King David gave them to the LORD, along with the silver and gold he had taken from the other nations he had defeated. 12These nations were Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and Amalek. David also gave the LORD what he had taken from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

13David was famous after he returned from defeating eighteen thousand Arameans in the Valley of Salt. 14He put groups of soldiers all over Edom, and all the Edomites became his servants. The LORD gave David victory everywhere he went.

15David was king over all Israel, and he did what was fair

and right for all his people. [16]Joab son of Zeruiah was commander over the army. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the recorder. [17]Zadok son of Ahitub and Abiathar son of Ahimelech were priests. Seraiah was the royal secretary. [18]Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites.[n] And David's sons were priests.

## Psalm 64:1–10

### *A Prayer Against Enemies*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

64 God, listen to my complaint.I am afraid of my enemies;
protect my life from them.

[2]Hide me from those who plan wicked things,
from that gang who does evil.

[3]They sharpen their tongues like swords
and shoot bitter words like arrows.

[4]From their hiding places they shoot at innocent people;
they shoot suddenly and are not afraid.

[5]They encourage each other to do wrong.
They talk about setting traps,
thinking no one will see them.

[6]They plan wicked things and say,
"We have a perfect plan."
The mind of human beings is hard to understand.

[7]But God will shoot them with arrows;
they will suddenly be struck down.

[8]Their own words will be used against them.
All who see them will shake their heads.

[9]Then everyone will fear God.
They will tell what God has done,
and they will learn from what he has done.

[10]Good people will be happy in the LORD
and will find protection in him.
Let everyone who is honest praise the LORD.

## Proverbs 16:18–19

[18]Pride leads to destruction;
a proud attitude brings ruin.

[19]It is better to be humble and be with those who suffer
than to share stolen property with the proud.

## John 5:19–47

### *Jesus Has God's Authority*

[19]But Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing alone. The Son does only what he sees the Father doing, because the Son does whatever the Father does. [20]The Father loves the Son and shows the Son all the things he himself does. But the Father will show the Son even greater things than this so that you can all be amazed. [21]Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to those he wants to. [22]In fact, the Father judges no one, but he has given the Son power to do all the judging [23]so that all people will honor the Son as much as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

[24]"I tell you the truth, whoever hears what I say and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life. That person will not be judged guilty but has already left death and entered life. [25]I tell

you the truth, the time is coming and is already here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will have life. [26]Life comes from the Father himself, and he has allowed the Son to have life in himself as well. [27]And the Father has given the Son the approval to judge, because he is the Son of Man. [28]Don't be surprised at this: A time is coming when all who are dead and in their graves will hear his voice. [29]Then they will come out of their graves. Those who did good will rise and have life forever, but those who did evil will rise to be judged guilty.

## *Jesus Is God's Son*

[30]"I can do nothing alone. I judge only the way I am told, so my judgment is fair. I don't try to please myself, but I try to please the One who sent me.

[31]"If only I tell people about myself, what I say is not true. [32]But there is another who tells about me, and I know that the things he says about me are true.

[33]"You have sent people to John, and he has told you the truth. [34]It is not that I need what humans say; I tell you this so you can be saved. [35]John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were happy to enjoy his light for a while.

[36]"But I have a proof about myself that is greater than that of John. The things I do, which are the things my Father gave me to do, prove that the Father sent me. [37]And the Father himself who sent me has given proof about me. You have never heard his voice or seen what he looks like. [38]His teaching does not live in you, because you don't believe in the One the Father sent. [39]You carefully study the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. They do in fact tell about me, [40]but you refuse to come to me to have that life.

[41]"I don't need praise from people. [42]But I know you—I know that you don't have God's love in you. [43]I have come from my Father and speak for him, but you don't accept me. But when another person comes, speaking only for himself, you will accept him. [44]You try to get praise from each other, but you do not try to get the praise that comes from the only God. So how can you believe? [45]Don't think that I will stand before the Father and say you are wrong. The one who says you are wrong is Moses, the one you hoped would save you. [46]If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because Moses wrote about me. [47]But if you don't believe what Moses wrote, how can you believe what I say?"

# May 19

# The World Needs Servants

*Then Jesus took the loaves of bread, thanked God for them, and gave them to the people … He did the same with the fish, giving as much as the people wanted.*

John 6:11

"The Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people" (Mark 10:45). The world needs servants. People like Jesus who did not come to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). He chose remote Nazareth over center stage Jerusalem, his dad's carpentry shop over a marble-columned palace, and three decades of anonymity over a life of popularity.

Jesus came to serve. He selected prayer over sleep, the wilderness over the Jordan, irascible apostles over obedient angels. I'd have gone with the angels. Given the choice, I would have built my apostle team out of cherubim and seraphim or Gabriel and Michael, eyewitnesses of Red Sea rescues and Mount Carmel falling fires. I'd choose the angels.

Not Jesus. He picked the people. Peter, Andrew, John, and Matthew. When they feared the storm, he stilled it. When they had no coin for taxes, he supplied it. And when they had no wine for the wedding or food for the multitude, he made both.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## 2 Samuel 9:1—10:19

### *David Helps Saul's Family*

9 David asked, "Is anyone still left in Saul's family? I want to
show kindness to that person for Jonathan's sake!"

2Now there was a servant named Ziba from Saul's family. So
David's servants called Ziba to him. King David said to him, "Are
you Ziba?"

He answered, “Yes, I am your servant.”

3The king asked, “Is anyone left in Saul’s family? I want to show God’s kindness to that person.”

Ziba answered the king, “Jonathan has a son still living who is crippled in both feet.”

4The king asked Ziba, “Where is this son?”

Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

5Then King David had servants bring Jonathan’s son from the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar. 6Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, came before David and bowed facedown on the floor.

David said, “Mephibosheth!”

Mephibosheth said, “I am your servant.”

7David said to him, “Don’t be afraid. I will be kind to you for your father Jonathan’s sake. I will give you back all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

8Mephibosheth bowed to David again and said, “You are being very kind to me, your servant! And I am no better than a dead dog!”

9Then King David called Saul’s servant Ziba. David said to him, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. 10You, your sons, and your servants will farm the land and harvest the crops. Then your family will have food to eat. But Mephibosheth, your master’s grandson, will always eat at my table.”

(Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) 11Ziba said to King David, “I, your servant, will do everything my master, the king, commands me.”

So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table as if he were one of the king’s sons. 12Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. Everyone in Ziba’s family became Mephibosheth’s servants. 13Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table. And he was crippled in both feet.

## *War with the Ammonites and Arameans*

10 When Nahash king of the Ammonites died, his son Hanun became king after him. 2David said, “Nahash was loyal to me, so I will be loyal to his son Hanun.” So David sent his messengers to comfort Hanun about his father’s death.

David’s officers went to the land of the Ammonites. 3But the Ammonite leaders said to Hanun, their master, “Do you think David wants to honor your father by sending men to comfort you? No! David sent them to study the city and spy it out and capture it!” 4So Hanun arrested David’s officers. To shame them he shaved off half their beards and cut off their clothes at the hips. Then he sent them away.

5When the people told David, he sent messengers to meet his
officers because they were very ashamed. King David said,
“Stay in Jericho until your beards have grown back. Then come
home.”
6The Ammonites knew that they had insulted David. So they
hired twenty thousand Aramean foot soldiers from Beth Rehob
and Zobah. They also hired the king of Maacah with a thousand
men and twelve thousand men from Tob.
7When David heard about this, he sent Joab with the whole
army. 8The Ammonites came out and prepared for battle at the
city gate. The Arameans from Zobah and Rehob and the men
from Tob and Maacah were out in the field by themselves.
9Joab saw that there were enemies both in front of him and
behind him. So he chose some of the best soldiers of Israel and
sent them out to fight the Arameans. 10Joab put the rest of the
army under the command of Abishai, his brother. Then he sent
them out to fight the Ammonites. 11Joab said to Abishai, “If the
Arameans are too strong for me, you must help me. Or, if the
Ammonites are too strong for you, I will help you. 12Be strong.
We must fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God.
The LORD will do what he thinks is right.”
13Then Joab and the army with him went to attack the
Arameans, and the Arameans ran away. 14When the Ammonites
saw that the Arameans were running away, they also ran away
from Abishai and went back to their city. So Joab returned from
the battle with the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.
15When the Arameans saw that Israel had defeated them,
they came together into one big army. 16Hadadezer sent
messengers to bring the Arameans from east of the Euphrates
River, and they went to Helam. Their leader was Shobach, the
commander of Hadadezer’s army.
17When David heard about this, he gathered all the Israelites
together. They crossed over the Jordan River and went to
Helam. There the Arameans prepared for battle and attacked
him. 18But the Arameans ran away from the Israelites. David
killed seven hundred Aramean chariot drivers and forty
thousand Aramean horsemen. He also killed Shobach, the
commander of the Aramean army.
19When the kings who served Hadadezer saw that the
Israelites had defeated them, they made peace with the
Israelites and served them. And the Arameans were afraid to
help the Ammonites again.

## Psalm 65:1–8

## *A Hymn of Thanksgiving*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.**

65 God, you will be praised in Jerusalem.We will keep our promises to you.

2You hear our prayers.
All people will come to you.

3Our guilt overwhelms us,
but you forgive our sins.

4Happy are the people you choose
and invite to stay in your court.

We are filled with good things in your house,
your holy Temple.

5You answer us in amazing ways,
God our Savior.

People everywhere on the earth
and beyond the sea trust you.

6You made the mountains by your strength;
you are dressed in power.

7You stopped the roaring seas,
the roaring waves,
and the uproar of the nations.

8Even those people at the ends of the earth fear your miracles.
You are praised from where the sun rises to where it sets.

## Proverbs 16:20–21

20 Whoever listens to what is taught will succeed,
and whoever trusts the LORD will be happy.

21 The wise are known for their understanding.
Their pleasant words make them better teachers.

## John 6:1–21

### *More than Five Thousand Fed*

6 After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias).
2 Many people followed him because they saw the miracles he
did to heal the sick. 3 Jesus went up on a hill and sat down there
with his followers. 4 It was almost the time for the Jewish
Passover Feast.
5 When Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming
toward him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough bread
for all these people to eat?" 6 (Jesus asked Philip this question to
test him, because Jesus already knew what he planned to do.)
7 Philip answered, "Someone would have to work almost a
year to buy enough bread for each person to have only a little
piece."
8 Another one of his followers, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother,
said, 9 "Here is a boy with five loaves of barley bread and two
little fish, but that is not enough for so many people."
10 Jesus said, "Tell the people to sit down." There was plenty
of grass there, and about five thousand men sat down there.
11 Then Jesus took the loaves of bread, thanked God for them,
and gave them to the people who were sitting there. He did the
same with the fish, giving as much as the people wanted.
12 When they had all had enough to eat, Jesus said to his
followers, "Gather the leftover pieces of fish and bread so that
nothing is wasted." 13 So they gathered up the pieces and filled
twelve baskets with the pieces left from the five barley loaves.
14 When the people saw this miracle that Jesus did, they said,
"He must truly be the Prophet[n] who is coming into the world."
15 Jesus knew that the people planned to come and take him

by force and make him their king, so he left and went into the hills alone.

## *Jesus Walks on the Water*

[16]That evening Jesus' followers went down to Lake Galilee. [17]It was dark now, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The followers got into a boat and started across the lake to Capernaum. [18]By now a strong wind was blowing, and the waves on the lake were getting bigger. [19]When they had rowed the boat about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the water, coming toward the boat. The followers were afraid, [20]but Jesus said to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid." [21]Then they were glad to take him into the boat. At once the boat came to land at the place where they wanted to go.

# May 20

## When God Says No

*"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

John 6:35

There are times when the one thing you want is the one thing you never get … You pray and wait. No answer.

You pray and wait.

May I ask a very important question? What if God says no?

What if the request is delayed or even denied? When God says no to you, how will you respond? If God says, "I've given you my grace, and that is enough," will you be content?

*Content.* That's the word. A state of heart in which you would be at peace if God gave you nothing more than he already has.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### 2 Samuel 11:1—12:31

### *David Sins with Bathsheba*

11 In the spring, when the kings normally went out to war, David
sent out Joab, his servants, and all the Israelites. They
destroyed the Ammonites and attacked the city of Rabbah. But
David stayed in Jerusalem. 2One evening David got up from his
bed and walked around on the roof[n] of his palace. While he was
on the roof, he saw a woman bathing. She was very beautiful.
3So David sent his servants to find out who she was. A servant
answered, "That woman is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam. She is
the wife of Uriah the Hittite." 4So David sent messengers to
bring Bathsheba to him. When she came to him, he had sexual
relations with her. (Now Bathsheba had purified herself from
her monthly period.) Then she went back to her house. 5But
Bathsheba became pregnant and sent word to David, saying, "I
am pregnant."

6So David sent a message to Joab: “Send Uriah the Hittite to
me.” And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7When Uriah came to him,
David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were, and how
the war was going. 8Then David said to Uriah, “Go home and
rest.”

So Uriah left the palace, and the king sent a gift to him. 9But
Uriah did not go home. Instead, he slept outside the door of the
palace as all the king’s officers did.

10The officers told David, “Uriah did not go home.”

Then David said to Uriah, “You came from a long trip. Why
didn’t you go home?”

11Uriah said to him, “The Ark and the soldiers of Israel and
Judah are staying in tents. My master Joab and his officers are
camping out in the fields. It isn’t right for me to go home to eat
and drink and have sexual relations with my wife!”

12David said to Uriah, “Stay here today. Tomorrow I’ll send
you back to the battle.” So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day
and the next. 13Then David called Uriah to come to see him, so
Uriah ate and drank with David. David made Uriah drunk, but
he still did not go home. That evening Uriah again slept with
the king’s officers.

14The next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it
by Uriah. 15In the letter David wrote, “Put Uriah on the front
lines where the fighting is worst and leave him there alone. Let
him be killed in battle.”

16Joab watched the city and saw where its strongest
defenders were and put Uriah there. 17When the men of the city
came out to fight against Joab, some of David’s men were killed.
And Uriah the Hittite was one of them.

18Then Joab sent David a complete account of the war. 19Joab
told the messenger, “Tell King David what happened in the war.
20After you finish, the king may be angry and ask, ‘Why did you
go so near the city to fight? Didn’t you know they would shoot
arrows from the city wall? 21Do you remember who killed
Abimelech son of Jerub-Besheth?[n] It was a woman on the city
wall. She threw a large stone for grinding grain on Abimelech
and killed him there in Thebez. Why did you go so near the
wall?’ If King David asks that, tell him, ‘Your servant Uriah the
Hittite also died.’”

22The messenger left and went to David and told him
everything Joab had told him to say. 23The messenger told
David, “The men of Ammon were winning. They came out and
attacked us in the field, but we fought them back to the city
gate. 24The archers on the city wall shot at your servants, and
some of your men were killed. Your servant Uriah the Hittite
also died.”

25David said to the messenger, “Say this to Joab: ‘Don’t be
upset about this. The sword kills everyone the same. Make a

stronger attack against the city and capture it.' Encourage Joab with these words."

26When Bathsheba heard that her husband was dead, she cried for him. 27After she finished her time of sadness, David sent servants to bring her to his house. She became David's wife and gave birth to his son, but the LORD did not like what David had done.

## *David's Son Dies*

12 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to David, he said, "There were two men in a city. One was rich, but the other was poor. 2The rich man had many sheep and cattle. 3But the poor man had nothing except one little female lamb he had bought. The poor man fed the lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food and drank from his cup and slept in his arms. The lamb was like a daughter to him.

4"Then a traveler stopped to visit the rich man. The rich man wanted to feed the traveler, but he didn't want to take one of his own sheep or cattle. Instead, he took the lamb from the poor man and cooked it for his visitor."

5David became very angry at the rich man. He said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this should die! 6He must pay for the lamb four times for doing such a thing. He had no mercy!"

7Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I appointed you king of Israel and saved you from Saul. 8I gave you his kingdom and his wives. And I made you king of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you even more. 9So why did you ignore the LORD's command? Why did you do what he says is wrong? You killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and took his wife to be your wife! 10Now there will always be people in your family who will die by a sword, because you did not respect me; you took the wife of Uriah the Hittite for yourself!'

11"This is what the LORD says: 'I am bringing trouble to you from your own family. While you watch, I will take your wives from you and give them to someone who is very close to you. He will have sexual relations with your wives, and everyone will know it. 12You had sexual relations with Bathsheba in secret, but I will do this so all the people of Israel can see it.'"

13Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan answered, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You will not die. 14But what you did caused the LORD's enemies to lose all respect for him. For this reason the son who was born to you will die."

15 Then Nathan went home. And the LORD caused the son of
David and Bathsheba, Uriah's widow, to be very sick. 16 David
prayed to God for the baby. David fasted and went into his
house and stayed there, lying on the ground all night. 17 The
elders of David's family came to him and tried to pull him up
from the ground, but he refused to get up or to eat food with
them.
18 On the seventh day the baby died. David's servants were
afraid to tell him that the baby was dead. They said, "Look, we
tried to talk to David while the baby was alive, but he refused to
listen to us. If we tell him the baby is dead, he may do
something awful."
19 When David saw his servants whispering, he knew that the
baby was dead. So he asked them, "Is the baby dead?"
They answered, "Yes, he is dead."
20 Then David got up from the floor, washed himself, put
lotions on, and changed his clothes. Then he went into the
LORD's house to worship. After that, he went home and asked for
something to eat. His servants gave him some food, and he ate.
21 David's servants said to him, "Why are you doing this?
When the baby was still alive, you fasted and you cried. Now
that the baby is dead, you get up and eat food."
22 David said, "While the baby was still alive, I fasted, and I
cried. I thought, 'Who knows? Maybe the LORD will feel sorry for
me and let the baby live.' 23 But now that the baby is dead, why
should I fast? I can't bring him back to life. Someday I will go to
him, but he cannot come back to me."
24 Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife. He slept with
her and had sexual relations with her. She became pregnant
again and had another son, whom David named Solomon. The
LORD loved Solomon. 25 The LORD sent word through Nathan the
prophet to name the baby Jedidiah,[n] because the LORD loved the
child.

## *David Captures Rabbah*

26 Joab fought against Rabbah, a royal city of the Ammonites,
and he was about to capture it. 27 Joab sent messengers to David
and said, "I have fought against Rabbah and have captured its
water supply. 28 Now bring the other soldiers together and
attack this city. Capture it before I capture it myself and it is
called by my name!"
29 So David gathered all the army and went to Rabbah and
fought against it and captured it. 30 David took the crown off
their king's head and had it placed on his own head. That gold
crown weighed about seventy-five pounds, and it had valuable
gems in it. And David took many valuable things from the city.
31 He also brought out the people of the city and forced them to

work with saws, iron picks, and axes. He also made them build with bricks. David did this to all the Ammonite cities. Then David and all his army returned to Jerusalem.

## Psalm 65:9–13

9 You take care of the land and water it;
you make it very fertile.

The rivers of God are full of water.
Grain grows because you make it grow.

10 You send rain to the plowed fields;
you fill the rows with water.

You soften the ground with rain,
and then you bless it with crops.

11 You give the year a good harvest,
and you load the wagons with many crops.

12 The desert is covered with grass
and the hills with happiness.

13 The pastures are full of flocks,
and the valleys are covered with grain.
Everything shouts and sings for joy.

## Proverbs 16:22–24

22 Understanding is like a fountain which gives life to those who use it,
but foolishness brings punishment to fools.

[23]Wise people's minds tell them what to say,
and that helps them be better teachers.

[24]Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
making people happy and healthy.

# John 6:22–59

## *The People Seek Jesus*

[22]The next day the people who had stayed on the other side of the lake knew that Jesus had not gone in the boat with his followers but that they had left without him. And they knew that only one boat had been there. [23]But then some boats came from Tiberias and landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. [24]When the people saw that Jesus and his followers were not there now, they got into boats and went to Capernaum to find Jesus.

## *Jesus, the Bread of Life*

[25]When the people found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Teacher, when did you come here?"

[26]Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you aren't looking for me because you saw me do miracles. You are looking for me because you ate the bread and were satisfied. [27]Don't work for the food that spoils. Work for the food that stays good always and gives eternal life. The Son of Man will give you this food, because on him God the Father has put his power."

[28]The people asked Jesus, "What are the things God wants us to do?"

[29]Jesus answered, "The work God wants you to do is this: Believe the One he sent."

[30]So the people asked, "What miracle will you do? If we see a miracle, we will believe you. What will you do? [31]Our ancestors ate the manna in the desert. This is written in the Scriptures: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"[n]

[32]Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven; it is my Father who is giving you the true bread from heaven. [33]God's bread is the One who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

[34]The people said, "Sir, give us this bread always."

[35]Then Jesus said, "I am the bread that gives life. Whoever

comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. [36]But as I told you before, you have seen me and still don't believe. [37]The Father gives me the people who are mine. Every one of them will come to me, and I will always accept them. [38]I came down from heaven to do what God wants me to do, not what I want to do. [39]Here is what the One who sent me wants me to do: I must not lose even one whom God gave me, but I must raise them all on the last day. [40]Those who see the Son and believe in him have eternal life, and I will raise them on the last day. This is what my Father wants."

[41]Some people began to complain about Jesus because he said, "I am the bread that comes down from heaven." [42]They said, "This is Jesus, the son of Joseph. We know his father and mother. How can he say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

[43]But Jesus answered, "Stop complaining to each other. [44]The Father is the One who sent me. No one can come to me unless the Father draws him to me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. [45]It is written in the prophets, 'They will all be taught by God.'[n] Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. [46]No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only he has seen the Father. [47]I tell you the truth, whoever believes has eternal life. [48]I am the bread that gives life. [49]Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but still they died. [50]Here is the bread that comes down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will never die. [51]I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give up so that the world may have life."

[52]Then the evil people began to argue among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

[53]Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, you must eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood. Otherwise, you won't have real life in you. [54]Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. [55]My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. [56]Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. [57]The living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father. So whoever eats me will live because of me. [58]I am not like the bread your ancestors ate. They ate that bread and still died. I am the bread that came down from heaven, and whoever eats this bread will live forever." [59]Jesus said all these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

# May 21

## The Cure for Disappointment

*Come and see what God has done, the amazing things he has done for people.*

Psalm 66:5

we need to hear that God is still in control. We need to hear that it's not over until he says so. We need to hear that life's mishaps and tragedies are not a reason to bail out. They are simply a reason to sit tight.

Corrie ten Boom used to say, "When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through" …

The way to deal with discouragement? The cure for disappointment? Go back and read the story of God. Read it again and again. Be reminded that you aren't the first person to weep. And you aren't the first person to be helped.

Read the story and remember, [the] story is yours!

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### 2 Samuel 13:1—14:33

#### *Amnon and Tamar*

13 David had a son named Absalom and a son named Amnon.
Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and Amnon loved
her. 2Tamar was a virgin. Amnon made himself sick just thinking
about her, because he could not find any chance to be alone
with her.

3Amnon had a friend named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's
brother. Jonadab was a very clever man. 4He asked Amnon,
"Son of the king, why do you look so sad day after day? Tell me
what's wrong!"

Amnon told him, "I love Tamar, the sister of my half-brother
Absalom."

[5]Jonadab said to Amnon, “Go to bed and act as if you are
sick. Then your father will come to see you. Tell him, ‘Please let
my sister Tamar come in and give me food to eat. Let her make
the food in front of me so I can watch and eat it from her
hand.’”
[6]So Amnon went to bed and acted sick. When King David
came in to see him, Amnon said to him, “Please let my sister
Tamar come in. Let her make two of her special cakes for me
while I watch. Then I will eat them from her hands.”
[7]David sent for Tamar in the palace, saying, “Go to your
brother Amnon’s house and make some food for him.” [8]So
Tamar went to her brother Amnon’s house, and he was in bed.
Tamar took some dough and pressed it together with her hands.
She made some special cakes while Amnon watched. Then she
baked them. [9]Next she took the pan and served him, but he
refused to eat.
He said to his servants, “All of you, leave me alone!” So they
all left him alone. [10]Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food into
the bedroom so I may eat from your hand.”
Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them to her
brother Amnon in the bedroom. [11]She went to him so he could
eat from her hands, but Amnon grabbed her. He said, “Sister,
come and have sexual relations with me.”
[12]Tamar said to him, “No, brother! Don’t force me! This
should never be done in Israel! Don’t do this shameful thing! [13]I
could never get rid of my shame! And you will be like the
shameful fools in Israel! Please talk with the king, and he will
let you marry me.”
[14]But Amnon refused to listen to her. He was stronger than
she was, so he forced her to have sexual relations with him.
[15]After that, Amnon hated Tamar. He hated her more than he
had loved her before. Amnon said to her, “Get up and leave!”
[16]Tamar said to him, “No! Sending me away would be worse
than what you’ve already done!”
But he refused to listen to her. [17]He called his young servant
back in and said, “Get this woman out of here and away from
me! Lock the door after her.” [18]So his servant led her out of the
room and bolted the door after her.
Tamar was wearing a special robe with long sleeves, because
the king’s virgin daughters wore this kind of robe. [19]To show
how upset she was, Tamar put ashes on her head and tore her
special robe and put her hand on her head. Then she went away,
crying loudly.
[20]Absalom, Tamar’s brother, said to her, “Has Amnon, your
brother, forced you to have sexual relations with him? For now,
sister, be quiet. He is your half-brother. Don’t let this upset you
so much!” So Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house and
was sad and lonely.
[21]When King David heard the news, he was very angry.

[22]Absalom did not say a word, good or bad, to Amnon. But he hated Amnon for disgracing his sister Tamar.

## *Absalom's Revenge*

[23]Two years later Absalom had some men come to Baal Hazor, near Ephraim, to cut the wool from his sheep. Absalom invited all the king's sons to come also. [24]Absalom went to the king and said, "I have men coming to cut the wool. Please come with your officers and join me."

[25]King David said to Absalom, "No, my son. We won't all go, because it would be too much trouble for you." Although Absalom begged David, he would not go, but he did give his blessing.

[26]Absalom said, "If you don't want to come, then please let my brother Amnon come with us."

King David asked, "Why should he go with you?"

[27]Absalom kept begging David until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with Absalom.

[28]Then Absalom instructed his servants, "Watch Amnon. When he is drunk, I will tell you, 'Kill Amnon.' Right then, kill him! Don't be afraid, because I have commanded you! Be strong and brave!" [29]So Absalom's young men killed Amnon as Absalom commanded, but all of David's other sons got on their mules and escaped.

[30]While the king's sons were on their way, the news came to David, "Absalom has killed all of the king's sons! Not one of them is left alive!" [31]King David tore his clothes and lay on the ground to show his sadness. All his servants standing nearby tore their clothes also.

[32]Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said to David, "Don't think all the young men, your sons, are killed. No, only Amnon is dead! Absalom has planned this ever since Amnon forced his sister Tamar to have sexual relations with him. [33]My master and king, don't think that all of the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead!"

[34]In the meantime Absalom had run away.

A guard standing on the city wall saw many people coming from the other side of the hill. [35]So Jonadab said to King David, "Look, I was right! The king's sons are coming!"

[36]As soon as Jonadab had said this, the king's sons arrived, crying loudly. David and all his servants began crying also. [37]David cried for his son every day.

But Absalom ran away to Talmai[n] son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. [38]After Absalom ran away to Geshur, he stayed there for three years. [39]When King David got over Amnon's death, he missed Absalom greatly.

## *Joab Sends a Wise Woman to David*

14 Joab son of Zeruiah knew that King David missed Absalom
very much. 2So Joab sent messengers to Tekoa to bring a wise
woman from there. He said to her, “Pretend to be very sad. Put
on funeral clothes and don’t put lotion on yourself. Act like a
woman who has been crying many days for someone who died.
3Then go to the king and say these words.” Then Joab told her
what to say.

4So the woman from Tekoa spoke to the king. She bowed
facedown on the ground to show respect and said, “My king,
help me!”

5King David asked her, “What is the matter?”

The woman said, “I am a widow; my husband is dead. 6I had
two sons. They were out in the field fighting, and no one was
there to stop them. So one son killed the other son. 7Now all the
family group is against me. They said to me, ‘Bring the son who
killed his brother so we may kill him for killing his brother. That
way we will also get rid of the one who would receive what
belonged to his father.’ My son is like the last spark of a fire. He
is all I have left. If they kill him, my husband’s name and
property will be gone from the earth.”

8Then the king said to the woman, “Go home. I will take care
of this for you.”

9The woman of Tekoa said to him, “Let the blame be on me
and my father’s family. My master and king, you and your
throne are innocent.”

10King David said, “Bring me anyone who says anything bad
to you. Then he won’t bother you again.”

11The woman said, “Please promise in the name of the LORD
your God. Then my relative who has the duty of punishing a
murderer won’t add to the destruction by killing my son.”

David said, “As surely as the LORD lives, no one will hurt your
son. Not one hair from his head will fall to the ground.”

12The woman said, “Let me say something to you, my master
and king.”

The king said, “Speak.”

13Then the woman said, “Why have you decided this way
against the people of God? When you judge this way, you show
that you are guilty for not bringing back your son who was
forced to leave home. 14We will all die someday. We’re like
water spilled on the ground; no one can gather it back. But God
doesn’t take away life. Instead, he plans ways that those who
have been sent away will not have to stay away from him! 15My
master and king, I came to say this to you because the people
have made me afraid! I thought, ‘Let me talk to the king. Maybe
he will do what I ask. 16Maybe he will listen. Perhaps he will
save me from those who want to keep both me and my son from

getting what God gave us.'

17"Now I say, 'May the words of my master the king give me rest. Like an angel of God, you know what is good and what is bad. May the LORD your God be with you!'"

18Then King David said, "Do not hide the truth. Answer me one question."

The woman said, "My master the king, please ask your question."

19The king said, "Did Joab tell you to say all these things?"

The woman answered, "As you live, my master the king, no one could avoid that question. You are right. Your servant Joab did tell me to say these things. 20Joab did it so you would see things differently. My master, you are wise like an angel of God who knows everything that happens on earth."

## *Absalom Returns to Jerusalem*

21The king said to Joab, "Look, I will do what I promised. Bring back the young man Absalom."

22Joab bowed facedown on the ground and blessed the king. Then he said, "Today I know you are pleased with me, because you have done what I asked."

23Then Joab got up and went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. 24But King David said, "Absalom must go to his own house. He may not come to see me." So Absalom went to his own house and did not go to see the king.

25Absalom was greatly praised for his handsome appearance. No man in Israel was as handsome as he. No blemish was on him from his head to his foot. 26At the end of every year, Absalom would cut his hair, because it became too heavy. When he weighed it, it would weigh about five pounds by the royal measure.

27Absalom had three sons and one daughter. His daughter's name was also Tamar, and she was a beautiful woman.

28Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two full years without seeing King David. 29Then Absalom sent for Joab so he could send him to the king, but Joab would not come. Absalom sent a message a second time, but Joab still refused to come. 30Then Absalom said to his servants, "Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley growing there. Go burn it." So Absalom's servants set fire to Joab's field.

31Then Joab went to Absalom's house and said to him, "Why did your servants burn my field?"

32Absalom said to Joab, "I sent a message to you, asking you to come here. I wanted to send you to the king to ask him why he brought me home from Geshur. It would have been better for me to stay there! Now let me see the king. If I have sinned, he can put me to death!"

33 So Joab went to the king and told him Absalom's words. Then the king called for Absalom. Absalom came and bowed facedown on the ground before the king, and the king kissed him.

## Psalm 66:1–7

### *Praise God for What He Has Done*

**For the director of music. A song. A psalm.**

66 Everything on earth, shout with joy
to God!

2 Sing about his glory!
Make his praise glorious!

3 Say to God, "Your works are amazing!
Because your power is great,
your enemies fall before you.

4 All the earth worships you
and sings praises to you.
They sing praises to your name." *Selah*

5 Come and see what God has done,
the amazing things he has done for people.

6 He turned the sea into dry land.
The people crossed the river on foot.
So let us rejoice because of what he did.

7 He rules forever with his power.
He keeps his eye on the nations,
so people should not turn against him. *Selah*

## Proverbs 16:25–26

25 Some people think they are doing right,
but in the end it leads to death.

26 The workers' hunger helps them,
because their desire to eat makes them work.

## John 6:60–71

### *The Words of Eternal Life*

60 When the followers of Jesus heard this, many of them said,
"This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?"
61 Knowing that his followers were complaining about this,
Jesus said, "Does this teaching bother you? 62 Then will it also
bother you to see the Son of Man going back to the place where
he came from? 63 It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh doesn't
give life. The words I told you are spirit, and they give life.
64 But some of you don't believe." (Jesus knew from the
beginning who did not believe and who would turn against him.)
65 Jesus said, "That is the reason I said, 'If the Father does not
bring a person to me, that one cannot come.'"
66 After Jesus said this, many of his followers left him and
stopped following him.
67 Jesus asked the twelve followers, "Do you want to leave,
too?"
68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, who would we go to?
You have the words that give eternal life. 69 We believe and
know that you are the Holy One from God."
70 Then Jesus answered, "I chose all twelve of you, but one of
you is a devil."
71 Jesus was talking about Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.
Judas was one of the twelve, but later he was going to turn
against Jesus.

# May 22

## A Home for Your Heart

*He protects our lives and does not let us be defeated.*

Psalm 66:9

chances are you've given little thought to housing your soul. We create elaborate houses for our bodies, but our souls are relegated to a hillside shanty where the night winds chill us and the rain soaks us. Is it any wonder the world is so full of cold hearts?

Doesn't have to be this way. We don't have to live outside. It's not God's plan for your heart to roam as a Bedouin. God wants you to move in out of the cold and live … with him. Under his roof there is space available. At his table a plate is set. In his living room a wingback chair is reserved just for you. And he'd like you to take up residence in his house. Why would he want you to share his home?

Simple, he's your Father.

from *The Great House of God*

## 2 Samuel 15:1—16:19

### *Absalom Plans to Take David's Kingdom*

15 After this, Absalom got a chariot and horses for himself and
fifty men to run before him. 2Absalom would get up early and
stand near the city gate.[n] Anyone who had a problem for the
king to settle would come here. When someone came, Absalom
would call out and say, "What city are you from?"

The person would answer, "I'm from one of the tribes of
Israel."

3Then Absalom would say, "Look, your claims are right, but
the king has no one to listen to you." 4Absalom would also say,
"I wish someone would make me judge in this land! Then people
with problems could come to me, and I could help them get

justice.”

5People would come near Absalom to bow to him. When they did, Absalom would reach out his hand and take hold of them and kiss them. 6Absalom did that to all the Israelites who came to King David for decisions. In this way, Absalom stole the hearts of all Israel.

7After four years Absalom said to King David, “Please let me go to Hebron. I want to carry out my promise that I made to the LORD 8while I was living in Geshur in Aram. I said, ‘If the LORD takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship him in Hebron.’”

9The king said, “Go in peace.”

So Absalom went to Hebron. 10But he sent secret messengers through all the tribes of Israel. They told the people, “When you hear the trumpets, say this: ‘Absalom is the king at Hebron!’”

11Absalom had invited two hundred men to go with him. So they went from Jerusalem with him, but they didn’t know what he was planning. 12While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel, one of the people who advised David, to come from his hometown of Giloh. So Absalom’s plans were working very well. More and more people began to support him.

13A messenger came to David, saying, “The Israelites are giving their loyalty to Absalom.”

14Then David said to all his officers who were with him in Jerusalem, “We must leave quickly! If we don’t, we won’t be able to get away from Absalom. We must hurry before he catches us and destroys us and kills the people of Jerusalem.”

15The king’s officers said to him, “We will do anything you say.”

16The king set out with everyone in his house, but he left ten slave women to take care of the palace. 17The king left with all his people following him, and they stopped at a house far away. 18All the king’s servants passed by him—the Kerethites and Pelethites,[n] all those from Gath, and the six hundred men who had followed him.

19The king said to Ittai, a man from Gath, “Why are you also going with us? Turn back and stay with King Absalom because you are a foreigner. This is not your homeland. 20You joined me only a short time ago. Should I make you wander with us when I don’t even know where I’m going? Turn back and take your brothers with you. May kindness and loyalty be shown to you.”

21But Ittai said to the king, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will stay with you, whether it means life or death.”

22David said to Ittai, “Go, march on.” So Ittai from Gath and all his people with their children marched on. 23All the people cried loudly as everyone passed by. King David crossed the Kidron Valley, and then all the people went on to the desert. 24Zadok and all the Levites with him carried the Ark of the

Agreement with God. They set it down, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had left the city.

25The king said to Zadok, “Take the Ark of God back into the city. If the LORD is pleased with me, he will bring me back and will let me see both it and Jerusalem again. 26But if the LORD says he is not pleased with me, I am ready. He can do what he wants with me.”

27The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Aren’t you a seer? Go back to the city in peace and take your son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan with you. 28I will wait near the crossings into the desert until I hear from you.” 29So Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.

30David went up the Mount of Olives, crying as he went. He covered his head and went barefoot. All the people with David covered their heads also and cried as they went. 31Someone told David, “Ahithophel is one of the people with Absalom who made secret plans against you.”

So David prayed, “LORD, please make Ahithophel’s advice foolish.”

32When David reached the top of the mountain where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite came to meet him. Hushai’s coat was torn, and there was dirt on his head to show how sad he was. 33David said to Hushai, “If you go with me, you will be just one more person for me to take care of. 34But if you return to the city, you can make Ahithophel’s advice useless. Tell Absalom, ‘I am your servant, my king. In the past I served your father, but now I will serve you.’ 35The priests Zadok and Abiathar will be with you. Tell them everything you hear in the royal palace. 36Zadok’s son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan are with them. Send them to tell me everything you hear.” 37So David’s friend Hushai entered Jerusalem just as Absalom arrived.

## *Ziba Meets David*

16 When David had passed a short way over the top of the Mount of Olives, Ziba, Mephibosheth’s servant, met him. Ziba had a row of donkeys loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred cakes of raisins, one hundred cakes of figs, and leather bags full of wine. 2The king asked Ziba, “What are these things for?”

Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for your family to ride. The bread and cakes of figs are for the servants to eat. And the wine is for anyone to drink who might become weak in the desert.”

3The king asked, “Where is Mephibosheth?”

Ziba answered him, “Mephibosheth is staying in Jerusalem because he thinks, ‘Today the Israelites will give my father’s

kingdom back to me!'"

4Then the king said to Ziba, "All right. Everything that belonged to Mephibosheth, I now give to you!"

Ziba said, "I bow to you. I hope I will always be able to please you."

## *Shimei Curses David*

5As King David came to Bahurim, a man came out and cursed him. He was from Saul's family group, and his name was Shimei son of Gera. 6He threw stones at David and his officers, but the people and soldiers gathered all around David. 7Shimei cursed David, saying, "Get out, get out, you murderer, you troublemaker. 8The LORD is punishing you for the people in Saul's family you killed! You took Saul's place as king, but now the LORD has given the kingdom to your son Absalom! Now you are ruined because you are a murderer!"

9Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse you, the king? Let me go over and cut off his head!"

10But the king answered, "This does not concern you, sons of Zeruiah! If he is cursing me because the LORD told him to, who can question him?"

11David also said to Abishai and all his officers, "My own son is trying to kill me! This man is a Benjaminite and has more right to kill me! Leave him alone, and let him curse me because the LORD told him to do this. 12Maybe the LORD will see my misery and repay me with something good for Shimei's curses today!"

13So David and his men went on down the road, but Shimei followed on the nearby hillside. He kept cursing David and throwing stones and dirt at him. 14When the king and all his people arrived at the Jordan, they were very tired, so they rested there.

15Meanwhile, Absalom, Ahithophel, and all the Israelites arrived at Jerusalem. 16David's friend Hushai the Arkite came to Absalom and said to him, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"

17Absalom asked, "Why are you not loyal to your friend David? Why didn't you leave Jerusalem with your friend?"

18Hushai said, "I belong to the one chosen by the LORD and by these people and everyone in Israel. I will stay with you. 19In the past I served your father. So whom should I serve now? David's son! I will serve you as I served him."

## Psalm 66:8–15

[8]You people, praise our God;
loudly sing his praise.

[9]He protects our lives
and does not let us be defeated.

[10]God, you have tested us;
you have purified us like silver.

[11]You let us be trapped
and put a heavy load on us.

[12]You let our enemies walk on our heads.
We went through fire and flood,
but you brought us to a place with good things.

[13]I will come to your Temple with burnt offerings.
I will give you what I promised,
[14] things I promised when I was in trouble.

[15]I will bring you offerings of fat animals,
and I will offer sheep, bulls, and goats. *Selah*

## Proverbs 16:27–30

[27]Useless people make evil plans,
and their words are like a burning fire.

[28]A useless person causes trouble,
and a gossip ruins friendships.

[29]Cruel people trick their neighbors

and lead them to do wrong.

30 Someone who winks is planning evil,
and the one who grins is planning something wrong.

# John 7:1–24

## *Jesus' Brothers Don't Believe*

7 After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He did not want to
travel in Judea, because some evil people there wanted to kill
him. 2 It was time for the Feast of Shelters. 3 So Jesus' brothers
said to him, "You should leave here and go to Judea so your
followers there can see the miracles you do. 4 Anyone who wants
to be well known does not hide what he does. If you are doing
these things, show yourself to the world." 5 (Even Jesus'
brothers did not believe in him.)

6 Jesus said to his brothers, "The right time for me has not yet
come, but any time is right for you. 7 The world cannot hate you,
but it hates me, because I tell it the evil things it does. 8 So you
go to the feast. I will not go yet[n] to this feast, because the right
time for me has not yet come." 9 After saying this, Jesus stayed
in Galilee.

10 But after Jesus' brothers had gone to the feast, Jesus went
also. But he did not let people see him. 11 At the feast some
people were looking for him and saying, "Where is that man?"

12 Within the large crowd there, many people were
whispering to each other about Jesus. Some said, "He is a good
man."

Others said, "No, he fools the people." 13 But no one was
brave enough to talk about Jesus openly, because they were
afraid of the elders.

## *Jesus Teaches at the Feast*

14 When the feast was about half over, Jesus went to the
Temple and began to teach. 15 The people were amazed and
said, "This man has never studied in school. How did he learn
so much?"

16 Jesus answered, "The things I teach are not my own, but
they come from him who sent me. 17 If people choose to do what
God wants, they will know that my teaching comes from God
and not from me. 18 Those who teach their own ideas are trying

to get honor for themselves. But those who try to bring honor to the one who sent them speak the truth, and there is nothing false in them. 19Moses gave you the law,[n] but none of you obeys that law. Why are you trying to kill me?”

20The people answered, “A demon has come into you. We are not trying to kill you.”

21Jesus said to them, “I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. 22Moses gave you the law about circumcision. (But really Moses did not give you circumcision; it came from our ancestors.) And yet you circumcise a baby boy on a Sabbath day. 23If a baby boy can be circumcised on a Sabbath day to obey the law of Moses, why are you angry at me for healing a person’s whole body on the Sabbath day? 24Stop judging by the way things look, but judge by what is really right.”

# May 23

## God’s Bottomless Well

*“If anyone believes in me, rivers of living water will flow out from that person’s heart.”*

John 7:38

Don’t you need regular sips from God’s reservoir? I do. In countless situations—stressful meetings, dull days, long drives, demanding trips—and many times a day, I step to the underground spring of God. There I receive anew his work for my sin and death, the energy of his Spirit, his lordship, and his love.

Drink with me from his bottomless well. You don’t have to live with a dehydrated heart.

Receive Christ’s *work* on the Cross,
the *energy* of his Spirit,
his *lordship* over your life,
his unending, unfailing *love*.

Drink deeply and often. And out of you will flow rivers of living water.

from *Come Thirsty*

### 2 Samuel 16:20—18:33

#### *Ahithophel’s Advice*

20 Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Tell us what we should do.”

21 Ahithophel said, “Your father left behind some of his slave
women to take care of the palace. Have sexual relations with
them. Then all Israel will hear that your father is your enemy,
and all your people will be encouraged to give you more
support.” 22 So they put up a tent for Absalom on the roof[n] of the
palace where everyone in Israel could see it. And Absalom had
sexual relations with his father’s slave women.

23 At that time people thought Ahithophel’s advice was as

reliable as God's own word. Both David and Absalom thought it was that reliable.
17 Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men and chase David tonight. 2I'll catch him while he is tired and weak, and I'll frighten him so all his people will run away. But I'll kill only King David. 3Then I'll bring everyone back to you. If the man you are looking for is dead, everyone else will return safely." 4This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the leaders of Israel.

5But Absalom said, "Now call Hushai the Arkite, so I can hear what he says." 6When Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom said to him, "This is the plan Ahithophel gave. Should we follow it? If not, tell us."

7Hushai said to Absalom, "Ahithophel's advice is not good this time." 8Hushai added, "You know your father and his men are strong. They are as angry as a bear that is robbed of its cubs. Your father is a skilled fighter. He won't stay all night with the army. 9He is probably already hiding in a cave or some other place. If the first attack fails, people will hear the news and think, 'Absalom's followers are losing!' 10Then even the men who are as brave as lions will be frightened, because all the Israelites know your father is a fighter. They know his men are brave!

11"This is what I suggest: Gather all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba.[n] There will be as many people as grains of sand by the sea. Then you yourself must go into the battle. 12We will go to David wherever he is hiding. We will fall on him as dew falls on the ground. We will kill him and all of his men so that no one will be left alive. 13If David escapes into a city, all the Israelites will bring ropes to that city and pull it into the valley. Not a stone will be left!"

14Absalom and all the Israelites said, "The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel." (The LORD had planned to destroy the good advice of Ahithophel so the LORD could bring disaster on Absalom.)

15Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, what Ahithophel had suggested to Absalom and the elders of Israel. He also reported to them what he himself had suggested. Hushai said, 16"Quickly! Send a message to David. Tell him not to stay tonight at the crossings into the desert but to cross over the Jordan River at once. If he crosses the river, he and all his people won't be destroyed."

17Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at En Rogel. They did not want to be seen going into the city, so a servant girl would go out to them and give them messages. Then Jonathan and Ahimaaz would go and tell King David.

18But a boy saw Jonathan and Ahimaaz and told Absalom. So Jonathan and Ahimaaz left quickly and went to a man's house in

Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. 19The man's wife spread a sheet over the opening of the well and covered it with grain. No one could tell that anyone was hiding there.

20Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house and asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?"

She said to them, "They have already crossed the brook."

Absalom's servants then went to look for Jonathan and Ahimaaz, but they could not find them. So they went back to Jerusalem.

21After Absalom's servants left, Jonathan and Ahimaaz climbed out of the well and went to tell King David. They said, "Hurry, cross over the river! Ahithophel has said these things against you!" 22So David and all his people crossed the Jordan River. By dawn, everyone had crossed the Jordan.

23When Ahithophel saw that the Israelites did not accept his advice, he saddled his donkey and went to his hometown. He left orders for his family and property, and then he hanged himself. He died and was buried in his father's tomb.

## *War Between David and Absalom*

24David arrived at Mahanaim. And Absalom and all his Israelites crossed over the Jordan River. 25Absalom had made Amasa captain of the army instead of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Jether the Ishmaelite. Amasa's mother was Abigail daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. 26Absalom and the Israelites camped in the land of Gilead.

27Shobi, Makir, and Barzillai were at Mahanaim when David arrived. Shobi son of Nahash was from the Ammonite town of Rabbah. Makir son of Ammiel was from Lo Debar, and Barzillai was from Rogelim in Gilead. 28They brought beds, bowls, clay pots, wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans, small peas, 29honey, milk curds, sheep, and cheese made from cows' milk for David and his people. They said, "The people are hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert."

18 David counted his men and placed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. 2He sent the troops out in three groups. Joab commanded one-third of the men. Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah commanded another third. And Ittai from Gath commanded the last third. King David said to them, "I will also go with you."

3But the men said, "You must not go with us! If we run away in the battle, Absalom's men won't care. Even if half of us are killed, Absalom's men won't care. But you're worth ten thousand of us! You can help us most by staying in the city."

4The king said to his people, "I will do what you think is best." So the king stood at the side of the gate as the army went

out in groups of a hundred and a thousand.

5The king commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, “Be gentle
with young Absalom for my sake.” Everyone heard the king’s
orders to the commanders about Absalom.

6David’s army went out into the field against Absalom’s
Israelites, and they fought in the forest of Ephraim. 7There
David’s army defeated the Israelites. Many died that day—
twenty thousand men. 8The battle spread through all the
country, but that day more men died in the forest than in the
fighting.

## *Absalom Dies*

9Then Absalom happened to meet David’s troops. As
Absalom was riding his mule, it went under the thick branches
of a large oak tree. Absalom’s head got caught in the tree, and
his mule ran out from under him. So Absalom was left hanging
above the ground.

10When one of the men saw it happen, he told Joab, “I saw
Absalom hanging in an oak tree!”

11Joab said to him, “You saw him? Why didn’t you kill him
and let him fall to the ground? I would have given you a belt
and four ounces of silver!”

12The man answered, “I wouldn’t touch the king’s son even if
you gave me twenty-five pounds of silver. We heard the king
command you, Abishai, and Ittai, ‘Be careful not to hurt young
Absalom.’ 13If I had killed him, the king would have found out,
and you would not have protected me!”

14Joab said, “I won’t waste time here with you!” Absalom was
still alive in the oak tree, so Joab took three spears and stabbed
him in the heart. 15Ten young men who carried Joab’s armor
also gathered around Absalom and struck him and killed him.

16Then Joab blew the trumpet, so the troops stopped chasing
the Israelites. 17Then Joab’s men took Absalom’s body and
threw it into a large pit in the forest and filled the pit with many
stones. All the Israelites ran away to their homes.

18When Absalom was alive, he had set up a pillar for himself
in the King’s Valley. He said, “I have no son to keep my name
alive.” So he named the pillar after himself, and it is called
Absalom’s Monument even today.

19Ahimaaz son of Zadok said to Joab, “Let me run and take
the news to King David. I’ll tell him the LORD has saved him from
his enemies.”

20Joab answered Ahimaaz, “No, you are not the one to take
the news today. You may do it another time, but do not take it
today, because the king’s son is dead.”

21Then Joab said to a man from Cush, “Go, tell the king what
you have seen.” The Cushite bowed to Joab and ran to tell

David.

22 But Ahimaaz son of Zadok begged Joab again, “No matter what happens, please let me go along with the Cushite!”

Joab said, “Son, why do you want to carry the news? You won’t get any reward.”

23 Ahimaaz answered, “No matter what happens, I will run.”

So Joab said to Ahimaaz, “Run!” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the Jordan Valley and passed the Cushite.

24 David was sitting between the inner and outer gates of the city. The watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the walls, and as he looked up, he saw a man running alone. 25 He shouted the news to the king.

The king said, “If he is alone, he is bringing good news!”

The man came nearer and nearer to the city. 26 Then the watchman saw another man running, and he called to the gatekeeper, “Look! Another man is running alone!”

The king said, “He is also bringing good news!”

27 The watchman said, “I think the first man runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok.”

The king said, “Ahimaaz is a good man. He must be bringing good news!”

28 Then Ahimaaz called a greeting to the king. He bowed facedown on the ground before the king and said, “Praise the LORD your God! The LORD has defeated those who were against you, my king.”

29 The king asked, “Is young Absalom all right?”

Ahimaaz answered, “When Joab sent me, I saw some great excitement, but I don’t know what it was.”

30 The king said, “Step over here and wait.” So Ahimaaz stepped aside and stood there.

31 Then the Cushite arrived. He said, “Master and king, hear the good news! Today the LORD has punished those who were against you!”

32 The king asked the Cushite, “Is young Absalom all right?”

The Cushite answered, “May your enemies and all who come to hurt you be like that young man!”

33 Then the king was very upset, and he went to the room over the city gate and cried. As he went, he cried out, “My son Absalom, my son Absalom! I wish I had died and not you. Absalom, my son, my son!”

## Psalm 66:16–20

16 All of you who fear God, come and listen,

and I will tell you what he has done for me.

17 I cried out to him with my mouth
and praised him with my tongue.

18 If I had known of any sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened to me.

19 But God has listened;
he has heard my prayer.

20 Praise God,
who did not ignore my prayer
or hold back his love from me.

## Proverbs 16:31–32

31 Gray hair is like a crown of honor;
it is earned by living a good life.

32 Patience is better than strength.
Controlling your temper is better than capturing a city.

## John 7:25–52

### *Is Jesus the Christ?*

25 Then some of the people who lived in Jerusalem said, “This is the man they are trying to kill. 26 But he is teaching where everyone can see and hear him, and no one is trying to stop him. Maybe the leaders have decided he really is the Christ. 27 But we know where this man is from. Yet when the real Christ comes, no one will know where he comes from.”

28 Jesus, teaching in the Temple, cried out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. But I have not come by my

own authority. I was sent by the One who is true, whom you don't know. [29]But I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me."

[30]When Jesus said this, they tried to seize him. But no one was able to touch him, because it was not yet the right time. [31]But many of the people believed in Jesus. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miracles than this man has done?"

## *The Leaders Try to Arrest Jesus*

[32]The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about Jesus. So the leading priests and the Pharisees sent some Temple guards to arrest him. [33]Jesus said, "I will be with you a little while longer. Then I will go back to the One who sent me. [34]You will look for me, but you will not find me. And you cannot come where Iam."

[35]Some people said to each other, "Where will this man go so we cannot find him? Will he go to the Greek cities where our people live and teach the Greek people there? [36]What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'You cannot come where I am'?"

## *Jesus Talks About the Spirit*

[37]On the last and most important day of the feast Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. [38]If anyone believes in me, rivers of living water will flow out from that person's heart, as the Scripture says." [39]Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been raised to glory. But later, those who believed in Jesus would receive the Spirit.

## *The People Argue About Jesus*

[40]When the people heard Jesus' words, some of them said, "This man really is the Prophet."[n]

[41]Others said, "He is the Christ."

Still others said, "The Christ will not come from Galilee. [42]The Scripture says that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived." [43]So the people did not agree with each other about Jesus. [44]Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one was able to touch him.

## *Some Leaders Won't Believe*

[45]The Temple guards went back to the leading priests and

the Pharisees, who asked, “Why didn’t you bring Jesus?”

46The guards answered, “The words he says are greater than
the words of any other person who has ever spoken!”

47The Pharisees answered, “So Jesus has fooled you also!
48Have any of the leaders or the Pharisees believed in him? No!
49But these people, who know nothing about the law, are under
God’s curse.”

50Nicodemus, who had gone to see Jesus before, was in that
group.[n] He said, 51“Our law does not judge a person without
hearing him and knowing what he has done.”

52They answered, “Are you from Galilee, too? Study the
Scriptures, and you will learn that no prophet comes from
Galilee.”

# May 24

## The Verdict

*Jesus said, "I also don't judge you guilty. You may go now, but don't sin anymore."*

John 8:11

If you have ever wondered how God reacts when you fail, frame the words [of that verse] and hang them on the wall. Read them. Ponder them … Or better still, take him with you to your canyon of shame. Invite Christ to journey with you … to stand beside you as you retell the events of the darkest nights of your soul.

And then listen. Listen carefully. He's speaking… "I don't judge you guilty."

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

Not with his hand, but with his blood.

His message has two words: Not guilty.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### 2 Samuel 19:1—20:26

### *Joab Scolds David*

19 People told Joab, "Look, the king is sad and crying because of
Absalom." 2David's army had won the battle that day. But it
became a very sad day for all the people, because they heard
that the king was very sad for his son. 3The people came into
the city quietly that day. They were like an army that had been
defeated in battle and had run away. 4The king covered his face
and cried loudly, "My son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!"

5Joab went into the king's house and said, "Today you have
shamed all your men. They saved your life and the lives of your
sons, daughters, wives, and slave women. 6You have shamed
them because you love those who hate you, and you hate those

who love you. Today you have made it clear that your commanders and men mean nothing to you. What if Absalom had lived and all of us were dead? I can see you would be pleased. 7Now go out and encourage your servants. I swear by the LORD that if you don't go out, no man will be left with you by tonight! That will be worse than all the troubles you have had from your youth until today."

8So the king went to the city gate.[n] When the news spread that the king was at the gate, everyone came to see him.

## *David Goes Back to Jerusalem*

All the Israelites who had followed Absalom had run away to their homes. 9People in all the tribes of Israel began to argue, saying, "The king saved us from the Philistines and our other enemies, but he left the country because of Absalom. 10We appointed Absalom to rule us, but now he has died in battle. We should make David the king again."

11King David sent a message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, that said, "Speak to the elders of Judah. Say, 'Even in my house I have heard what all the Israelites are saying. So why are you the last tribe to bring the king back to his palace? 12You are my brothers, my own family. Why are you the last tribe to bring back the king?' 13And say to Amasa, 'You are part of my own family. May God punish me terribly if I don't make you commander of the army in Joab's place!'"

14David touched the hearts of all the people of Judah at once. They sent a message to the king that said, "Return with all your men." 15Then the king returned as far as the Jordan River. The men of Judah came to Gilgal to meet him and to bring him across the Jordan.

16Shimei son of Gera, a Benjaminite who lived in Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David. 17With Shimei came a thousand Benjaminites. Ziba, the servant from Saul's family, also came, bringing his fifteen sons and twenty servants with him. They all hurried to the Jordan River to meet the king. 18The people went across the Jordan to help bring the king's family back to Judah and to do whatever the king wanted. As the king was crossing the river, Shimei son of Gera came to him and bowed facedown on the ground in front of the king. 19He said to the king, "My master, don't hold me guilty. Don't remember the wrong I did when you left Jerusalem! Don't hold it against me. 20I know I have sinned. That is why I am the first person from Joseph's family to come down and meet you today, my master and king!"

21But Abishai son of Zeruiah said, "Shimei should die because he cursed you, the LORD's appointed king!"

22David said, "This does not concern you, sons of Zeruiah!

Today you're against me! No one will be put to death in Israel today. Today I know I am king over Israel!" [23]Then the king promised Shimei, "You won't die."

[24]Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, also went down to meet King David. Mephibosheth had not cared for his feet, cut his beard, or washed his clothes from the time the king had left Jerusalem until he returned safely. [25]When Mephibosheth came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, "Mephibosheth, why didn't you go with me?"

[26]He answered, "My master, my servant Ziba tricked me! I said to Ziba, 'I am crippled, so saddle a donkey. Then I will ride it so I can go with the king.' [27]But he lied about me to you. You, my master and king, are like an angel from God. Do what you think is good. [28]You could have killed all my grandfather's family. Instead, you put me with those people who eat at your own table. So I don't have a right to ask anything more from the king!"

[29]The king said to him, "Don't say anything more. I have decided that you and Ziba will divide the land."

[30]Mephibosheth said to the king, "Let Ziba take all the land now that my master the king has arrived safely home."

[31]Barzillai of Gilead came down from Rogelim to cross the Jordan River with the king. [32]Barzillai was a very old man, eighty years old. He had taken care of the king when David was staying at Mahanaim, because Barzillai was a very rich man. [33]David said to Barzillai, "Cross the river with me. Come with me to Jerusalem, and I will take care of you."

[34]But Barzillai answered the king, "Do you know how old I am? Do you think I can go with you to Jerusalem? [35]I am eighty years old! I am too old to taste what I eat or drink. I am too old to hear the voices of men and women singers. Why should you be bothered with me? [36]I am not worthy of a reward from you, but I will cross the Jordan River with you. [37]Then let me go back so I may die in my own city near the grave of my father and mother. But here is Kimham, your servant. Let him go with you, my master and king. Do with him whatever you want."

[38]The king answered, "Kimham will go with me. I will do for him anything you wish, and I will do anything for you that you wish." [39]The king kissed Barzillai and blessed him. Then Barzillai returned home, and the king and all the people crossed the Jordan.

[40]When the king crossed over to Gilgal, Kimham went with him. All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel led David across the river.

[41]Soon all the Israelites came to the king and said to him, "Why did our relatives, the people of Judah, steal you away? Why did they bring you and your family across the Jordan River with your men?"

42 All the people of Judah answered the Israelites, “We did
this because the king is our close relative. Why are you angry
about it? We have not eaten food at the king’s expense or taken
anything for ourselves!”
43 The Israelites answered the people of Judah, “We have ten
tribes in the kingdom, so we have more right to David than you
do! But you ignored us! We were the first ones to talk about
bringing our king back!”
But the people of Judah spoke even more unkindly than the
people of Israel.

## *Sheba Leads Israel Away from David*

20 It happened that a troublemaker named Sheba son of Bicri
from the tribe of Benjamin was there. He blew the trumpet and
said:

“We have no share in David!
We have no part in the son of Jesse!

People of Israel, let’s go home!”

2 So all the Israelites left David and followed Sheba son of
Bicri. But the people of Judah stayed with their king all the way
from the Jordan River to Jerusalem.
3 David came back to his palace in Jerusalem. He had left ten
of his slave women there to take care of the palace. Now he put
them in a locked house. He gave them food, but he did not have
sexual relations with them. So they lived like widows until they
died.
4 The king said to Amasa, “Tell the men of Judah to meet with
me in three days, and you must also be here.” 5 So Amasa went
to call the men of Judah together, but he took more time than
the king had said.
6 David said to Abishai, “Sheba son of Bicri is more
dangerous to us than Absalom was. Take my men and chase him
before he finds walled cities and escapes from us.” 7 So Joab’s
men, the Kerethites and the Pelethites,[n] and all the soldiers
went with Abishai. They went out from Jerusalem to chase
Sheba son of Bicri.
8 When Joab and the army came to the great rock at Gibeon,
Amasa came out to meet them. Joab was wearing his uniform,
and at his waist he wore a belt that held his sword in its case.
As Joab stepped forward, his sword fell out of its case. 9 Joab
asked Amasa, “Brother, is everything all right with you?” Then
with his right hand he took Amasa by the beard to kiss him.

10 Amasa was not watching the sword in Joab's hand. So Joab
pushed the sword into Amasa's stomach, causing Amasa's
insides to spill onto the ground. Joab did not have to stab Amasa
again; he was already dead. Then Joab and his brother Abishai
continued to chase Sheba son of Bicri.
11 One of Joab's young men stood by Amasa's body and said,
"Everyone who is for Joab and David should follow Joab!"
12 Amasa lay in the middle of the road, covered with his own
blood. When the young man saw that everyone was stopping to
look at the body, he dragged it from the road, laid it in a field,
and put a cloth over it. 13 After Amasa's body was taken off the
road, all the men followed Joab to chase Sheba son of Bicri.
14 Sheba went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth
Maacah. All the Berites also came together and followed him.
15 So Joab and his men came to Abel Beth Maacah and
surrounded it. They piled dirt up against the city wall, and they
began hacking at the walls to bring them down.
16 But a wise woman shouted out from the city, "Listen!
Listen! Tell Joab to come here. I want to talk to him!"
17 So Joab came near her. She asked him, "Are you Joab?"
He answered, "Yes, I am."
Then she said, "Listen to what I say."
Joab said, "I'm listening."
18 Then the woman said, "In the past people would say, 'Ask
for advice at Abel,' and the problem would be solved. 19 I am one
of the peaceful, loyal people of Israel. You are trying to destroy
an important city of Israel. Why must you destroy what belongs
to the LORD?"
20 Joab answered, "I would prefer not to destroy or ruin
anything! 21 That is not what I want. But there is a man here
from the mountains of Ephraim, who is named Sheba son of
Bicri. He has turned against King David. If you bring him to me,
I will leave the city alone."
The woman said to Joab, "His head will be thrown over the
wall to you."
22 Then the woman spoke very wisely to all the people of the
city. They cut off the head of Sheba son of Bicri and threw it
over the wall to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and the army left
the city. Every man returned home, and Joab went back to the
king in Jerusalem.
23 Joab was commander of all the army of Israel. Benaiah son
of Jehoiada led the Kerethites and Pelethites. 24 Adoniram was in
charge of the men who were forced to do hard work.
Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the recorder. 25 Sheba was the
royal secretary. Zadok and Abiathar were the priests, 26 and Ira
the Jairite was David's priest.

## Psalm 67:1–7

## *Everyone Should Praise God*

**For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.**

67 God, have mercy on us and bless usand show us your
kindness *Selah*

2so the world will learn your ways,
and all nations will learn that you can save.

3God, the people should praise you;
all people should praise you.

4The nations should be glad and sing
because you judge people fairly.
You guide all the nations on earth. *Selah*

5God, the people should praise you;
all people should praise you.

6The land has given its crops.
God, our God, blesses us.

7God blesses us
so people all over the earth will fear him.

## Proverbs 16:33—17:1

33People throw lots to make a decision,
but the answer comes from the LORD.

17 It is better to eat a dry crust of bread in peace
than to have a feast where there is quarreling.

## John 7:53—8:20

Some of the earliest surviving Greek copies do not contain 7:53—8:11.

[53And everyone left and went home.

### *The Woman Caught in Adultery*

8 Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2But early in the morning he went back to the Temple, and all the people came to him, and he sat and taught them. 3The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. They forced her to stand before the people. 4They said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught having sexual relations with a man who is not her husband. 5The law of Moses commands that we stone to death every woman who does this. What do you say we should do?" 6They were asking this to trick Jesus so that they could have some charge against him.

But Jesus bent over and started writing on the ground with his finger. 7When they continued to ask Jesus their question, he raised up and said, "Anyone here who has never sinned can throw the first stone at her." 8Then Jesus bent over again and wrote on the ground.

9Those who heard Jesus began to leave one by one, first the older men and then the others. Jesus was left there alone with the woman standing before him. 10Jesus raised up again and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one judged you guilty?"

11She answered, "No one, sir."

Then Jesus said, "I also don't judge you guilty. You may go now, but don't sin anymore."]

### *Jesus Is the Light of the World*

12Later, Jesus talked to the people again, saying, "I am the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness but will have the light that gives life."

13The Pharisees said to Jesus, "When you talk about yourself, you are the only one to say these things are true. We cannot accept what you say."

14Jesus answered, "Yes, I am saying these things about myself, but they are true. I know where I came from and where

I am going. But you don’t know where I came from or where I
am going. 15You judge by human standards. I am not judging
anyone. 16But when I do judge, I judge truthfully, because I am
not alone. The Father who sent me is with me. 17Your own law
says that when two witnesses say the same thing, you must
accept what they say. 18I am one of the witnesses who speaks
about myself, and the Father who sent me is the other witness.”
19They asked, “Where is your father?”
Jesus answered, “You don’t know me or my Father. If you
knew me, you would know my Father, too.” 20Jesus said these
things while he was teaching in the Temple, near where the
money is kept. But no one arrested him, because the right time
for him had not yet come.

# May 25

## Sinner, Set Free

*"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

John 8:32

Think of it this way. Sin put you in prison. Sin locked you behind the bars of guilt and shame and deception and fear. Sin did nothing but shackle you to the wall of misery. Then Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time; he satisfied the penalty and set you free. Christ died, and when you cast your lot with him, your old self died too.

The only way to be set free from the prison of sin is to serve its penalty. In this case the penalty is death. Someone has to die, either you or a heaven-sent substitute. You cannot leave prison unless there is a death. But that death has occurred at Calvary. And when Jesus died, you died to sin's claim on your life. You are free.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

## 2 Samuel 21:1—22:51

### *The Gibeonites Punish Saul's Family*

21 During the time David was king, there was a shortage of food
that lasted for three years. So David prayed to the LORD.

The LORD answered, "Saul and his family of murderers are
the reason for this shortage, because he killed the Gibeonites."
2(Now the Gibeonites were not Israelites; they were a group of
Amorites who were left alive. The Israelites had promised not to
hurt the Gibeonites, but Saul had tried to kill them, because he
was eager to help the people of Israel and Judah.)

King David called the Gibeonites together and spoke to them.
3He asked, "What can I do for you? How can I make up for the
harm done so you can bless the LORD's people?"

4The Gibeonites said to David, “We cannot demand silver or
gold from Saul or his family. And we don’t have the right to kill
anyone in Israel.”
Then David asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”
5The Gibeonites said, “Saul made plans against us and tried
to destroy all our people who are left in the land of Israel. 6So
bring seven of his sons to us. Then we will kill them and hang
them on stakes in the presence of the LORD at Gibeah, the
hometown of Saul, the LORD’s chosen king.”
The king said, “I will give them to you.” 7But the king
protected Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul,
because of the promise he had made to Jonathan in the LORD’s
name. 8The king did take Armoni and Mephibosheth,[n] sons of
Rizpah and Saul. (Rizpah was the daughter of Aiah.) And the
king took the five sons of Saul’s daughter Merab. (Adriel son of
Barzillai the Meholathite was the father of Merab’s five sons.)
9David gave these seven sons to the Gibeonites. Then the
Gibeonites killed them and hung them on stakes on a hill in the
presence of the LORD. All seven sons died together. They were
put to death during the first days of the harvest season at the
beginning of barley harvest.
10Aiah’s daughter Rizpah took the rough cloth that was worn
to show sadness and put it on a rock for herself. She stayed
there from the beginning of the harvest until the rain fell on her
sons’ bodies. During the day she did not let the birds of the sky
touch her sons’ bodies, and during the night she did not let the
wild animals touch them.
11People told David what Aiah’s daughter Rizpah, Saul’s
slave woman, was doing. 12Then David took the bones of Saul
and Jonathan from the men of Jabesh Gilead. (The Philistines
had hung the bodies of Saul and Jonathan in the public square
of Beth Shan after they had killed Saul at Gilboa. Later the men
of Jabesh Gilead had secretly taken them from there.) 13David
brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from Gilead.
Then the people gathered the bodies of Saul’s seven sons who
were hanged on stakes. 14The people buried the bones of Saul
and his son Jonathan at Zela in Benjamin in the tomb of Saul’s
father Kish. The people did everything the king commanded.
Then God answered the prayers for the land.

## *Wars with the Philistines*

15Again there was war between the Philistines and Israel.
David and his men went out to fight the Philistines, but David
became tired. 16Ishbi-Benob, one of the sons of Rapha, had a
bronze spearhead weighing about seven and one-half pounds
and a new sword. He planned to kill David, 17but Abishai son of
Zeruiah killed the Philistine and saved David’s life.

Then David's men made a promise to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle. If you were killed, Israel would lose its greatest leader."

18 Later, at Gob, there was another battle with the Philistines. Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, another one of the sons of Rapha.

19 Later, there was another battle at Gob with the Philistines. Elhanan son of Jaare-Oregim from Bethlehem killed Goliath[n] from Gath. His spear was as large as a weaver's rod.

20 At Gath another battle took place. A huge man was there; he had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four fingers and toes in all. This man also was one of the sons of Rapha. 21 When he challenged Israel, Jonathan son of Shimeah, David's brother, killed him.

22 These four sons of Rapha from Gath were killed by David and his men.

## *David's Song of Praise*

22 David sang this song to the LORD when the LORD saved him from Saul and all his other enemies. 2 He said:

"The LORD is my rock, my fortress, my Savior.

3 My God is my rock.
I can run to him for safety.

He is my shield and my saving strength,
my defender and my place of safety.
The LORD saves me from those who want to harm me.

4 I will call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and I will be saved from my enemies.

5 "The waves of death came around me;
the deadly rivers overwhelmed me.

6 The ropes of death wrapped around me.
The traps of death were before me.

7 In my trouble I called to the LORD;
I cried out to my God.

From his temple he heard my voice;
my call for help reached his ears.

8 "The earth trembled and shook.
The foundations of heaven began to shake.
They trembled because the LORD was angry.

9 Smoke came out of his nose,
and burning fire came out of his mouth.
Burning coals went before him.

10 He tore open the sky and came down
with dark clouds under his feet.

11 He rode a creature with wings and flew.
He raced on the wings of the wind.

12 He made darkness his shelter,
surrounded by fog and clouds.

13 Out of the brightness of his presence
came flashes of lightning.

14 The LORD thundered from heaven;
the Most High raised his voice.

15 He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies.
His bolts of lightning confused them with fear.

16 The LORD spoke strongly.
The wind blew from his nose.

Then the valleys of the sea appeared,

and the foundations of the earth were seen.

17 "The LORD reached down from above and took me;
he pulled me from the deep water.

18 He saved me from my powerful enemies,
from those who hated me, because they were too strong for me.

19 They attacked me at my time of trouble,
but the LORD supported me.

20 He took me to a safe place.
Because he delights in me, he saved me.

21 "The LORD spared me because I did what was right.
Because I have not done evil, he has rewarded me.

22 I have followed the ways of the LORD;
I have not done evil by turning from my God.

23 I remember all his laws
and have not broken his rules.

24 I am innocent before him;
I have kept myself from doing evil.

25 The LORD rewarded me because I did what was right,
because I did what the LORD said was right.

26 "LORD, you are loyal to those who are loyal,
and you are good to those who are good.

27 You are pure to those who are pure,
but you are against those who are evil.

28 You save the humble,
but you bring down those who are proud.

29 LORD, you give light to my lamp.
The LORD brightens the darkness around me.

30 With your help I can attack an army.
With God's help I can jump over a wall.

31 "The ways of God are without fault;
the LORD's words are pure.

He is a shield to those who trust him.

32 Who is God? Only the LORD.
Who is the Rock? Only our God.

33 God is my protection.
He makes my way free from fault.

34 He makes me like a deer that does not stumble;
he helps me stand on the steep mountains.

35 He trains my hands for battle
so my arms can bend a bronze bow.

36 You protect me with your saving shield.
You have stooped to make me great.

37 You give me a better way to live,
so I live as you want me to.

38 I chased my enemies and destroyed them.
I did not quit till they were destroyed.

39 I destroyed and crushed them
so they couldn't rise up again.
They fell beneath my feet.

40 You gave me strength in battle.
You made my enemies bow before me.

41 You made my enemies turn back,
and I destroyed those who hated me.

42 They called for help,
but no one came to save them.

They called to the LORD,
but he did not answer them.

43 I beat my enemies into pieces,
like dust on the ground.

I poured them out and walked on them
like mud in the streets.

44 "You saved me when my people attacked me.
You kept me as the leader of nations.

People I never knew serve me.

45 Foreigners obey me.
As soon as they hear me, they obey me.

46 They all become afraid
and tremble in their hiding places.

47 "The LORD lives!
May my Rock be praised!
Praise God, the Rock, who saves me!

48 God gives me victory over my enemies
and brings people under my rule.

49 He frees me from my enemies.

"You set me over those who hate me.
You saved me from violent people.

50 So I will praise you, LORD, among the nations.
I will sing praises to your name.

51 The LORD gives great victories to his king.
He is loyal to his appointed king,
to David and his descendants forever."

## Psalm 68:1–6

### *Praise God Who Saved the Nation*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.**

68 Let God rise up and scatter his enemies;
let those who hate him run away from him.

2 Blow them away as smoke
is driven away by the wind.

As wax melts before a fire,
let the wicked be destroyed before God.

3 But those who do right should be glad
and should rejoice before God;
they should be happy and glad.

[4]Sing to God; sing praises to his name.

Prepare the way for him
who rides through the desert,

whose name is the LORD.
Rejoice before him.

[5]God is in his holy Temple.
He is a father to orphans,
and he defends the widows.

[6]God gives the lonely a home.
He leads prisoners out with joy,
but those who turn against God will live in a dry land.

## Proverbs 17:2–4

[2]A wise servant will rule over the master's disgraceful child
and will even inherit a share of what the master leaves his children.

[3]A hot furnace tests silver and gold,
but the Lord tests hearts.

[4]Evil people listen to evil words.
Liars pay attention to cruel words.

## John 8:21–59

### *The People Misunderstand Jesus*

[21]Again, Jesus said to the people, "I will leave you, and you will look for me, but you will die in your sins. You cannot come

where I am going.”
22So the Jews asked, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he
said, ‘You cannot come where I am going’?”
23Jesus said, “You people are from here below, but I am from
above. You belong to this world, but I don’t belong to this world.
24So I told you that you would die in your sins. Yes, you will die
in your sins if you don’t believe that I am he.”
25They asked, “Then who are you?”
Jesus answered, “I am what I have told you from the
beginning. 26I have many things to say and decide about you.
But I tell people only the things I have heard from the One who
sent me, and he speaks the truth.”
27The people did not understand that he was talking to them
about the Father. 28So Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the
Son of Man, you will know that I am he. You will know that
these things I do are not by my own authority but that I say only
what the Father has taught me. 29The One who sent me is with
me. I always do what is pleasing to him, so he has not left me
alone.” 30While Jesus was saying these things, many people
believed in him.

## *Freedom from Sin*

31So Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, “If you
continue to obey my teaching, you are truly my followers.
32Then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you
free.”
33They answered, “We are Abraham’s children, and we have
never been anyone’s slaves. So why do you say we will be free?”
34Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, everyone who lives in
sin is a slave to sin. 35A slave does not stay with a family
forever, but a son belongs to the family forever. 36So if the Son
makes you free, you will be truly free. 37I know you are
Abraham’s children, but you want to kill me because you don’t
accept my teaching. 38I am telling you what my Father has
shown me, but you do what your father has told you.”
39They answered, “Our father is Abraham.”
Jesus said, “If you were really Abraham’s children, you would
do[n] the things Abraham did. 40I am a man who has told you the
truth which I heard from God, but you are trying to kill me.
Abraham did nothing like that. 41So you are doing the things
your own father did.”
But they said, “We are not like children who never knew who
their father was. God is our Father; he is the only Father we
have.”
42Jesus said to them, “If God were really your Father, you
would love me, because I came from God and now I am here. I
did not come by my own authority; God sent me. 43You don’t

understand what I say, because you cannot accept my teaching.
44 You belong to your father the devil, and you want to do what
he wants. He was a murderer from the beginning and was
against the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he
tells a lie, he shows what he is really like, because he is a liar
and the father of lies. 45 But because I speak the truth, you don't
believe me. 46 Can any of you prove that I am guilty of sin? If I
am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? 47 The person
who belongs to God accepts what God says. But you don't
accept what God says, because you don't belong to God."

## *Jesus Is Greater than Abraham*

48 They answered, "We say you are a Samaritan and have a
demon in you. Are we not right?"

49 Jesus answered, "I have no demon in me. I give honor to
my Father, but you dishonor me. 50 I am not trying to get honor
for myself. There is One who wants this honor for me, and he is
the judge. 51 I tell you the truth, whoever obeys my teaching will
never die."

52 They said to Jesus, "Now we know that you have a demon
in you! Even Abraham and the prophets died. But you say,
'Whoever obeys my teaching will never die.' 53 Do you think you
are greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the
prophets died, too. Who do you think you are?"

54 Jesus answered, "If I give honor to myself, that honor is
worth nothing. The One who gives me honor is my Father, and
you say he is your God. 55 You don't really know him, but I know
him. If I said I did not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I
do know him, and I obey what he says. 56 Your father Abraham
was very happy that he would see my day. He saw that day and
was glad."

57 They said to him, "You have never seen Abraham! You are
not even fifty years old."

58 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was
even born, I am!" 59 When Jesus said this, the people picked up
stones to throw at him. But Jesus hid himself, and then he left
the Temple.

# May 26

## Intimacy with the Almighty

*"This man was born blind so that God's power could be shown in him. While it is daytime, we must continue doing the work of the One who sent me."*

John 9:3–4

Jesus didn't act unless he saw his father act. He didn't judge until he heard his father judge. No act or deed occurred without his father's guidance … Because Jesus could hear what others couldn't, he acted differently than they did. Remember when everyone was troubled about the man born blind? Jesus wasn't. Somehow he knew that the blindness would reveal God's power (John 9:3). Remember when everyone was distraught about Lazarus's illness? Jesus wasn't … It was as if Jesus could hear what no one else could … Jesus had unbroken communion with his father.

Do you suppose the Father desires the same for us? Absolutely! … God desires the same abiding intimacy with you that he had with his son.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## 2 Samuel 23:1—24:25

### *David's Last Words*

23 These are the last words of David.
This is the message of David son of Jesse.
The man made great by the Most High God speaks.

He is the appointed king of the God of Jacob;
he is the sweet singer of Israel:

2 “The LORD’s Spirit spoke through me,
and his word was on my tongue.

3 The God of Israel spoke;
the Rock of Israel said to me:

‘Whoever rules fairly over people,
who rules with respect for God,

4 is like the morning light at dawn,
like a morning without clouds.

He is like sunshine after a rain
that makes the grass sprout from the ground.’

5 “This is how God has cared for my family.
God made a lasting agreement with me,
right and sure in every way.

He will accomplish my salvation
and satisfy all my desires.

6 “But all evil people will be thrown away like thorns
that cannot be held in a hand.

7 No one can touch them
except with a tool of iron or wood.

They will be thrown in the fire and burned where they lie.”

## *David’s Army*

8 These are the names of David’s warriors:
Josheb-Basshebeth, the Tahkemonite, was head of the Three.[n] He killed eight hundred men at one time.
9 Next was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. Eleazar was one of the three soldiers who were with David when they challenged the Philistines. The Philistines were gathered for battle, and the

Israelites drew back. [10]But Eleazar stayed where he was and fought the Philistines until he was so tired his hand stuck to his sword. The LORD gave a great victory for the Israelites that day. The troops came back after Eleazar had won the battle, but only to take weapons and armor from the enemy.

[11]Next there was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines came together to fight in a vegetable field. Israel's troops ran away from the Philistines, [12]but Shammah stood in the middle of the field and fought for it and killed the Philistines. And the LORD gave a great victory.

[13]Once, three of the Thirty, David's chief soldiers, came down to him at the cave of Adullam during harvest. The Philistine army had camped in the Valley of Rephaim. [14]At that time David was in the stronghold, and some of the Philistines were in Bethlehem.

[15]David had a strong desire for some water. He said, "Oh, I wish someone would get me water from the well near the city gate of Bethlehem!" [16]So the three warriors broke through the Philistine army and took water from the well near the city gate of Bethlehem. Then they brought it to David, but he refused to drink it. He poured it out before the LORD, [17]saying, "May the LORD keep me from drinking this water! It would be like drinking the blood of the men who risked their lives!" So David refused to drink it. These were the brave things that the three warriors did.

[18]Abishai, brother of Joab son of Zeruiah, was captain of the Three. Abishai fought three hundred soldiers with his spear and killed them. He became as famous as the Three [19]and was more honored than the Three. He became their commander even though he was not one of them.

[20]Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a brave fighter from Kabzeel who did mighty things. He killed two of the best warriors from Moab. He also went down into a pit and killed a lion on a snowy day. [21]Benaiah killed a large Egyptian who had a spear in his hand. Benaiah had a club, but he grabbed the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. [22]These were the things Benaiah son of Jehoiada did. He was as famous as the Three. [23]He received more honor than the Thirty, but he did not become a member of the Three. David made him leader of his bodyguards.

## *The Thirty Chief Soldiers*

[24]The following men were among the Thirty:
Asahel brother of Joab;
Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem;

[25]Shammah the Harodite;
Elika the Harodite;

[26]Helez the Paltite;
Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa;

[27]Abiezer the Anathothite;
Mebunnai the Hushathite;

[28]Zalmon the Ahohite;
Maharai the Netophathite;

[29]Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite;
Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin;

[30]Benaiah the Pirathonite;
Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash;

[31]Abi-Albon the Arbathite;
Azmaveth the Barhumite;

[32]Eliahba the Shaalbonite;
the sons of Jashen;
Jonathan [33]son of Shammah the Hararite;
Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite;

[34]Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maacathite;
Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite;

[35]Hezro the Carmelite;
Paarai the Arbite;

[36]Igal son of Nathan of Zobah;
the son of Hagri;

[37]Zelek the Ammonite;

Naharai the Beerothite, who carried the armor of Joab
son of Zeruiah;

38 Ira the Ithrite;
Gareb the Ithrite,

39 and Uriah the Hittite.
There were thirty-seven in all.

## *David Counts His Army*

24 The LORD was angry with Israel again, and he caused David to
turn against the Israelites. He said, “Go, count the people of
Israel and Judah.”
2 So King David said to Joab, the commander of the army, “Go
through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba,[n] and
count the people. Then I will know how many there are.”
3 But Joab said to the king, “May the LORD your God give you
a hundred times more people, and may my master the king live
to see this happen. Why do you want to do this?”
4 But the king commanded Joab and the commanders of the
army, so they left the king to count the Israelites.
5 After crossing the Jordan River, they camped near Aroer on
the south side of the city in the ravine. They went through Gad
and on to Jazer. 6 Then they went to Gilead and the land of
Tahtim Hodshi and to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon. 7 They
went to the strong, walled city of Tyre and to all the cities of the
Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went to southern Judah, to
Beersheba. 8 After nine months and twenty days, they had gone
through all the land. Then they came back to Jerusalem.
9 Joab gave the list of the people to the king. There were
eight hundred thousand men in Israel who could use the sword
and five hundred thousand men in Judah.
10 David felt ashamed after he had counted the people. He
said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly by what I have done.
LORD, I beg you to forgive me, your servant, because I have been
very foolish.”
11 When David got up in the morning, the LORD spoke his
word to Gad, who was a prophet and David’s seer. 12 The LORD
told Gad, “Go and tell David, ‘This is what the LORD says: I offer
you three choices. Choose one of them and I will do it to you.’”
13 So Gad went to David and said to him, “Should three years
of hunger come to you and your land? Or should your enemies
chase you for three months? Or should there be three days of
disease in your land? Think about it. Then decide which of these
things I should tell the LORD who sent me.”

[14]David said to Gad, “I am in great trouble. Let the LORD
punish us, because the LORD is very merciful. Don’t let my
punishment come from human beings!”
[15]So the LORD sent a terrible disease on Israel. It began in the
morning and continued until the chosen time to stop. From Dan
to Beersheba seventy thousand people died. [16]When the angel
raised his arm toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD felt very
sorry about the terrible things that had happened. He said to
the angel who was destroying the people, “That is enough! Put
down your arm!” The angel of the LORD was then by the
threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.
[17]When David saw the angel that killed the people, he said to
the LORD, “I am the one who sinned and did wrong. These
people only followed me like sheep. They did nothing wrong.
Please punish me and my family.”
[18]That day Gad came to David and said, “Go and build an
altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.”
[19]So David did what Gad told him to do, just as the LORD
commanded.
[20]Araunah looked and saw the king and his servants coming
to him. So he went out and bowed facedown on the ground
before the king. [21]He said, “Why has my master the king come
to me?”
David answered, “To buy the threshing floor from you so I
can build an altar to the LORD. Then the terrible disease will
stop.”
[22]Araunah said to David, “My master and king, you may take
anything you want for a sacrifice. Here are some oxen for the
whole burnt offering and the threshing boards and the yokes for
the wood. [23]My king, I give everything to you.” Araunah also
said to the king, “May the LORD your God be pleased with you.”
[24]But the king answered Araunah, “No, I will pay you for the
land. I won’t offer to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost
me nothing.”
So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for one and
one-fourth pounds of silver. [25]He built an altar to the LORD there
and offered whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.
Then the LORD answered his prayer for the country, and the
disease in Israel stopped.

## Psalm 68:7–10

[7]God, you led your people out
when you marched through the desert. *Selah*

[8]The ground shook
and the sky poured down rain

before God, the God of Mount Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel.

[9]God, you sent much rain;
you refreshed your tired land.

[10]Your people settled there.
God, in your goodness
you took care of the poor.

## Proverbs 17:5–6

[5]Whoever mistreats the poor insults their Maker;

whoever enjoys someone's trouble will be punished.

[6]Old people are proud of their grandchildren,
and children are proud of their parents.

## John 9:1–23

### *Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind*

[9] As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born
blind. [2]His followers asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused this
man to be born blind—his own sin or his parents' sin?"
[3]Jesus answered, "It is not this man's sin or his parents' sin
that made him blind. This man was born blind so that God's
power could be shown in him. [4]While it is daytime, we must
continue doing the work of the One who sent me. Night is
coming, when no one can work. [5]While I am in the world, I am
the light of the world."

6 After Jesus said this, he spit on the ground and made some
mud with it and put the mud on the man's eyes. 7 Then he told
the man, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam." (Siloam means
Sent.) So the man went, washed, and came back seeing.
8 The neighbors and some people who had earlier seen this
man begging said, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and
beg?"
9 Some said, "He is the one," but others said, "No, he only
looks like him."
The man himself said, "I am the man."
10 They asked, "How did you get your sight?"
11 He answered, "The man named Jesus made some mud and
put it on my eyes. Then he told me to go to Siloam and wash. So
I went and washed, and then I could see."
12 They asked him, "Where is this man?"
"I don't know," he answered.

## *Pharisees Question the Healing*

13 Then the people took to the Pharisees the man who had
been blind. 14 The day Jesus had made mud and healed his eyes
was a Sabbath day. 15 So now the Pharisees asked the man,
"How did you get your sight?"
He answered, "He put mud on my eyes, I washed, and now I
see."
16 So some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man does not
keep the Sabbath day, so he is not from God."
But others said, "A man who is a sinner can't do miracles like
these." So they could not agree with each other.
17 They asked the man again, "What do you say about him
since it was your eyes he opened?"
The man answered, "He is a prophet."
18 These leaders did not believe that he had been blind and
could now see again. So they sent for the man's parents 19 and
asked them, "Is this your son who you say was born blind? Then
how does he now see?"
20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and
that he was born blind. 21 But we don't know how he can now
see. We don't know who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is old
enough to speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because
they were afraid of the elders, who had already decided that
anyone who said Jesus was the Christ would be avoided. 23 That
is why his parents said, "He is old enough. Ask him."

# May 27

## Prayers Make a Difference

*"We all know that God does not listen to sinners, but he listens to anyone who worships and obeys him."*

John 9:31

most of our prayer lives could use a tune-up. Some prayer lives lack consistency. They're either a desert or an oasis. Long, arid, dry spells interrupted by brief plunges into the waters of communion …

Others of us need sincerity. Our prayers are a bit hollow, memorized, and rigid. More liturgy than life. And though they are daily, they are dull.

Still others lack, well, honesty. We honestly wonder if prayer makes a difference. Why on earth would God in heaven want to talk to me? If God knows all, who am I to tell him anything? If God controls all, who am I to do anything? …

Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## 1 Kings 1:1—2:46

### *Adonijah Tries to Become King*

1 At this time King David was very old, and although his
servants covered him with blankets, he could not keep warm.
2They said to him, "We will look for a young woman to care for
you. She will lie close to you and keep you warm." 3After
searching everywhere in Israel for a beautiful young woman,
they found a girl named Abishag from Shunam and brought her
to the king. 4The girl was very beautiful, and she cared for the
king and served him. But the king did not have sexual relations
with her.

5 Adonijah was the son of King David and Haggith, and he
was very proud. “I will be the king,” he said. So he got chariots
and horses for himself and fifty men for his personal bodyguard.
6 Now David had never interfered with Adonijah by questioning
what he did. Born next after Absalom, Adonijah was a very
handsome man.

7 Adonijah spoke with Joab son of Zeruiah and Abiathar the
priest, and they agreed to help him. 8 But Zadok the priest,
Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and
King David’s special guard did not join Adonijah.

9 Then Adonijah killed some sheep, cows, and fat calves for
sacrifices at the Stone of Zoheleth near the spring of Rogel. He
invited all his brothers, the other sons of King David, to come,
as well as all the men of Judah. 10 But Adonijah did not invite
Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, his father’s special guard, or his
brother Solomon.

11 When Nathan heard about this, he went to Bathsheba,
Solomon’s mother. “Have you heard that Adonijah, Haggith’s
son, has made himself king?” Nathan asked. “Our real king,
David, does not know it. 12 I strongly advise you to save yourself
and your sons. 13 Go to King David and tell him, ‘My master and
king, you promised that my son Solomon would be king and
would rule on your throne after you. Why then has Adonijah
become king?’ 14 While you are still talking to the king, I will
come in and tell him that what you have said about Adonijah is
true.”

15 So Bathsheba went in to see the aged king in his bedroom,
where Abishag, the girl from Shunam, was caring for him.
16 Bathsheba bowed and knelt before the king. He asked, “What
do you want?”

17 She answered, “My master, you made a promise to me in
the name of the LORD your God. You said, ‘Your son Solomon will
become king after me, and he will rule on my throne.’ 18 But
now, unknown to you, Adonijah has become king. 19 He has
killed many cows, fat calves, and sheep for sacrifices. And he
has invited all your sons, as well as Abiathar the priest and Joab
the commander of the army, but he did not invite Solomon, who
serves you. 20 My master and king, all the Israelites are
watching you, waiting for you to decide who will be king after
you. 21 As soon as you die, Solomon and I will be treated as
criminals.”

22 While Bathsheba was still talking with the king, Nathan the
prophet arrived. 23 The servants told the king, “Nathan the
prophet is here.” So Nathan went to the king and bowed
facedown on the ground before him.

24 Nathan said, “My master and king, have you said that
Adonijah will be the king after you and that he will rule on your
throne? 25 Today he has sacrificed many cows, fat calves, and

sheep, and he has invited all your other sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. Right now they are eating and drinking with him. They are saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!' [26]But he did not invite me, your own servant, or Zadok the priest, or Benaiah son of Jehoiada, or your son Solomon. [27]Did you do this? Since we are your servants, why didn't you tell us who should be king after you?"

## *David Makes Solomon King*

[28]Then the king said, "Tell Bathsheba to come in!" So she came in and stood before the king.

[29]Then the king made this promise, "The LORD has saved me from all trouble. As surely as he lives, [30]I will do today what I have promised you in the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. I promised that your son Solomon would be king after me and rule on my throne in my place."

[31]Then Bathsheba bowed facedown on the ground and knelt before the king and said, "Long live my master King David!"

[32]Then King David said, "Tell Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada to come in." When they came before the king, [33]he said to them, "Take my servants with you and put my son Solomon on my own mule. Take him down to the spring called Gihon. [34]There Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet should pour olive oil on him and make him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' [35]Then come back up here with him. He will sit on my throne and rule in my place, because he is the one I have chosen to be the ruler over Israel and Judah."

[36]Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, "Amen! This is what the LORD, the God of my master, has declared! [37]The LORD has always helped you, our king. May he also help Solomon and make King Solomon's throne an even greater throne than yours."

[38]So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada left with the Kerethites and Pelethites.[n] They put Solomon on King David's mule and took him to the spring called Gihon. [39]Zadok the priest took the container of olive oil from the Holy Tent and poured the oil on Solomon's head to show he was the king. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" [40]All the people followed Solomon into the city. Playing flutes and shouting for joy, they made so much noise the ground shook.

[41]At this time Adonijah and all the guests with him were finishing their meal. When he heard the sound from the trumpet, Joab asked, "What does all that noise from the city mean?"

[42]While Joab was speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the

priest arrived. Adonijah said, “Come in! You are an important man, so you must be bringing good news.”

43But Jonathan answered, “No! Our master King David has made Solomon the new king. 44King David sent Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and all the king’s bodyguards with him, and they have put Solomon on the king’s own mule. 45Then Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet poured olive oil on Solomon at Gihon to make him king. After that they went into the city, shouting with joy. Now the whole city is excited, and that is the noise you hear. 46Solomon has now become the king. 47All the king’s officers have come to tell King David that he has done a good thing. They are saying, ‘May your God make Solomon even more famous than you and an even greater king than you.’” Jonathan continued, “And King David bowed down on his bed to worship God, 48saying, ‘Bless the LORD, the God of Israel. Today he has made one of my sons the king and allowed me to see it.’”

49Then all of Adonijah’s guests were afraid, and they left quickly and scattered. 50Adonijah was also afraid of Solomon, so he went and took hold of the corners of the altar.[n] 51Then someone told Solomon, “Adonijah is afraid of you, so he is at the altar, holding on to its corners. He says, ‘Tell King Solomon to promise me today that he will not kill me.’”

52So Solomon answered, “Adonijah must show that he is a man of honor. If he does that, I promise he will not lose even a single hair from his head. But if he does anything wrong, he will die.” 53Then King Solomon sent some men to get Adonijah. When he was brought from the altar, he came before King Solomon and bowed down. Solomon told him, “Go home.”

## *The Death of David*

2 Since it was almost time for David to die, he gave his son Solomon his last commands. 2David said, “My time to die is near. Be a good and strong leader. 3Obey the LORD your God. Follow him by obeying his demands, his commands, his laws, and his rules that are written in the teachings of Moses. If you do these things, you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go. 4And if you obey the LORD, he will keep the promise he made to me. He said: ‘If your descendants live as I tell them and have complete faith in me, a man from your family will always be king over the people of Israel.’

5“Also, you remember what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me. He killed the two commanders of Israel’s armies: Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He did this as if he and they were at war, although it was a time of peace. He put their blood on the belt around his waist and on his sandals on his feet. 6Punish him in the way you think is wisest, but do not let him die peacefully

of old age.

7 “Be kind to the children of Barzillai of Gilead, and allow
them to eat at your table. They welcomed me when I ran away
from your brother Absalom.

8 “And remember, Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite, is
here with you. He cursed me the day I went to Mahanaim. But
when he came down to meet me at the Jordan River, I promised
him before the LORD, ‘Shimei, I will not kill you.’ 9 But you should
not leave him unpunished. You are a wise man, and you will
know what to do to him, but you must be sure he is killed.”

10 Then David died and was buried with his ancestors in
Jerusalem. 11 He had ruled over Israel forty years—seven years
in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem.

## *Solomon Takes Control as King*

12 Solomon became king after David, his father, and he was in
firm control of his kingdom.

13 At this time Adonijah son of Haggith went to Bathsheba,
Solomon’s mother. “Do you come in peace?” Bathsheba asked.

“Yes. This is a peaceful visit,” Adonijah answered. 14 “I have
something to say to you.”

“You may speak,” she said.

15 “You remember that at one time the kingdom was mine,”
Adonijah said. “All the people of Israel recognized me as their
king, but things have changed. Now my brother is the king,
because the LORD chose him. 16 Now I have one thing to ask you;
please do not refuse me.”

Bathsheba answered, “What do you want?”

17 “I know King Solomon will do anything you ask him,”
Adonijah continued. “Please ask him to give me Abishag the
Shunammite to be my wife.”

18 “Very well,” she answered. “I will speak to the king for
you.”

19 So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for
Adonijah. When Solomon saw her, he stood up to meet her, then
bowed down, and sat on the throne. He told some servants to
bring another throne for his mother. Then she sat down at his
right side.

20 Bathsheba said, “I have one small thing to ask you. Please
do not refuse me.”

“Ask, mother,” the king answered. “I will not refuse you.”

21 So she said, “Allow Abishag the Shunammite to marry your
brother Adonijah.”

22 King Solomon answered his mother, “Why do you ask me to
give him Abishag? Why don’t you also ask for him to become the
king since he is my older brother? Abiathar the priest and Joab
son of Zeruiah would support him!”

[23]Then King Solomon swore by the name of the LORD, saying,
“May God punish me terribly if this doesn’t cost Adonijah his
life! [24]By the LORD who has given me the throne that belonged
to my father David and who has kept his promise and given the
kingdom to me and my people, Adonijah will die today!” [25]Then
King Solomon gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he
went and killed Adonijah.

[26]King Solomon said to Abiathar the priest, “I should kill you
too, but I will allow you to go back to your fields in Anathoth. I
will not kill you at this time, because you helped carry the Ark
of the LORD God while marching with my father David. And I
know you shared in all the hard times with him.” [27]Then
Solomon removed Abiathar from being the LORD’s priest. This
happened as the LORD had said it would, when he was speaking
in Shiloh about the priest Eli and his descendants.

[28]When Joab heard about what had happened, he was afraid.
He had supported Adonijah but not Absalom. So Joab ran to the
Tent of the LORD and took hold of the corners of the altar.[n]
[29]Someone told King Solomon that Joab had run to the Tent of
the LORD and was beside the altar. Then Solomon ordered
Benaiah to go and kill him.

[30]Benaiah went into the Tent of the LORD and said to Joab,
“The king says, ‘Come out!’”

But Joab answered, “No, I will die here.”

So Benaiah went back to the king and told him what Joab
had said. [31]Then the king ordered Benaiah, “Do as he says! Kill
him there and bury him. Then my family and I will be free of the
guilt of Joab, who has killed innocent people. [32]Without my
father knowing it, he killed two men who were much better than
he was—Abner son of Ner, the commander of Israel’s army, and
Amasa son of Jether, the commander of Judah’s army. So the
LORD will pay him back for those deaths. [33]Joab and his family
will be forever guilty for their deaths, but there will be peace
from the LORD for David, his descendants, his family, and his
throne forever.”

[34]So Benaiah son of Jehoiada killed Joab, and he was buried
near his home in the desert. [35]The king then made Benaiah son
of Jehoiada commander of the army in Joab’s place. He also
made Zadok the new high priest in Abiathar’s place.

[36]Next the king sent for Shimei. Solomon said to him, “Build
a house for yourself in Jerusalem and live there. Don’t leave the
city. [37]The very day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley,
someone will kill you, and it will be your own fault.”

[38]So Shimei answered the king, “I agree with what you say. I
will do what you say, my master and king.” So Shimei lived in
Jerusalem for a long time.

[39]But three years later two of Shimei’s slaves ran away to
Achish king of Gath, who was the son of Maacah. Shimei heard

that his slaves were in Gath, [40]so he put his saddle on his donkey and went to Achish at Gath to find them. Then he brought them back from Gath.

[41]Someone told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and had returned. [42]So Solomon sent for Shimei and said, “I made you promise in the name of the LORD not to leave Jerusalem. I warned you if you went out anywhere you would die, and you agreed to what I said. [43]Why did you break your promise to the LORD and disobey my command?” [44]The king also said, “You know the many wrong things you did to my father David, so now the LORD will punish you for those wrongs. [45]But the LORD will bless me and make the rule of David safe before the LORD forever.”

[46]Then the king ordered Benaiah to kill Shimei, and he did. Now Solomon was in full control of his kingdom.

## Psalm 68:11–14

[11]The Lord gave the command,
and a great army told the news:

[12]“Kings and their armies run away.
In camp they divide the wealth taken in war.

[13]Those who stayed by the campfires
will share the riches taken in battle.”

[14]The Almighty scattered kings
like snow on Mount Zalmon.

## Proverbs 17:7–9

[7]Fools should not be proud,
and rulers should not be liars.

[8]Some people think they can pay others to do anything they ask.
They think it will work every time.

[9]Whoever forgives someone's sin makes a friend,
but gossiping about the sin breaks up friendships.

## John 9:24–41

[24]So for the second time, they called the man who had been blind. They said, "You should give God the glory by telling the truth. We know that this man is a sinner."
[25]He answered, "I don't know if he is a sinner. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I see."
[26]They asked, "What did he do to you? How did he make you see again?"
[27]He answered, "I already told you, and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his followers, too?"
[28]Then they insulted him and said, "You are his follower, but we are followers of Moses. [29]We know that God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where this man comes from."
[30]The man answered, "This is a very strange thing. You don't know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. [31]We all know that God does not listen to sinners, but he listens to anyone who worships and obeys him. [32]Nobody has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a man born blind. [33]If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."
[34]They answered, "You were born full of sin! Are you trying to teach us?" And they threw him out.

### *Spiritual Blindness*

[35]When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, Jesus found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"
[36]He asked, "Who is the Son of Man, sir, so that I can believe in him?"
[37]Jesus said to him, "You have seen him. The Son of Man is the one talking with you."
[38]He said, "Lord, I believe!" Then the man worshiped Jesus.
[39]Jesus said, "I came into this world so that the world could be judged. I came so that the blind[n] would see and so that those who see will become blind."
[40]Some of the Pharisees who were nearby heard Jesus say

this and asked, “Are you saying we are blind, too?”

41 Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But since you keep saying you see, your guilt remains.”

# May 28

## Every Child Has a Name

*“I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.”*

John 10:14

The shepherd knows his sheep. He calls them by name. When we see a crowd, we see exactly that, a crowd … We see people, not persons, but people. A herd of humans. A flock of faces. That’s what we see.

But not so with the Shepherd. To him every face is different. Every face is a story. Every face is a child. Every child has a name …

The shepherd knows his sheep. He knows each one by name. The Shepherd knows you. He knows your name. And he will never forget it.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## 1 Kings 3:1—4:34

### *Solomon Asks for Wisdom*

3 Solomon made an agreement with the king of Egypt by
marrying his daughter and bringing her to Jerusalem. At this
time Solomon was still building his palace and the Temple of the
LORD, as well as a wall around Jerusalem. 2The Temple for the
worship of the LORD had not yet been finished, so people were
still sacrificing at altars in many places of worship. 3Solomon
showed he loved the LORD by following the commands his father
David had given him, except many other places of worship were
still used to offer sacrifices and to burn incense.

4King Solomon went to Gibeon to offer a sacrifice, because it
was the most important place of worship. He offered a thousand
burnt offerings on that altar. 5While he was at Gibeon, the LORD
appeared to him in a dream during the night. God said, “Ask for

whatever you want me to give you."

6Solomon answered, "You were very kind to your servant, my
father David. He obeyed you, and he was honest and lived right.
You showed great kindness to him when you allowed his son to
be king after him. 7LORD my God, now you have made me, your
servant, king in my father's place. But I am like a little child; I
don't know how to do what must be done. 8I, your servant, am
here among your chosen people, and there are too many of
them to count. 9I ask that you give me a heart that understands,
so I can rule the people in the right way and will know the
difference between right and wrong. Otherwise, it is impossible
to rule this great people of yours."

10The LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked this. 11So
God said to him, "You did not ask for a long life, or riches for
yourself, or the death of your enemies. Since you asked for
wisdom to make the right decisions, 12I will do what you asked.
I will give you wisdom and understanding that is greater than
anyone has had in the past or will have in the future. 13I will
also give you what you did not ask for: riches and honor. During
your life no other king will be as great as you. 14If you follow me
and obey my laws and commands, as your father David did, I
will also give you a long life."

15After Solomon woke up from the dream, he went to
Jerusalem. He stood before the Ark of the Agreement with the
LORD, where he made burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.
After that, he gave a feast for all his leaders and officers.

## *Solomon Makes a Wise Decision*

16One day two women who were prostitutes came to
Solomon. As they stood before him, 17one of the women said,
"My master, this woman and I live in the same house. I gave
birth to a baby while she was there with me. 18Three days later
this woman also gave birth to a baby. No one else was in the
house with us; it was just the two of us. 19One night this woman
rolled over on her baby, and he died. 20So she took my son from
my bed during the night while I was asleep, and she carried him
to her bed. Then she put the dead baby in my bed. 21The next
morning when I got up to feed my baby, I saw that he was dead!
When I looked at him more closely, I realized he was not my
son."

22"No!" the other woman cried. "The living baby is my son,
and the dead baby is yours!"

But the first woman said, "No! The dead baby is yours, and
the living one is mine!" So the two women argued before the
king.

23Then King Solomon said, "One of you says, 'My son is alive
and your son is dead.' Then the other one says, 'No! Your son is

dead and my son is alive.’”

24The king sent his servants to get a sword. When they brought it to him, 25he said, “Cut the living baby into two pieces, and give each woman half.”

26The real mother of the living child was full of love for her son. So she said to the king, “Please, my master, don’t kill him! Give the baby to her!”

But the other woman said, “Neither of us will have him. Cut him into two pieces!”

27Then King Solomon said, “Don’t kill him. Give the baby to the first woman, because she is the real mother.”

28When the people of Israel heard about King Solomon’s decision, they respected him very much. They saw he had wisdom from God to make the right decisions.

## *Solomon’s Officers*

4 King Solomon ruled over all Israel. 2These are the names of his leading officers:

Azariah son of Zadok was the priest;

3Elihoreph and Ahijah, sons of Shisha, recorded what happened in the courts;

Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud recorded the history of the people;

4Benaiah son of Jehoiada was commander of the army;

Zadok and Abiathar were priests;

5Azariah son of Nathan was in charge of the district governors;

Zabud son of Nathan was a priest and adviser to the king;

6Ahishar was responsible for everything in the palace;

Adoniram son of Abda was in charge of the labor force.

7Solomon placed twelve governors over the districts of Israel, who gathered food from their districts for the king and his family. Each governor was responsible for bringing food to the king one month of each year. 8These are the names of the twelve governors:

Ben-Hur was governor of the mountain country of Ephraim.

9Ben-Deker was governor of Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh, and Elon Bethhanan.

10Ben-Hesed was governor of Arubboth, Socoh, and all the land of Hepher.

11Ben-Abinadab was governor of Naphoth Dor. (He was married to Taphath, Solomon’s daughter.)

12Baana son of Ahilud was governor of Taanach, Megiddo, and all of Beth Shan next to Zarethan. This was below Jezreel from Beth Shan to Abel Meholah across from Jokmeam.

13Ben-Geber was governor of Ramoth in Gilead. (He was governor of all the towns of Jair in Gilead. Jair was the son of Manasseh. Ben-Geber was also over the district of Argob in

Bashan, which had sixty large, walled cities with bronze bars on their gates.)

14 Ahinadab son of Iddo was governor of Mahanaim.

15 Ahimaaz was governor of Naphtali. (He was married to Basemath, Solomon's daughter.)

16 Baana son of Hushai was governor of Asher and Aloth.

17 Jehoshaphat son of Paruah was governor of Issachar.

18 Shimei son of Ela was governor of Benjamin.

19 Geber son of Uri was governor of Gilead. Gilead had been the country of Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan. But Geber was the only governor over this district.

## *Solomon's Kingdom*

20 There were as many people in Judah and Israel as grains of sand on the seashore. The people ate, drank, and were happy.
21 Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought Solomon the payments he demanded, and they were under his control all his life.

22 Solomon needed much food each day to feed himself and all the people who ate at his table: one hundred ninety-five bushels of fine flour, three hundred ninety bushels of grain,
23 ten cows that were fed on good grain, twenty cows that were raised in the fields, one hundred sheep, three kinds of deer, and fattened birds.

24 Solomon controlled all the countries west of the Euphrates River—the land from Tiphsah to Gaza. And he had peace on all sides of his kingdom. 25 During Solomon's life Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba,[n] also lived in peace; all of his people were able to sit under their own fig trees and grapevines.

26 Solomon had four thousand stalls for his chariot horses and twelve thousand horses. 27 Each month one of the district governors gave King Solomon all the food he needed—enough for every person who ate at the king's table. The governors made sure he had everything he needed. 28 They also brought enough barley and straw for Solomon's chariot and work horses; each person brought this grain to the right place.

## *Solomon's Wisdom*

29 God gave Solomon great wisdom so he could understand many things. His wisdom was as hard to measure as the grains of sand on the seashore. 30 His wisdom was greater than any wisdom of the East, or any wisdom in Egypt. 31 He was wiser than anyone on earth. He was even wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, as well as Heman, Calcol, and Darda—the three sons

of Mahol. King Solomon became famous in all the surrounding countries. [32]During his life he spoke three thousand wise sayings and also wrote one thousand five songs. [33]He taught about many kinds of plants—everything from the great cedar trees of Lebanon to the weeds that grow out of the walls. He also taught about animals, birds, crawling things, and fish. [34]People from all nations came to listen to King Solomon's wisdom. The kings of all nations sent them to him, because they had heard of Solomon's wisdom.

## Psalm 68:15–20

[15]The mountains of Bashan are high;
the mountains of Bashan have many peaks.

[16]Why do you mountains with many peaks look with envy
on the mountain that God chose for his home?
The LORD will live there forever.

[17]God comes with millions of chariots;
the Lord comes from Mount Sinai to his holy place.

[18]When you went up to the heights,
you led a parade of captives.
You received gifts from the people,

even from those who turned against you.
And the LORD God will live there.

[19]Praise the Lord, God our Savior,
who helps us every day. *Selah*

[20]Our God is a God who saves us;
the LORD God saves us from death.

## Proverbs 17:10–12

10 A wise person will learn more from a warning
than a fool will learn from a hundred lashings.

11 Disobedient people look only for trouble,
so a cruel messenger will be sent against them.

12 It is better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs
than to meet a fool doing foolish things.

## John 10:1–21

### *The Shepherd and His Sheep*

10 Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the person who does not
enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in some other way, is
a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the door is the
shepherd of the sheep. 3 The one who guards the door opens it
for him. And the sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd. He
calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he
brings all his sheep out, he goes ahead of them, and they follow
him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a
stranger. They will run away from him because they don’t know
his voice.” 6 Jesus told the people this story, but they did not
understand what it meant.

### *Jesus Is the Good Shepherd*

7 So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the door for
the sheep. 8 All the people who came before me were thieves
and robbers. The sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door,
and the person who enters through me will be saved and will be
able to come in and go out and find pasture. 10 A thief comes to
steal and kill and destroy, but I came to give life—life in all its
fullness.

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life
for the sheep. 12 The worker who is paid to keep the sheep is
different from the shepherd who owns them. When the worker

sees a wolf coming, he runs away and leaves the sheep alone. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. [13]The man runs away because he is only a paid worker and does not really care about the sheep.

[14]“I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me, [15]just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I give my life for the sheep. [16]I have other sheep that are not in this flock, and I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd. [17]The Father loves me because I give my life so that I can take it back again. [18]No one takes it away from me; I give my own life freely. I have the right to give my life, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father commanded me todo.”

[19]Again the leaders did not agree with each other because of these words of Jesus. [20]Many of them said, “A demon has come into him and made him crazy. Why listen to him?”

[21]But others said, “A man who is crazy with a demon does not say things like this. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

# May 29

## Jesus Knows

*“I am the one God chose and sent into the world.”*

John 10:36

God with us. He knows hurt. His siblings called him crazy. He knows hunger. He made a meal out of wheat-field grains.

He knows exhaustion. So sleepy, he dozed in a storm-tossed boat.

Most of all, he knows sin. Not his own, mind you. But he knows yours.

Every lie you’ve told.

Person you’ve hurt.

Promise you’ve broken.

Every deed you’ve committed against God—for all sin is against God—Jesus knows. He knows them better than you do. He knows their price. Because he paid it.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## 1 Kings 5:1—6:38

### *Preparing to Build the Temple*

5 Hiram, the king of Tyre, had always been David’s friend. When
Hiram heard that Solomon had been made king in David’s
place, he sent his messengers to Solomon. 2Solomon sent this
message back to King Hiram: 3“You remember my father David
had to fight many wars with the countries around him, so he
was never able to build a temple for worshiping the LORD his
God. David was waiting until the LORD allowed him to defeat all
his enemies. 4But now the LORD my God has given me peace on
all sides of my country. I have no enemies now, and no danger
threatens my people.

5“The LORD promised my father David, ‘I will make your son
king after you, and he will build a temple for worshiping me.’

Now, I plan to build that temple for worshiping the LORD my God. 6So send your men to cut down cedar trees for me from Lebanon. My servants will work with yours, and I will pay them whatever wages you decide. We don't have anyone who can cut down trees as well as the people of Sidon."

7When Hiram heard what Solomon asked, he was very happy. He said, "Praise the LORD today! He has given David a wise son to rule over this great nation!" 8Then Hiram sent back this message to Solomon: "I received the message you sent, and I will give you all the cedar and pine trees you want. 9My servants will bring them down from Lebanon to the sea. There I will tie them together and float them along the shore to the place you choose. Then I will separate the logs there, and you can take them away. In return it is my wish that you give food to all those who live with me." 10So Hiram gave Solomon as much cedar and pine as he wanted. 11And Solomon gave Hiram about one hundred twenty-five thousand bushels of wheat each year to feed the people who lived with him. Solomon also gave him about one hundred fifteen thousand gallons of pure olive oil every year.

12The LORD gave Solomon wisdom as he had promised. And there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; these two kings made a treaty between themselves.

13King Solomon forced thirty thousand men of Israel to help in this work. 14He sent a group of ten thousand men each month to Lebanon. Each group worked in Lebanon one month, then went home for two months. A man named Adoniram was in charge. 15Solomon forced eighty thousand men to work in the hill country, cutting stone, and he had seventy thousand men to carry the stones. 16There were also thirty-three hundred men who directed the workers. 17King Solomon commanded them to cut large blocks of fine stone to be used for the foundation of the Temple. 18Solomon's and Hiram's builders and the men from Byblos carved the stones and prepared the stones and the logs for building the Temple.

## *Solomon Builds the Temple*

6 Solomon began to build the Temple four hundred eighty years after the people of Israel had left Egypt. This was during the fourth year of King Solomon's rule over Israel. It was the second month, the month of Ziv.

2The Temple was ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and forty-five feet high. 3The porch in front of the main room of the Temple was fifteen feet deep and thirty feet wide. This room ran along the front of the Temple itself. Its width was equal to that of the Temple. 4The Temple also had windows that opened and closed. 5Solomon also built some side rooms against the walls of

the main room and the inner room of the Temple. He built rooms all around. 6The rooms on the bottom floor were seven and one-half feet wide. Those on the middle floor were nine feet wide, and the rooms above them were ten and one-half feet wide. The Temple wall that formed the side of each room was thinner than the wall in the room below. These rooms were pushed against the Temple wall, but they did not have their main beams built into this wall.

7The stones were prepared at the same place where they were cut from the ground. Since these stones were the only ones used to build the Temple, there was no noise of hammers, axes, or any other iron tools at the Temple.

8The entrance to the lower rooms beside the Temple was on the south side. From there, stairs went up to the second-floor rooms. And from there, stairs went on to the third-floor rooms. 9Solomon put a roof made from beams and cedar boards on the Temple. So he finished building the Temple 10as well as the bottom floor that was beside the Temple. This bottom floor was seven and one-half feet high and was attached to the Temple by cedar beams.

11The LORD said to Solomon: 12"If you obey all my laws and commands, I will do for you what I promised your father David. 13I will live among the Israelites in this Temple, and I will never leave my people Israel."

14So Solomon finished building the Temple. 15The inside walls were covered from floor to ceiling with cedar boards. The floor was made from pine boards. 16A room thirty feet long was built in the back part of the Temple. This room, called the Most Holy Place, was separated from the rest of the Temple by cedar boards which reached from floor to ceiling. 17The main room, the one in front of the Most Holy Place, was sixty feet long. 18Everything inside the Temple was covered with cedar, which was carved with pictures of flowers and plants. A person could not see the stones of the wall, only the cedar.

19Solomon prepared the inner room at the back of the Temple to keep the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD. 20This inner room was thirty feet long, thirty feet wide, and thirty feet high. He covered this room with pure gold, and he also covered the altar of cedar. 21He covered the inside of the Temple with pure gold, placing gold chains across the front of the inner room, which was also covered with gold. 22So all the inside of the Temple, as well as the altar of the Most Holy Place, was covered with gold.

23Solomon made two creatures from olive wood and placed them in the Most Holy Place. Each creature was fifteen feet tall 24and had two wings. Each wing was seven and one-half feet long, so it was fifteen feet from the end of one wing to the end of the other. 25The creatures were the same size and shape;

[26]each was fifteen feet tall. [27]These creatures were put beside each other in the Most Holy Place with their wings spread out. One creature's wing touched one wall, and the other creature's wing touched the other wall with their wings touching each other in the middle of the room. [28]These two creatures were covered with gold.

[29]All the walls around the Temple were carved with pictures of creatures with wings, as well as palm trees and flowers. This was true for both the main room and the inner room. [30]The floors of both rooms were covered with gold.

[31]Doors made from olive wood were placed at the entrance to the Most Holy Place. These doors had five-sided frames. [32]Creatures with wings, as well as palm trees and flowers, were also carved on the two olive wood doors that were covered with gold. The creatures and the palm trees on the doors were covered with gold as well. [33]At the entrance to the main room there was a square door frame made of olive wood. [34]Two doors were made from pine. Each door had two parts so the doors folded. [35]The doors were covered with pictures of creatures with wings, as well as palm trees and flowers. All of the carvings were covered with gold, which was evenly spread over them.

[36]The inner courtyard was enclosed by walls, which were made of three rows of cut stones and one row of cedar boards.

[37]Work began on the Temple in Ziv, the second month, during the fourth year Solomon was king over Israel. [38]The Temple was finished during the eleventh year he was king, in the eighth month, the month of Bul. It was built exactly as it was planned. Solomon had spent seven years building it.

## Psalm 68:21–27

[21]God will crush his enemies' heads,
the hairy skulls of those who continue to sin.

[22]The Lord said, "I will bring the enemy back from Bashan;
I will bring them back from the depths of the sea.

[23]Then you can stick your feet in their blood,
and your dogs can lick their share."

[24]God, people have seen your victory march;
God my King marched into the holy place.

[25]The singers are in front and the instruments are behind.
In the middle are the girls with the tambourines.

[26]Praise God in the meeting place;
praise the LORD in the gathering of Israel.

[27]There is the smallest tribe, Benjamin, leading them.
And there are the leaders of Judah with their group.
There also are the leaders of Zebulun and of Naphtali.

## Proverbs 17:13–15

[13]Whoever gives evil in return for good
will always have trouble at home.

[14]Starting a quarrel is like a leak in a dam,
so stop it before a fight breaks out.

[15]The LORD hates both of these things:
freeing the guilty and punishing the innocent.

## John 10:22–42

### *Jesus Is Rejected*

[22]The time came for the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, [23]and Jesus was walking in the Temple in Solomon's Porch. [24]Some people gathered around him and said, "How long will you make us wonder about you? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

[25]Jesus answered, "I told you already, but you did not

believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name show who I am.
26But you don't believe, because you are not my sheep. 27My
sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28I
give them eternal life, and they will never die, and no one can
steal them out of my hand. 29My Father gave my sheep to me.
He is greater than all, and no person can steal my sheep out of
my Father's hand. 30The Father and I are one."

31Again some of the people picked up stones to kill Jesus.
32But he said to them, "I have done many good works from the
Father. Which of these good works are you killing me for?"

33They answered, "We are not killing you because of any
good work you did, but because you speak against God. You are
only a human, but you say you are the same as God!"

34Jesus answered, "It is written in your law that God said, 'I
said, you are gods.'[n] 35This Scripture called those people gods
who received God's message, and Scripture is always true. 36So
why do you say that I speak against God because I said, 'I am
God's Son'? I am the one God chose and sent into the world. 37If
I don't do what my Father does, then don't believe me. 38But if I
do what my Father does, even though you don't believe in me,
believe what I do. Then you will know and understand that the
Father is in me and I am in the Father."

39They tried to take Jesus again, but he escaped from them.

40Then he went back across the Jordan River to the place
where John had first baptized. Jesus stayed there, 41and many
people came to him and said, "John never did a miracle, but
everything John said about this man is true." 42And in that place
many believed in Jesus.

# May 30

## What Friends Do

*A friend loves you all the time.*

Proverbs 17:17

One gets the impression that to John, Jesus was above all a loyal companion. Messiah? Yes. Son of God? Indeed. Miracle worker? That, too. But more than anything Jesus was a pal. Someone you could go camping with or bowling with or count the stars with …

Now what do you do with a friend? (Well, that's rather simple too.) You stick by him.

Maybe that is why John is the only one of the twelve who was at the cross. He came to say good-bye. By his own admission he hadn't quite put the pieces together yet. But that didn't really matter. As far as he was concerned, his closest friend was in trouble and he came to help.

"Can you take care of my mother?"

Of course. That's what friends are for.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## 1 Kings 7:1—8:66

### *Solomon's Palace*

7 King Solomon also built a palace for himself; it took him
thirteen years to finish it. 2Built of cedars from the Forest of
Lebanon, it was one hundred fifty feet long, seventy-five feet
wide, and forty-five feet high. It had four rows of cedar columns
which supported the cedar beams. 3There were forty-five beams
on the roof, with fifteen beams in each row, and the ceiling was
covered with cedar above the beams. 4Windows were placed in
three rows facing each other. 5All the doors were square, and
the three doors at each end faced each other.

6Solomon also built the porch that had pillars. This porch

was seventy-five feet long and forty-five feet wide. Along the front of the porch was a roof supported by pillars.

7 Solomon also built a throne room where he judged people, called the Hall of Justice. This room was covered with cedar from the floor to the ceiling. 8 The palace where Solomon lived was built like the Hall of Justice, and it was behind this hall. Solomon also built the same kind of palace for his wife, who was the daughter of the king of Egypt.

9 All these buildings were made with blocks of fine stone. First they were carefully cut. Then they were trimmed with a saw in the front and back. These fine stones went from the foundations of the buildings to the top of the walls. Even the courtyard was made with blocks of stone. 10 The foundations were made with large blocks of fine stone, some as long as fifteen feet. Others were twelve feet long. 11 On top of these foundation stones were other blocks of fine stone and cedar beams. 12 The palace courtyard, the courtyard inside the Temple, and the porch of the Temple were surrounded by walls. All of these walls had three rows of stone blocks and one row of cedar beams.

## *The Temple Is Completed Inside*

13 King Solomon sent to Tyre and had Huram brought to him. 14 Huram's mother was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali. His father was from Tyre and had been skilled in making things from bronze. Huram was also very skilled and experienced in bronze work. So he came to King Solomon and did all the bronze work.

15 He made two bronze pillars, each one twenty-seven feet tall and eighteen feet around. 16 He also made two bronze capitals that were seven and one-half feet tall, and he put them on top of the pillars. 17 Then he made a net of seven chains for each capital, which covered the capitals on top of the two pillars. 18 He made two rows of bronze pomegranates to go on the nets. These covered the capitals at the top of the pillars. 19 The capitals on top of the pillars in the porch were shaped like lilies, and they were six feet tall. 20 The capitals were on top of both pillars, above the bowl-shaped section and next to the nets. At that place there were two hundred pomegranates in rows all around the capitals. 21 Huram put these two bronze pillars at the porch of the Temple. He named the south pillar He Establishes and the north pillar In Him Is Strength. 22 The capitals on top of the pillars were shaped like lilies. So the work on the pillars was finished.

23 Then Huram made from bronze a large round bowl, which was called the Sea. It was forty-five feet around, fifteen feet across, and seven and one-half feet deep. 24 Around the outer

edge of the bowl was a rim. Under this rim were two rows of bronze plants which surrounded the bowl. There were ten plants every eighteen inches, and these plants were made in one piece with the bowl. 25The bowl rested on the backs of twelve bronze bulls that faced outward from the center of the bowl. Three bulls faced north, three faced west, three faced south, and three faced east. 26The sides of the bowl were four inches thick, and it held about eleven thousand gallons. The rim of the bowl was like the rim of a cup or like a lily blossom.

27Then Huram made ten bronze stands, each one six feet long, six feet wide, and four and one-half feet high. 28The stands were made from square sides, which were put on frames. 29On the sides were bronze lions, bulls, and creatures with wings. On the frames above and below the lions and bulls were designs of flowers hammered into the bronze. 30Each stand had four bronze wheels with bronze axles. At the corners there were bronze supports for a large bowl, and the supports had designs of flowers. 31There was a frame on top of the bowls, eighteen inches high above the bowls. The opening of the bowl was round, twenty-seven inches deep. Designs were carved into the bronze on the frame, which was square, not round. 32The four wheels, placed under the frame, were twenty-seven inches high. The axles between the wheels were made as one piece with the stand. 33The wheels were like a chariot's wheels. Everything on the wheels—the axles, rims, spokes, and hubs—were made of bronze.

34The four supports were on the four corners of each stand. They were made as one piece with the stand. 35A strip of bronze around the top of each stand was nine inches deep. It was also made as one piece with the stand. 36The sides of the stand and the frames were covered with carvings of creatures with wings, as well as lions, palm trees, and flowers. 37This is the way Huram made the ten stands. The bronze for each stand was melted and poured into a mold, so all the stands were the same size and shape.

38Huram also made ten bronze bowls, one bowl for each of the ten stands. Each bowl was six feet across and could hold about two hundred thirty gallons. 39Huram put five stands on the south side of the Temple and five on the north side. He put the large bowl in the southeast corner of the Temple. 40Huram also made bowls, shovels, and small bowls.

So Huram finished all his work for King Solomon on the Temple of the LORD:

41two pillars;

two large bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars;

two nets to cover the two large bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars;

42 four hundred pomegranates for the two nets (there were two rows of pomegranates for each net covering the bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars);

43 ten stands with a bowl on each stand;

44 the large bowl with twelve bulls under it;

45 the pots, shovels, small bowls, and all the utensils for the Temple of the LORD.

Huram made everything King Solomon wanted from polished bronze. 46 The king had these things poured into clay molds that were made in the plain of the Jordan River between Succoth and Zarethan. 47 Solomon never weighed the bronze used to make these things, because there was too much to weigh. So the total weight of all the bronze was never known.

48 Solomon also made all the items for the Temple of the LORD:

the golden altar;

the golden table which held the bread that shows God's people are in his presence;

49 the lampstands of pure gold (five on the right side and five on the left side in front of the Most Holy Place);

the flowers, lamps, and tongs of gold;

50 the pure gold bowls, wick trimmers, small bowls, pans, and dishes used to carry coals;

the gold hinges for the doors of the Most Holy Place and the main room of the Temple.

51 Finally the work King Solomon did for the Temple of the LORD was finished. Solomon brought in everything his father David had set apart for the Temple—silver, gold, and other articles. He put everything in the treasuries of the Temple of the LORD.

## *The Ark Is Brought into the Temple*

8 King Solomon called for the elders of Israel, the heads of the tribes, and the leaders of the families to come to him in Jerusalem. He wanted them to bring the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD from the older part of the city. 2 So all the Israelites came together with King Solomon during the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month.

3 When all the elders of Israel arrived, the priests lifted up the Ark. 4 They carried the Ark of the LORD, the Meeting Tent, and the holy utensils; the priests and the Levites brought them up. 5 King Solomon and all the Israelites gathered before the Ark and sacrificed so many sheep and cattle no one could count them all. 6 Then the priests put the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD in its place inside the Most Holy Place in the Temple, under the wings of the golden creatures. 7 The wings of these creatures were spread out over the place for the Ark, covering it and its carrying poles. 8 The carrying poles were so long that anyone standing in the Holy Place in front of the Most Holy Place could see the ends of the poles, but no one could see them from outside the Holy Place. The poles are still there today. 9 The only things inside the Ark were two stone tablets[n] that Moses had put in the Ark at Mount Sinai. That was where the LORD made his agreement with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

10 When the priests left the Holy Place, a cloud filled the Temple of the LORD. 11 The priests could not continue their work, because the Temple was filled with the glory of the LORD.

## *Solomon Speaks to the People*

12 Then Solomon said, “The LORD said he would live in a dark cloud. 13 LORD, I have truly built a wonderful Temple for you—a place for you to live forever.”

14 While all the Israelites were standing there, King Solomon turned to them and blessed them.

15 Then he said, “Praise the LORD, the God of Israel. He has done what he promised to my father David. The LORD said, 16 ‘Since the time I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have

not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel where a temple will be built for me. But I have chosen David to lead my people Israel.'

17"My father David wanted to build a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel. 18But the LORD said to my father David, 'It was good that you wanted to build a temple for me. 19But you are not the one to build it. Your son, who comes from your own body, is the one who will build my temple.'

20"Now the LORD has kept his promise. I am the king now in place of David my father. Now I rule Israel as the LORD promised, and I have built the Temple for the LORD, the God of Israel. 21I have made a place there for the Ark, in which is the Agreement the LORD made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt."

## *Solomon's Prayer*

22Then Solomon stood facing the LORD's altar, and all the Israelites were standing behind him. He spread out his hands toward the sky 23and said:

"LORD, God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven above or on earth below. You keep your agreement of love with your servants who truly follow you. 24You have kept the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You spoke it with your own mouth and finished it with your hands today. 25Now LORD, God of Israel, keep the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You said, 'If your sons are careful to obey me as you have obeyed me, there will always be someone from your family ruling Israel.' 26Now, God of Israel, please continue to keep that promise you made to your servant David, my father.

27"But, God, can you really live here on the earth? The sky and the highest place in heaven cannot contain you. Surely this house which I have built cannot contain you. 28But please listen to my prayer and my request, because I am your servant. LORD my God, hear this prayer your servant prays to you today. 29Night and day please watch over this Temple where you have said, 'I will be worshiped there.' Hear the prayer I pray facing this Temple. 30Hear my prayers and the prayers of your people Israel when we pray facing this place. Hear from your home in heaven, and when you hear, forgive us.

31"If someone wrongs another person, he will be brought to the altar in this Temple. If he swears an oath that he is not guilty, 32then hear in heaven. Judge the case, punish the guilty, but declare that the innocent person is not guilty.

33"When your people, the Israelites, sin against you, their enemies will defeat them. But if they come back to you and praise you and pray to you in this Temple, 34then hear them in heaven. Forgive the sins of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land you gave to their ancestors.

35“When they sin against you, you will stop the rain from
falling on their land. Then they will pray, facing this place and
praising you; they will stop sinning when you make them suffer.
36When this happens, please hear their prayer in heaven, and
forgive the sins of your servants, the Israelites. Teach them to
do what is right. Then please send rain to this land you have
given particularly to them.

37“At times the land will become so dry that no food will
grow, or a great sickness will spread among the people.
Sometimes all the crops will be destroyed by locusts or
grasshoppers. Your people will be attacked in their cities by
their enemy or will become sick. 38When any of these things
happen, the people will become truly sorry. If your people
spread their hands in prayer toward this Temple, 39then hear
their prayers from your home in heaven. Forgive and treat each
person as he should be treated because you know what is in a
person’s heart. Only you know what is in everyone’s heart.
40Then your people will respect you as long as they live in this
land you gave to our ancestors.

41–42“People who are not Israelites, foreigners from other
lands, will hear about your greatness and power. They will come
from far away to pray at this Temple. 43Then hear from your
home in heaven, and do whatever they ask you. Then people
everywhere will know you and respect you, just as your people
in Israel do. Then everyone will know I built this Temple as a
place to worship you.

44“When your people go out to fight their enemies along
some road on which you send them, your people will pray to
you, facing the city which you have chosen and the Temple I
have built for you. 45Then hear in heaven their prayers, and do
what is right.

46“Everyone sins, so your people will also sin against you.
You will become angry with them and hand them over to their
enemies. Their enemies will capture them and take them away
to their countries far or near. 47Your people will be sorry for
their sins when they are held as prisoners in another country.
They will be sorry and pray to you in the land where they are
held as prisoners, saying, ‘We have sinned. We have done wrong
and acted wickedly.’ 48They will truly turn back to you in the
land of their enemies. They will pray to you, facing this land you
gave their ancestors, this city you have chosen, and the Temple
I have built for you. 49Then hear their prayers from your home
in heaven, and do what is right. 50Forgive your people of all
their sins and for turning against you. Make those who have
captured them show them mercy. 51Remember, they are your
special people. You brought them out of Egypt, as if you were
pulling them out of a blazing furnace.

52“Give your attention to my prayers and the prayers of your
people Israel. Listen to them anytime they ask you for help.

53You chose them from all the nations on earth to be your very
own people. This is what you promised through Moses your
servant when you brought our ancestors out of Egypt, Lord
God."
54Solomon prayed this prayer to the LORD, kneeling in front of
the altar with his arms raised toward heaven. When he finished
praying, he got up. 55Then, in a loud voice, he stood and blessed
all the people of Israel, saying: 56"Praise the LORD! He promised
he would give rest to his people Israel, and he has given us rest.
The LORD has kept all the good promises he gave through his
servant Moses. 57May the LORD our God be with us as he was
with our ancestors. May he never leave us, 58and may he turn
us to himself so we will follow him. Let us obey all the laws and
commands he gave our ancestors. 59May the LORD our God
remember this prayer day and night and do what is right for his
servant and his people Israel day by day. 60Then all the people
of the world will know the LORD is the only true God. 61You must
fully obey the LORD our God and follow all his laws and
commands. Continue to obey in the future as you do now."

### *Sacrifices Are Offered*

62Then King Solomon and all Israel with him offered
sacrifices to the LORD. 63Solomon killed twenty-two thousand
cattle and one hundred twenty thousand sheep as fellowship
offerings. So the king and all the people gave the Temple to the
LORD.
64On that day King Solomon made holy the middle part of the
courtyard which is in front of the Temple of the LORD. There he
offered whole burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the fat of the
fellowship offerings. He offered them in the courtyard, because
the bronze altar before the LORD was too small to hold all the
burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat of the fellowship
offerings.
65Solomon and all the Israelites celebrated the other festival
that came at that time. People came from as far away as Lebo
Hamath and the brook of Egypt. A great many people
celebrated before the LORD for seven days, then seven more
days, for a total of fourteen days. 66On the following day
Solomon sent the people home. They blessed the king as they
went, happy because of all the good things the LORD had done
for his servant David and his people Israel.

## Psalm 68:28–35

[28]God, order up your power;
show the mighty power you have used for us before.

[29]Kings will bring their wealth to you,
to your Temple in Jerusalem.

[30]Punish Egypt, the beast in the tall grass along the river.
Punish the leaders of nations, those bulls among the cows.

Defeated, they will bring you their silver.
Scatter those nations that love war.

[31]Messengers will come from Egypt;
the people of Cush will pray to God.

[32]Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
sing praises to the Lord. *Selah*

[33]Sing to the one who rides through the skies, which are from long ago.
He speaks with a thundering voice.

[34]Announce that God is powerful.
He rules over Israel,
and his power is in the skies.

[35]God, you are wonderful in your Temple.
The God of Israel gives his people strength and power.

Praise God!

## Proverbs 17:16–17

16 It won't do a fool any good to try to buy wisdom,
because he doesn't have the ability to be wise.

17 A friend loves you all the time,
and a brother helps in time of trouble.

## John 11:1–27

### *The Death of Lazarus*

11 A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in the town of
Bethany, where Mary and her sister Martha lived. 2 Mary was
the woman who later put perfume on the Lord and wiped his
feet with her hair. Mary's brother was Lazarus, the man who
was now sick. 3 So Mary and Martha sent someone to tell Jesus,
"Lord, the one you love is sick."

4 When Jesus heard this, he said, "This sickness will not end
in death. It is for the glory of God, to bring glory to the Son of
God." 5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 But
when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was
for two more days. 7 Then Jesus said to his followers, "Let's go
back to Judea."

8 The followers said, "But Teacher, some people there tried to
stone you to death only a short time ago. Now you want to go
back there?"

9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If
anyone walks in the daylight, he will not stumble, because he
can see by this world's light. 10 But if anyone walks at night, he
stumbles because there is no light to help him see."

11 After Jesus said this, he added, "Our friend Lazarus has
fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him."

12 The followers said, "But Lord, if he is only asleep, he will
be all right."

13 Jesus meant that Lazarus was dead, but his followers
thought he meant Lazarus was really sleeping. 14 So then Jesus
said plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am glad for your sakes I
was not there so that you may believe. But let's go to him now."

16 Then Thomas (the one called Didymus) said to the other
followers, "Let us also go so that we can die with him."

### *Jesus in Bethany*

17 When Jesus arrived, he learned that Lazarus had already

been dead and in the tomb for four days. [18]Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem. [19]Many of the Jews had come there to comfort Martha and Mary about their brother.

[20]When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed home. [21]Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. [22]But I know that even now God will give you anything you ask.”

[23]Jesus said, “Your brother will rise and live again.”

[24]Martha answered, “I know that he will rise and live again in the resurrection[n] on the last day.”

[25]Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will have life even if they die. [26]And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Martha, do you believe this?”

[27]Martha answered, “Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One coming to the world.”

# May 31

## He Weeps with Us

*Jesus cried.*

John 11:35

Jesus … weeps. He sits between Mary and Martha, puts an arm around each, and sobs … He weeps with them. He weeps for them.

He weeps with you.

He weeps for you.

He weeps so we will know: Mourning is not disbelieving. Flooded eyes don't represent a faithless heart. A person can enter a cemetery Jesus-certain of life after death and still have a Twin Tower crater in the heart. Christ did. He wept, and he knew he was ten minutes from seeing a living Lazarus!

And his tears give you permission to shed your own. Grief does not mean you don't trust; it simply means you can't stand the thought of another day without the Lazarus of your life. If Jesus gave the love, he understands the tears. So grieve, but don't grieve like those who don't know the rest of this story.

from *Next Door Savior*

## 1 Kings 9:1—10:29

### *The Lord Appears to Solomon Again*

9 Solomon finished building the Temple of the LORD and his royal
palace and everything he wanted to build. 2Then the LORD
appeared to him again just as he had done before, in Gibeon.
3The LORD said to him: "I have heard your prayer and what you
have asked me to do. You built this Temple, and I have made it a
holy place. I will be worshiped there forever and will watch over
it and protect it always.

4"But you must serve me as your father David did; he was
fair and sincere. You must obey all I have commanded and keep

my laws and rules. 5If you do, I will make your kingdom strong. This is the promise I made to your father David—that someone from his family would always rule Israel.

6"But you and your children must follow me and obey the laws and commands I have given you. You must not serve or worship other gods. 7If you do, I will force Israel to leave the land I have given them, and I will leave this Temple that I have made holy. All the nations will make fun of Israel and speak evil about them. 8If the Temple is destroyed, everyone who passes by will be shocked. They will make fun of you and ask, 'Why did the LORD do this terrible thing to this land and this Temple?' 9People will answer, 'This happened because they left the LORD their God. This was the God who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, but they decided to follow other gods. They worshiped and served those gods, so the LORD brought all this disaster on them.'"

## *Solomon's Other Achievements*

10By the end of twenty years, King Solomon had built two buildings—the Temple of the LORD and the royal palace. 11At that time King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had helped with the buildings. Hiram had given Solomon all the cedar, pine, and gold he wanted. 12So Hiram traveled from Tyre to see the towns Solomon had given him, but when he saw them, he was not pleased. 13He asked, "What good are these towns you have given me, my brother?" So he named them the Land of Cabul,[n] and they are still called that today. 14Hiram had sent Solomon about nine thousand pounds of gold.

15This is the account of the forced labor Solomon used to build the Temple and the palace. He had them fill in the land and build the wall around Jerusalem. He also had them rebuild the cities of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. 16(In the past the king of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. After burning it, he killed the Canaanites who lived there. Then he gave it as a wedding present to his daughter, who married Solomon. 17So Solomon rebuilt it.) He also built the cities of Lower Beth Horon 18and Baalath, as well as Tadmor, which is in the desert. 19King Solomon also built cities for storing grain and supplies and cities for his chariots and horses. He built whatever he wanted in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and everywhere he ruled.

20There were other people in the land who were not Israelites—Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 21They were descendants of people that the Israelites had not destroyed. Solomon forced them to work for him as slaves, as is still true today. 22But Solomon did not make slaves of the Israelites. They were his soldiers, government leaders, officers,

captains, chariot commanders, and drivers.

23These were his most important officers over the work. There were five hundred fifty supervisors over the people who did the work on Solomon's projects.

24The daughter of the king of Egypt moved from the old part of Jerusalem to the palace that Solomon had built for her. Then Solomon filled in the surrounding land.

25Three times each year Solomon offered whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he had built for the LORD. He also burned incense before the LORD. So he finished the work on the Temple.

26King Solomon also built ships at Ezion Geber, a town near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. 27Hiram had skilled sailors, so he sent them to serve in these ships with Solomon's men. 28The ships sailed to Ophir and brought back about thirty-two thousand pounds of gold to King Solomon.

## *The Queen of Sheba Visits Solomon*

10 When the queen of Sheba heard about Solomon, she came to test him with hard questions. 2She traveled to Jerusalem with a large group of servants and camels carrying spices, jewels, and much gold. When she came to Solomon, she talked with him about all she had in mind, 3and Solomon answered all her questions. Nothing was too hard for him to explain to her. 4The queen of Sheba learned that Solomon was very wise. She saw the palace he had built, 5the food on his table, his many officers, the palace servants, and their good clothes. She saw the servants who served him at feasts and the whole burnt offerings he made in the Temple of the LORD. All these things amazed her.

6So she said to King Solomon, "What I heard in my own country about your achievements and wisdom is true. 7I could not believe it then, but now I have come and seen it with my own eyes. I was not told even half of it! Your wisdom and wealth are much greater than I had heard. 8Your men and officers are very lucky, because in always serving you, they are able to hear your wisdom. 9Praise the LORD your God, who was pleased to make you king of Israel. The LORD has constant love for Israel, so he made you king to keep justice and to rule fairly."

10Then she gave the king about nine thousand pounds of gold and many spices and jewels. No one since that time has brought more spices than the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

11(Hiram's ships brought gold from Ophir, as well as much juniper wood and jewels. 12Solomon used the juniper wood to build supports for the Temple of the LORD and the palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. Such fine juniper wood has not been brought in or been seen since that time.)

13King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba everything she

wanted and asked for, in addition to what he had already given her of his wealth. Then she and her servants returned to her own country.

### *Solomon's Wealth*

14 Every year King Solomon received about fifty thousand
pounds of gold. 15 Besides that, he also received gold from the
traders and merchants, as well as from the kings of Arabia and
governors of the land.
16 King Solomon made two hundred large shields of
hammered gold, each of which contained about seven and one-
half pounds of gold. 17 He also made three hundred smaller
shields of hammered gold, each of which contained about four
pounds of gold. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of
Lebanon.
18 The king built a large throne of ivory and covered it with
fine gold. 19 The throne had six steps on it, and its back was
round at the top. There were armrests on both sides of the
chair, and each armrest had a lion beside it. 20 Twelve lions
stood on the six steps, one lion at each end of each step.
Nothing like this had ever been made for any other kingdom.
21 All of Solomon's drinking cups, as well as the dishes in the
Palace of the Forest of Lebanon, were made of pure gold.
Nothing was made from silver, because silver was not valuable
in Solomon's time.
22 King Solomon also had many trading ships at sea, along
with Hiram's ships. Every three years the ships returned,
bringing back gold, silver, ivory, apes, and baboons.
23 So Solomon had more riches and wisdom than all the other
kings on earth. 24 People everywhere wanted to see King
Solomon and listen to the wisdom God had given him. 25 Every
year those who came brought gifts of silver and gold, clothes,
weapons, spices, horses, and mules.
26 Solomon had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve
thousand horses. He kept some in special cities for the chariots,
and others he kept with him in Jerusalem. 27 In Jerusalem
Solomon made silver as common as stones and cedar trees as
common as the fig trees on the western hills. 28 He imported
horses from Egypt and Kue. His traders bought them in Kue.
29 A chariot from Egypt cost about fifteen pounds of silver, and a
horse cost nearly four pounds of silver. Solomon's traders also
sold horses and chariots to all the kings of the Hittites and the
Arameans.

## Psalm 69:1–4

## *A Cry for Help*

**For the director of music. To the tune of “Lilies.” A psalm of David.**

69 God, save me,
because the water has risen to my neck.

2I’m sinking down into the mud,
and there is nothing to stand on.

I am in deep water,
and the flood covers me.

3I am tired from calling for help;
my throat is sore.

My eyes are tired from waiting
for God to help me.

4There are more people who hate me for no reason than hairs on my head;
powerful enemies want to destroy me for no reason.

They make me pay back
what I did not steal.

## Proverbs 17:18–19

18It is not wise to promise
to pay what your neighbor owes.

19Whoever loves to argue loves to sin.

Whoever brags a lot is asking for trouble.

## John 11:28–57

### *Jesus Cries*

28 After Martha said this, she went back and talked to her
sister Mary alone. Martha said, “The Teacher is here and he is
asking for you.” 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and
went to Jesus. 30 Jesus had not yet come into the town but was
still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews were
with Mary in the house, comforting her. When they saw her
stand and leave quickly, they followed her, thinking she was
going to the tomb to cry there.
32 But Mary went to the place where Jesus was. When she
saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been
here, my brother would not have died.”
33 When Jesus saw Mary crying and the Jews who came with
her also crying, he was upset and was deeply troubled. 34 He
asked, “Where did you bury him?”
“Come and see, Lord,” they said.
35 Jesus cried.
36 So the Jews said, “See how much he loved him.”
37 But some of them said, “If Jesus opened the eyes of the
blind man, why couldn’t he keep Lazarus from dying?”

### *Jesus Raises Lazarus*

38 Again feeling very upset, Jesus came to the tomb. It was a
cave with a large stone covering the entrance. 39 Jesus said,
“Move the stone away.”
Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, “But, Lord, it has
been four days since he died. There will be a bad smell.”
40 Then Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed
you would see the glory of God?”
41 So they moved the stone away from the entrance. Then
Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard
me. 42 I know that you always hear me, but I said these things
because of the people here around me. I want them to believe
that you sent me.” 43 After Jesus said this, he cried out in a loud
voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 The dead man came out, his
hands and feet wrapped with pieces of cloth, and a cloth around
his face.
Jesus said to them, “Take the cloth off of him and let him go.”

## *The Plan to Kill Jesus*

45 Many of the people, who had come to visit Mary and saw
what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the
Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the
leading priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the council.
They asked, “What should we do? This man is doing many
miracles. 48 If we let him continue doing these things, everyone
will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and take away
our Temple and our nation.”

49 One of the men there was Caiaphas, the high priest that
year. He said, “You people know nothing! 50 You don’t realize
that it is better for one man to die for the people than for the
whole nation to be destroyed.”

51 Caiaphas did not think of this himself. As high priest that
year, he was really prophesying that Jesus would die for their
nation 52 and for God’s scattered children to bring them all
together and make them one.

53 That day they started planning to kill Jesus. 54 So Jesus no
longer traveled openly among the people. He left there and
went to a place near the desert, to a town called Ephraim and
stayed there with his followers.

55 It was almost time for the Passover Feast. Many from the
country went up to Jerusalem before the Passover to do the
special things to make themselves pure. 56 The people looked for
Jesus and stood in the Temple asking each other, “Is he coming
to the Feast? What do you think?” 57 But the leading priests and
the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus
was, he must tell them. Then they could arrest him.

# June 1

## Why Deny?

*God, you know what I have done wrong; I cannot hide my guilt from you.*

Psalm 69:5

we do ourselves no favors in justifying our deeds or glossing over our sins. Some time ago my daughter Andrea got a splinter in her finger. I took her to the restroom and set out some tweezers, ointment, and a Band-Aid.

She didn't like what she saw. "I just want the Band-Aid, Daddy."

Sometimes we are just like Andrea. We come to Christ with our sin, but all we want is a covering. We want to skip the treatment. We want to hide our sin. And one wonders if God, even in his great mercy, will heal what we conceal.

How can God heal what we deny? How can God touch what we cover up?

from *A Gentle Thunder*

## 1 Kings 11:1—12:33

### *Solomon's Many Wives*

11 King Solomon loved many women who were not from Israel.
He loved the daughter of the king of Egypt, as well as women of
the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites.
2 The LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not marry people of
other nations. If you do, they will cause you to follow their
gods." But Solomon fell in love with these women. 3 He had
seven hundred wives who were from royal families and three
hundred slave women who gave birth to his children. His wives
caused him to turn away from God. 4 As Solomon grew old, his
wives caused him to follow other gods. He did not follow the
LORD completely as his father David had done. 5 Solomon

worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the people of Sidon, and Molech, the hated god of the Ammonites. 6So Solomon did what the LORD said was wrong and did not follow the LORD completely as his father David had done.

7On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built two places for worship. One was a place to worship Chemosh, the hated god of the Moabites, and the other was a place to worship Molech, the hated god of the Ammonites. 8Solomon did the same thing for all his foreign wives so they could burn incense and offer sacrifices to their gods.

9The LORD had appeared to Solomon twice, but the king turned away from following the LORD, the God of Israel. The LORD was angry with Solomon, 10because he had commanded Solomon not to follow other gods. But Solomon did not obey the LORD's command. 11So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have chosen to break your agreement with me and have not obeyed my commands, I will tear your kingdom away from you and give it to one of your officers. 12But I will not take it away while you are alive because of my love for your father David. I will tear it away from your son when he becomes king. 13I will not tear away all the kingdom from him, but I will leave him one tribe to rule. I will do this because of David, my servant, and because of Jerusalem, the city I have chosen."

## *Solomon's Enemies*

14The LORD caused Hadad the Edomite, a member of the family of the king of Edom, to become Solomon's enemy. 15Earlier, David had defeated Edom. When Joab, the commander of David's army, went into Edom to bury the dead, he killed all the males. 16Joab and all the Israelites stayed in Edom for six months and killed every male in Edom. 17At that time Hadad was only a young boy, so he ran away to Egypt with some of his father's officers. 18They left Midian and went to Paran, where they were joined by other men. Then they all went to Egypt to see the king, who gave Hadad a house, some food, and some land.

19The king liked Hadad so much he gave Hadad a wife—the sister of Tahpenes, the king's wife. 20They had a son named Genubath. Queen Tahpenes brought him up in the royal palace with the king's own children.

21While he was in Egypt, Hadad heard that David had died and that Joab, the commander of the army, was dead also. So Hadad said to the king, "Let me go; I will return to my own country."

22"Why do you want to go back to your own country?" the king asked. "What haven't I given you here?"

"Nothing," Hadad answered, "but please, let me go."

[23]God also caused another man to be Solomon's enemy—
Rezon son of Eliada. Rezon had run away from his master,
Hadadezer king of Zobah. [24]After David defeated the army of
Zobah, Rezon gathered some men and became the leader of a
small army. They went to Damascus and settled there, and
Rezon became king of Damascus. [25]Rezon ruled Aram, and he
hated Israel. So he was an enemy of Israel all the time Solomon
was alive. Both Rezon and Hadad made trouble for Israel.

[26]Jeroboam son of Nebat was one of Solomon's officers. He
was an Ephraimite from the town of Zeredah, and he was the
son of a widow named Zeruah. Jeroboam turned against the
king.

[27]This is the story of how Jeroboam turned against the king.
Solomon was filling in the land and repairing the wall of
Jerusalem, the city of David, his father. [28]Jeroboam was a
capable man, and Solomon saw that this young man was a good
worker. So Solomon put him over all the workers from the
tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

[29]One day as Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, Ahijah, the
prophet from Shiloh, who was wearing a new coat, met him on
the road. The two men were alone out in the country. [30]Ahijah
took his new coat and tore it into twelve pieces. [31]Then he said
to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces of this coat for yourself. The LORD,
the God of Israel, says: 'I will tear the kingdom away from
Solomon and give you ten tribes. [32]But I will allow him to
control one tribe. I will do this for the sake of my servant David
and for Jerusalem, the city I have chosen from all the tribes of
Israel. [33]I will do this because Solomon has stopped following
me and has worshiped the Sidonian god Ashtoreth, the Moabite
god Chemosh, and the Ammonite god Molech. Solomon has not
obeyed me by doing what I said is right and obeying my laws
and commands, as his father David did.

[34]"'But I will not take all the kingdom away from Solomon. I
will let him rule all his life because of my servant David, whom I
chose, who obeyed all my commands and laws. [35]But I will take
the kingdom away from his son, and I will allow you to rule over
the ten tribes. [36]I will allow Solomon's son to continue to rule
over one tribe so that there will always be a descendant of
David, my servant, in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to be
worshiped. [37]But I will make you rule over everything you want.
You will rule over all of Israel, [38]and I will always be with you if
you do what I say is right. You must obey all my commands. If
you obey my laws and commands as David did, I will be with
you. I will make your family a lasting family of kings, as I did for
David, and give Israel to you. [39]I will punish David's children
because of this, but I will not punish them forever.'"

## *Solomon's Death*

40 Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but he ran away to Egypt,
to Shishak king of Egypt, where he stayed until Solomon died.
41 Everything else King Solomon did, and the wisdom he
showed, is written in the book of the history of Solomon.
42 Solomon ruled in Jerusalem over all Israel for forty years.
43 Then he died and was buried in Jerusalem, the city of David,
his father. And his son Rehoboam became king in his place.

## *Israel Turns Against Rehoboam*

12 Rehoboam went to Shechem, where all the Israelites had
gone to make him king. 2 Jeroboam son of Nebat was still in
Egypt, where he had gone to escape from Solomon. When
Jeroboam heard about Rehoboam being made king, he was
living in Egypt. 3 After the people sent for him, he and the
people went to Rehoboam and said to him, 4 "Your father forced
us to work very hard. Now, make it easier for us, and don't
make us work as hard as he did. Then we will serve you."
5 Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days, and then
come back to me." So the people left.
6 King Rehoboam asked the elders who had advised Solomon
during his lifetime, "How do you think I should answer these
people?"
7 They said, "You should be like a servant to them today. If
you serve them and give them a kind answer, they will serve you
always."
8 But Rehoboam rejected this advice. Instead, he asked the
young men who had grown up with him and who served as his
advisers. 9 Rehoboam asked them, "What is your advice? How
should we answer these people who said, 'Don't make us work
as hard as your father did'?"
10 The young men who had grown up with him answered,
"Those people said to you, 'Your father forced us to work very
hard. Now make our work easier.' You should tell them, 'My
little finger is bigger than my father's legs. 11 He forced you to
work hard, but I will make you work even harder. My father
beat you with whips, but I will beat you with whips that have
sharp points.'"
12 Rehoboam had told the people, "Come back to me in three
days." So after three days Jeroboam and all the people returned
to Rehoboam. 13 King Rehoboam spoke cruel words to them,
because he had rejected the advice the elders had given him.
14 He followed the advice of the young men and said to the
people, "My father forced you to work hard, but I will make you
work even harder. My father beat you with whips, but I will beat
you with whips that have sharp points." 15 So the king did not
listen to the people. The LORD caused this to happen to keep the

promise he had made to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah,
a prophet from Shiloh.
16When all the Israelites saw that the new king refused to
listen to them, they said to the king,

"We have no share in David!
We have no part in the son of Jesse!

People of Israel, let's go to our own homes!
Let David's son rule his own people!"

So the Israelites went home. 17But Rehoboam still ruled over
the Israelites who lived in the towns of Judah.
18Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor. When
Rehoboam sent him to the people of Israel, they threw stones at
him until he died. But King Rehoboam ran to his chariot and
escaped to Jerusalem. 19Since then, Israel has been against the
family of David.
20When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned,
they called him to a meeting and made him king over all Israel.
Only the tribe of Judah continued to follow the family of David.
21When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he gathered one
hundred eighty thousand of the best soldiers from the tribes of
Judah and Benjamin. As son of Solomon, Rehoboam wanted to
fight the people of Israel to take back his kingdom.
22But God spoke his word to Shemaiah, a man of God,
saying, 23"Speak to Solomon's son Rehoboam, the king of Judah,
and to all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the rest of the
people. Say to them, 24'The LORD says you must not go to war
against your brothers, the Israelites. Every one of you should go
home, because I made all these things happen.'" So they obeyed
the LORD's command and went home as the LORD had
commanded.
25Then Jeroboam made Shechem in the mountains of
Ephraim a very strong city, and he lived there. He also went to
the city of Peniel and made it stronger.

## *Jeroboam Builds Golden Calves*

26Jeroboam said to himself, "The kingdom will probably go
back to David's family. 27If the people continue going to the
Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, they will
want to be ruled again by Rehoboam. Then they will kill me and
follow Rehoboam king of Judah."
28King Jeroboam asked for advice. Then he made two golden
calves. "It is too long a journey for you to go to Jerusalem to
worship," he said to the people. "Israel, here are your gods who

brought you out of Egypt.” [29]Jeroboam put one golden calf in the city of Bethel and the other in the city of Dan. [30]This became a very great sin, because the people traveled as far as Dan to worship the calf there.

[31]Jeroboam built temples on the places of worship. He also chose priests from all the people, not just from the tribe of Levi. [32]And he started a new festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, just like the festival in Judah. During that time the king offered sacrifices on the altar, along with sacrifices to the calves in Bethel he had made. He also chose priests in Bethel to serve at the places of worship he had made. [33]So Jeroboam chose his own time for a festival for the Israelites—the fifteenth day of the eighth month. During that time he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built in Bethel. He set up a festival for the Israelites and offered sacrifices on the altar.

## Psalm 69:5–12

[5]God, you know what I have done wrong;
I cannot hide my guilt from you.

[6]Lord God All-Powerful,
do not let those who hope in you be ashamed because of me.

God of Israel,
do not let your worshipers be disgraced because of me.

[7]For you, I carry this shame,
and my face is covered with disgrace.

[8]I am like a stranger to my closest relatives
and a foreigner to my mother’s children.

[9]My strong love for your Temple completely controls me.
When people insult you, it hurts me.

10 When I cry and fast,
they make fun of me.

11 When I wear clothes of sadness,
they joke about me.

12 They make fun of me in public places,
and the drunkards make up songs about me.

## Proverbs 17:20–22

20 A person with an evil heart will find no success,
and the person whose words are evil will get into trouble.

21 It is sad to have a foolish child;
there is no joy in being the parent of a fool.

22 A happy heart is like good medicine,
but a broken spirit drains your strength.

## John 12:1–19

### *Jesus with Friends in Bethany*

12 Six days before the Passover Feast, Jesus went to Bethany,
where Lazarus lived. (Lazarus is the man Jesus raised from the
dead.) 2 There they had a dinner for Jesus. Martha served the
food, and Lazarus was one of the people eating with Jesus.
3 Mary brought in a pint of very expensive perfume made from
pure nard. She poured the perfume on Jesus' feet, and then she
wiped his feet with her hair. And the sweet smell from the
perfume filled the whole house.
4 Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' followers who would later turn
against him, was there. Judas said, 5 "This perfume was worth
an entire year's wages. Why wasn't it sold and the money given
to the poor?" 6 But Judas did not really care about the poor; he

said this because he was a thief. He was the one who kept the money box, and he often stole from it.

7 Jesus answered, “Leave her alone. It was right for her to save this perfume for today, the day for me to be prepared for burial. 8 You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.”

## *The Plot Against Lazarus*

9 A large crowd of people heard that Jesus was in Bethany. So they went there to see not only Jesus but Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. 10 So the leading priests made plans to kill Lazarus, too. 11 Because of Lazarus many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus.

## *Jesus Enters Jerusalem*

12 The next day a great crowd who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast heard that Jesus was coming there. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Jesus, shouting,

“Praise[n] God!

God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

God bless the King of Israel!”

Psalm 118:25–26

14 Jesus found a colt and sat on it. This was as the Scripture says,

15 “Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem!
Your king is coming,
sitting on the colt of a donkey.”

Zechariah 9:9

16 The followers of Jesus did not understand this at first. But after Jesus was raised to glory, they remembered that this had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.

## *People Tell About Jesus*

[17]There had been many people with Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead and told him to come out of the tomb. Now they were telling others about what Jesus did. [18]Many people went out to meet Jesus, because they had heard about this miracle. [19]So the Pharisees said to each other, “You can see that nothing is going right for us. Look! The whole world is following him.”

# June 2

## The Ultimate Triumph

*"A grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die to make many seeds. But if it never dies, it remains only a single seed."*

John 12:24

we do all we can to live and not die. God, however, says we must die in order to live. When you sow a seed, it must die in the ground before it can grow. What we see as the ultimate tragedy, he sees as the ultimate triumph.

And when a Christian dies, it's not a time to despair, but a time to trust. Just as the seed is buried and the material wrapping decomposes, so our fleshly body will be buried and will decompose. But just as the buried seed sprouts new life, so our body will blossom into a new body …

The seed buried in the earth will blossom in heaven. Your soul and body will reunite, and you will be like Jesus.

from *When Christ Comes*

## 1 Kings 13:1—14:31

### *The Man of God Speaks Against Bethel*

13 The LORD commanded a man of God from Judah to go to
Bethel. When he arrived, Jeroboam was standing by the altar to
offer a sacrifice. 2The LORD had commanded the man of God to
speak against the altar. The man said, "Altar, altar, the LORD says
to you: 'David's family will have a son named Josiah. The priests
for the places of worship now make their sacrifices on you, but
Josiah will sacrifice those priests on you. Human bones will be
burned on you.'" 3That same day the man of God gave proof
that these things would happen. "This is the LORD's sign that
this will happen," he said. "This altar will break apart, and the
ashes on it will fall to the ground."
4When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God said about

the altar in Bethel, the king raised his hand from the altar and pointed at the man. “Take him!” he said. But when the king said this, his arm was paralyzed, and he could not move it. 5The altar also broke into pieces, and its ashes fell to the ground. This was the sign the LORD had told the man of God to give.

6Then the king said to the man of God, “Please pray to the LORD your God for me, and ask him to heal my arm.”

So the man of God prayed to the LORD, and the king’s arm was healed, becoming as it was before.

7Then the king said to the man of God, “Please come home and eat with me, and I will give you a gift.”

8But the man of God answered the king, “Even if you gave me half of your kingdom, I would not go with you. I will not eat or drink anything in this place. 9The LORD commanded me not to eat or drink anything nor to return on the same road by which I came.” 10So he took a different road and did not return on the same road by which he had come to Bethel.

11Now an old prophet was living in Bethel. His sons came and told him what the man of God had done there that day. They also told their father what he had said to King Jeroboam. 12The father asked, “Which road did he use when he left?” So his sons showed him the road the man of God from Judah had taken. 13Then the prophet told his sons to put a saddle on his donkey. So they saddled the donkey, and he left.

14He went after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak tree. The prophet asked, “Are you the man of God who came from Judah?”

The man answered, “Yes, I am.”

15The prophet said, “Please come home and eat with me.”

16“I can’t go home with you,” the man of God answered. “I can’t eat or drink with you in this place. 17The LORD said to me, ‘Don’t eat or drink anything there or return on the same road by which you came.’”

18Then the old prophet said, “But I also am a prophet like you.” Then he told a lie. He said, “An angel from the LORD came to me and told me to bring you to my home. He said you should eat and drink with me.” 19So the man of God went to the old prophet’s house, and he ate and drank with him there.

20While they were sitting at the table, the LORD spoke his word to the old prophet. 21The old prophet cried out to the man of God from Judah, “The LORD said you did not obey him! He said you did not do what the LORD your God commanded you. 22The LORD commanded you not to eat or drink anything in this place, but you came back and ate and drank. So your body will not be buried in your family grave.”

23After the man of God finished eating and drinking, the prophet put a saddle on his donkey for him, and the man left. 24As he was traveling home, a lion attacked and killed him. His

body lay on the road, with the donkey and the lion standing nearby. 25Some men who were traveling on that road saw the body and the lion standing nearby. So they went to the city where the old prophet lived and told what they had seen.

26The old prophet who had brought back the man of God heard what had happened. “It is the man of God who did not obey the LORD’s command,” he said. “So the LORD sent a lion to kill him, just as he said he would.”

27Then the prophet said to his sons, “Put a saddle on my donkey,” which they did. 28The old prophet went out and found the body lying on the road, with the donkey and the lion still standing nearby. The lion had not eaten the body or hurt the donkey. 29The prophet put the body on his donkey and carried it back to the city to have a time of sadness for him and to bury him. 30The prophet buried the body in his own family grave, and they were sad for the man of God and said, “Oh, my brother.”

31After the prophet buried the body, he said to his sons, “When I die, bury me in this same grave. Put my bones next to his. 32Through him the LORD spoke against the altar at Bethel and against the places of worship in the towns of Samaria. What the LORD spoke through him will certainly come true.”

33After this incident King Jeroboam did not stop doing evil. He continued to choose priests for the places of worship from among all the people. Anyone who wanted to be a priest for the places of worship was allowed to be one. 34In this way the family of Jeroboam sinned, and this sin caused its ruin and destruction from the earth.

## *Jeroboam’s Son Dies*

14 At that time Jeroboam’s son Abijah became very sick. 2So Jeroboam said to his wife, “Go to Shiloh to see the prophet Ahijah. He is the one who said I would become king of Israel. But dress yourself so people won’t know you are my wife. 3Take the prophet ten loaves of bread, some cakes, and a jar of honey. Then ask him what will happen to our son, and he will tell you.” 4So the king’s wife did as he said and went to Ahijah’s home in Shiloh.

Now Ahijah was very old and blind. 5The LORD said to him, “Jeroboam’s son is sick, and Jeroboam’s wife is coming to ask you about him. When she arrives, she will pretend to be someone else.” Then the LORD told Ahijah what to say.

6When Ahijah heard her walking to the door, he said, “Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why are you pretending to be someone else? I have bad news for you. 7Go back and tell Jeroboam that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Jeroboam, I chose you from among all the people and made you the leader of my people Israel. 8I tore the kingdom away from David’s family, and

I gave it to you. But you are not like my servant David, who always obeyed my commands and followed me with all his heart. He did only what I said was right. 9But you have done more evil than anyone who ruled before you. You have quit following me and have made other gods and idols of metal. This has made me very angry, 10so I will soon bring disaster to your family. I will kill all the men in your family, both slaves and free men. I will destroy your family as completely as fire burns up manure. 11Anyone from your family who dies in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the fields will be eaten by the birds. The LORD has spoken.'"

12Then Ahijah said to Jeroboam's wife, "Go home now. As soon as you enter your city, your son will die, 13and all Israel will be sad for him and bury him. He is the only one of Jeroboam's family who will be buried, because he is the only one in the king's family who pleased the LORD, the God of Israel.

14"The LORD will put a new king over Israel, who will destroy Jeroboam's family, and this will happen soon. 15Then the LORD will punish Israel, which will be like reeds swaying in the water. The LORD will pull up Israel from this good land, the land he gave their ancestors. He will scatter Israel beyond the Euphrates River, because he is angry with the people. They made the LORD angry when they set up idols to worship Asherah. 16Jeroboam sinned, and then he made the people of Israel sin. So the LORD will let the people of Israel be defeated."

17Then Jeroboam's wife left and returned to Tirzah. As soon as she entered her home, the boy died. 18After they buried him, all Israel had a time of sadness for him, just as the LORD had said through his servant, the prophet Ahijah.

19Everything else Jeroboam did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. He fought wars and continued to rule the people, 20serving as king for twenty-two years. Then he died, and his son Nadab became king in his place.

## *The Death of Rehoboam*

21Solomon's son Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king of Judah. His mother was Naamah from Ammon. Rehoboam ruled in Jerusalem for seventeen years. (The LORD had chosen that city from all the land of Israel as the place where he would be worshiped.)

22The people of Judah did what the LORD said was wrong. Their sins made the LORD very angry, even more angry than he had been at their ancestors. 23The people built stone pillars and places to worship gods and Asherah idols on every high hill and under every green tree. 24There were even male prostitutes in the land. They acted like the people who had lived in the land before the Israelites. They had done many evil things, and God

had taken the land away from them.

25During the fifth year Rehoboam was king, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. 26He took the treasures from the Temple of the LORD and the king's palace. He took everything, even the gold shields Solomon had made. 27So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to put in their place and gave them to the commanders of the guards for the palace gates. 28Whenever the king went to the Temple of the LORD, the guards carried the shields. Later, they would put them back in the guardroom.

29Everything else King Rehoboam did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. 30There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam the whole time. 31Rehoboam, son of Naamah from Ammon, died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, and his son Abijam[n] became king in his place.

## Psalm 69:13–21

13But I pray to you, LORD, for favor.

God, because of your great love, answer me.
You are truly able to save.

14Pull me from the mud,
and do not let me sink.

Save me from those who hate me
and from the deep water.

15Do not let the flood drown me
or the deep water swallow me
or the grave close its mouth over me.

16LORD, answer me because your love is so good.
Because of your great kindness, turn to me.

17Do not hide from me, your servant.
I am in trouble. Hurry to help me!

[18]Come near and save me;
rescue me from my enemies.

[19]You see my shame and disgrace.
You know all my enemies and what they have said.

[20]Insults have broken my heart
and left me weak.

I looked for sympathy, but there was none;
I found no one to comfort me.

[21]They put poison in my food
and gave me vinegar to drink.

## Proverbs 17:23–24

[23]When the wicked accept money to do wrong
there can be no justice.

[24]The person with understanding is always looking for wisdom,
but the mind of a fool wanders everywhere.

## John 12:20–50

### *Jesus Talks About His Death*

[20]There were some Greek people, too, who came to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover Feast. [21]They went to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” [22]Philip told Andrew, and then Andrew and Philip told Jesus.
[23]Jesus said to them, “The time has come for the Son of Man

to receive his glory. [24]I tell you the truth, a grain of wheat must
fall to the ground and die to make many seeds. But if it never
dies, it remains only a single seed. [25]Those who love their lives
will lose them, but those who hate their lives in this world will
keep true life forever. [26]Whoever serves me must follow me.
Then my servant will be with me everywhere I am. My Father
will honor anyone who serves me.

[27]"Now I am very troubled. Should I say, 'Father, save me
from this time'? No, I came to this time so I could suffer.
[28]Father, bring glory to your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have brought glory to it,
and I will do it again."

[29]The crowd standing there, who heard the voice, said it was
thunder.

But others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

[30]Jesus said, "That voice was for your sake, not mine. [31]Now
is the time for the world to be judged; now the ruler of this
world will be thrown down. [32]If I am lifted up from the earth, I
will draw all people toward me." [33]Jesus said this to show how
he would die.

[34]The crowd said, "We have heard from the law that the
Christ will live forever. So why do you say, 'The Son of Man
must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

[35]Then Jesus said, "The light will be with you for a little
longer, so walk while you have the light. Then the darkness will
not catch you. If you walk in the darkness, you will not know
where you are going. [36]Believe in the light while you still have it
so that you will become children of light." When Jesus had said
this, he left and hid himself from them.

## *Some People Won't Believe in Jesus*

[37]Though Jesus had done many miracles in front of the
people, they still did not believe in him. [38]This was to bring
about what Isaiah the prophet had said:

"Lord, who believed what we told them?
Who saw the Lord's power in this?"

Isaiah 53:1

[39]This is why the people could not believe: Isaiah also had said,

[40]"He has blinded their eyes,
and he has closed their minds.

Otherwise they would see with their eyes
and understand in their minds
and come back to me and be healed."

Isaiah 6:10

41 Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about
him.

42 But many believed in Jesus, even many of the leaders. But
because of the Pharisees, they did not say they believed in him
for fear they would be put out of the synagogue. 43 They loved
praise from people more than praise from God.

44 Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me is really
believing in the One who sent me. 45 Whoever sees me sees the
One who sent me. 46 I have come as light into the world so that
whoever believes in me would not stay in darkness.

47 "Anyone who hears my words and does not obey them, I do
not judge, because I did not come to judge the world, but to
save the world. 48 There is a judge for those who refuse to
believe in me and do not accept my words. The word I have
taught will be their judge on the last day. 49 The things I taught
were not from myself. The Father who sent me told me what to
say and what to teach. 50 And I know that eternal life comes
from what the Father commands. So whatever I say is what the
Father told me to say."

# June 3

## The Sum of Christianity

*"I did this as an example so that you should do as I have done for you."*

John 13:15

mark it down. We are what we see. If we see only ourselves, our tombstones will have the same epitaph Paul used to describe enemies of Christ: "They will be destroyed. They do whatever their bodies want, they are proud of their shameful acts, and they only think about earthly things" (Philippians 3:19).

Humans were never meant to dwell in the stale fog of the lowlands with no vision of their Creator …

Seeing Jesus is what Christianity is all about. Christian service, in its purest form, is nothing more than imitating him whom we see. To see his majesty and to imitate him, that is the sum of Christianity.

from *God Came Near*

## 1 Kings 15:1—16:34

### *Abijam King of Judah*

15 Abijam became king of Judah during the eighteenth year
Jeroboam son of Nebat was king of Israel. 2Abijam ruled in
Jerusalem for three years. His mother was Maacah daughter of
Abishalom. 3He did all the same sins his father before him had
done. Abijam was not faithful to the LORD his God as David, his
great-grandfather, had been. 4Because the LORD loved David, the
LORD gave him a kingdom in Jerusalem and allowed him to have
a son to be king after him. The LORD also kept Jerusalem safe.
5David always did what the LORD said was right and obeyed his
commands all his life, except the one time when David sinned
against Uriah the Hittite.
6There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam during

Abijam's lifetime. [7]Everything else Abijam did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. During the time Abijam ruled, there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. [8]Abijam died and was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Asa became king in his place.

## *Asa King of Judah*

[9]During the twentieth year Jeroboam was king of Israel, Asa became king of Judah. [10]His grandmother's name was Maacah, the daughter of Abishalom. Asa ruled in Jerusalem for forty-one years.

[11]Asa did what the LORD said was right, as his ancestor David had done. [12]He forced the male prostitutes at the worship places to leave the country. He also took away the idols that his ancestors had made. [13]His grandmother Maacah had made a terrible Asherah idol, so Asa removed her from being queen mother. He cut down that idol and burned it in the Kidron Valley. [14]The places of worship to gods were not removed. Even so, Asa was faithful to the LORD all his life. [15]Asa brought into the Temple of the LORD the gifts he and his father had given: gold, silver, and utensils.

[16]There was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all the time they were kings. [17]Baasha attacked Judah, and he made the town of Ramah strong so he could keep people from leaving or entering Judah, Asa's country.

[18]Asa took the rest of the silver and gold from the treasuries of the Temple of the LORD and his own palace and gave it to his officers. Then he sent them to Ben-Hadad son of Tabrimmon, who was the son of Hezion. Ben-Hadad was the king of Aram and ruled in the city of Damascus. Asa said, [19]"Let there be a treaty between you and me as there was between my father and your father. I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. Break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will leave my land."

[20]Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa, so he sent the commanders of his armies to attack the towns of Israel. They defeated the towns of Ijon, Dan, and Abel Beth Maacah, as well as all Galilee and the area of Naphtali. [21]When Baasha heard about these attacks, he stopped building up Ramah and returned to Tirzah. [22]Then King Asa gave an order to all the people of Judah; everyone had to help. They carried away all the stones and wood Baasha had been using in Ramah, and they used them to build up Geba and Mizpah in the land of Benjamin.

[23]Everything else Asa did—his victories and the cities he built—is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. When he became old, he got a disease in his feet. [24]After Asa died, he was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David, his ancestor. Then Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became king

in his place.

## *Nadab King of Israel*

25 Nadab son of Jeroboam became king of Israel during the
second year Asa was king of Judah. Nadab was king of Israel for
two years, 26 and he did what the LORD said was wrong.
Jeroboam had led the people of Israel to sin, and Nadab sinned
in the same way as his father Jeroboam.
27 Baasha son of Ahijah, from the tribe of Issachar, made
plans to kill Nadab. Nadab and all Israel were attacking the
Philistine town of Gibbethon, so Baasha killed Nadab there.
28 This happened during Asa's third year as king of Judah, and
Baasha became the next king of Israel.

## *Baasha King of Israel*

29 As soon as Baasha became king, he killed all of Jeroboam's
family, leaving no one in Jeroboam's family alive. He destroyed
them all as the LORD had said would happen through his servant
Ahijah from Shiloh. 30 King Jeroboam had sinned very much and
had led the people of Israel to sin, so he made the LORD, the God
of Israel, very angry.
31 Everything else Nadab did is written in the book of the
history of the kings of Israel. 32 There was war between Asa king
of Judah and Baasha king of Israel all the time they ruled.
33 Baasha son of Ahijah became king of Israel during Asa's
third year as king of Judah. Baasha ruled in Tirzah for twenty-
four years, 34 and he did what the LORD said was wrong.
Jeroboam had led the people of Israel to sin, and Baasha sinned
in the same way as Jeroboam.
16 Jehu son of Hanani spoke the word of the LORD against King
Baasha. 2 The LORD said, "You were nothing, but I took you and
made you a leader over my people Israel. But you have followed
the ways of Jeroboam and have led my people Israel to sin.
Their sins have made me angry, 3 so, Baasha, I will soon destroy
you and your family. I will do to you what I did to the family of
Jeroboam son of Nebat. 4 Anyone from your family who dies in
the city will be eaten by dogs, and anyone from your family who
dies in the fields will be eaten by birds."
5 Everything else Baasha did and all his victories are written
down in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. 6 So
Baasha died and was buried in Tirzah, and his son Elah became
king in his place.
7 The LORD spoke his word against Baasha and his family
through the prophet Jehu son of Hanani. Baasha had done many
things the LORD said were wrong, which made the LORD very
angry. He did the same evil deeds that Jeroboam's family had

done before him. The LORD also spoke against Baasha because he killed all of Jeroboam's family.

## *Elah King of Israel*

8 Elah son of Baasha became king of Israel during Asa's
twenty-sixth year as king of Judah, and Elah ruled in Tirzah for
two years.
9 Zimri, one of Elah's officers, commanded half of Elah's
chariots. Zimri made plans against Elah while the king was in
Tirzah, getting drunk at Arza's home. (Arza was in charge of the
palace at Tirzah.) 10 Zimri went into Arza's house and killed Elah
during Asa's twenty-seventh year as king of Judah. Then Zimri
became king of Israel in Elah's place.

## *Zimri King of Israel*

11 As soon as Zimri became king, he killed all of Baasha's
family, not allowing any of Baasha's family or friends to live.
12 So Zimri destroyed all of Baasha's family just as the LORD had
said it would happen through the prophet Jehu. 13 Baasha and
his son Elah sinned and led the people of Israel to sin, and they
made the LORD, the God of Israel, angry because of their
worthless idols.
14 Everything else Elah did is written in the book of the
history of the kings of Israel.
15 So during Asa's twenty-seventh year as king of Judah,
Zimri became king of Israel and ruled in Tirzah seven days.
The army of Israel was camped near Gibbethon, a Philistine
town. 16 The men in the camp heard that Zimri had made secret
plans against King Elah and had killed him. So that day in the
camp they made Omri, the commander of the army, king over
Israel. 17 So Omri and all the Israelite army left Gibbethon and
attacked Tirzah. 18 When Zimri saw that the city had been
captured, he went into the palace and set it on fire, burning the
palace and himself with it. 19 So Zimri died because he had
sinned by doing what the LORD said was wrong. Jeroboam had
led the people of Israel to sin, and Zimri sinned in the same way
as Jeroboam.
20 Everything else Zimri did and the story of how he turned
against King Elah are written down in the book of the history of
the kings of Israel.

## *Omri King of Israel*

21 The people of Israel were divided into two groups. Half of
the people wanted Tibni son of Ginath to be king, while the

other half wanted Omri. 22Omri's followers were stronger than
the followers of Tibni son of Ginath, so Tibni died, and Omri
became king.
23Omri became king of Israel during the thirty-first year Asa
was king of Judah. Omri ruled Israel for twelve years, six of
those years in the city of Tirzah. 24He bought the hill of Samaria
from Shemer for about one hundred fifty pounds of silver. Omri
built a city on that hill and called it Samaria after the name of
its earlier owner, Shemer.
25But Omri did what the LORD said was wrong; he did more
evil than all the kings who came before him. 26Jeroboam son of
Nebat had led the people of Israel to sin, and Omri sinned in the
same way as Jeroboam. The Israelites made the LORD, the God of
Israel, very angry because they worshiped worthless idols.
27Everything else Omri did and all his successes are written
in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. 28So Omri died
and was buried in Samaria, and his son Ahab became king in his
place.

### *Ahab King of Israel*

29Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel during Asa's thirty-
eighth year as king of Judah, and Ahab ruled Israel in the city of
Samaria for twenty-two years. 30More than any king before him,
Ahab son of Omri did many things the LORD said were wrong.
31He sinned in the same ways as Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he
did even worse things. He married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal,
the king of Sidon. Then Ahab began to serve Baal and worship
him. 32He built a temple in Samaria for worshiping Baal and put
an altar there for Baal. 33Ahab also made an idol for worshiping
Asherah. He did more things to make the LORD, the God of
Israel, angry than all the other kings before him.
34During the time of Ahab, Hiel from Bethel rebuilt the city
of Jericho. It cost Hiel the life of Abiram, his oldest son, to begin
work on the city, and it cost the life of Segub, his youngest son,
to build the city gates. This happened just as the LORD, speaking
through Joshua son of Nun, said it would happen.[n]

## Psalm 69:22–28

22Let their own feasts cause their ruin;
    let their feasts trap them and pay them back.

[23]Let their eyes be closed so they cannot see
and their backs be forever weak from troubles.

[24]Pour your anger out on them;
let your anger catch up with them.

[25]May their place be empty;
leave no one to live in their tents.

[26]They chase after those you have hurt,
and they talk about the pain of those you have wounded.

[27]Charge them with crime after crime,
and do not let them have anything good.

[28]Wipe their names from the book of life,
and do not list them with those who do what is right.

## Proverbs 17:25–26

[25]Foolish children make their father sad
and cause their mother great sorrow.

[26]It is not good to punish the innocent
or to beat leaders for being honest.

## John 13:1–20

### *Jesus Washes His Followers' Feet*

[13] It was almost time for the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that it was time for him to leave this world and go back to the Father. He had always loved those who were his own in the world, and

he loved them all the way to the end.
2 Jesus and his followers were at the evening meal. The devil
had already persuaded Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to turn
against Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had given him power
over everything and that he had come from God and was going
back to God. 4 So during the meal Jesus stood up and took off his
outer clothing. Taking a towel, he wrapped it around his waist.
5 Then he poured water into a bowl and began to wash the
followers' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped
around him.
6 Jesus came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you
going to wash my feet?"
7 Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I am
doing, but you will understand later."
8 Peter said, "No, you will never wash my feet."
Jesus answered, "If I don't wash your feet, you are not one of
my people."
9 Simon Peter answered, "Lord, then wash not only my feet,
but wash my hands and my head, too!"
10 Jesus said, "After a person has had a bath, his whole body
is clean. He needs only to wash his feet. And you men are clean,
but not all of you." 11 Jesus knew who would turn against him,
and that is why he said, "Not all of you are clean."
12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his
clothes and sat down again. He asked, "Do you understand what
I have just done for you? 13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and
you are right, because that is what I am. 14 If I, your Lord and
Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash each
other's feet. 15 I did this as an example so that you should do as I
have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, a servant is not greater
than his master. A messenger is not greater than the one who
sent him. 17 If you know these things, you will be blessed if you
do them.
18 "I am not talking about all of you. I know those I have
chosen. But this is to bring about what the Scripture said: 'The
man who ate at my table has turned against me.'[n] 19 I am telling
you this now before it happens so that when it happens, you will
believe that I am he. 20 I tell you the truth, whoever accepts
anyone I send also accepts me. And whoever accepts me also
accepts the One who sent me."

# June 4

## Footprints of Discipleship

*"All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other."*

John 13:35

watch a small boy follow his dad through the snow. He stretches to step where his dad stepped. Not an easy task. His small legs extend as far as they can so his feet can fall in his father's prints.

The father, seeing what the son is doing, smiles and begins taking shorter steps, so the son can follow.

It's a picture of discipleship.

In our faith we follow in someone's steps. A parent, a teacher, a hero—none of us are the first to walk the trail. All of us have someone we follow.

In our faith we leave footprints to guide others. A child, a friend, a recent convert. None should be left to walk the trail alone.

It's the principle of discipleship.

from *The Inspirational Study Bible*

## 1 Kings 17:1—18:46

### *Elijah Stops the Rain*

17 Now Elijah the Tishbite was a prophet from the settlers in
Gilead. "I serve the LORD, the God of Israel," Elijah said to Ahab.
"As surely as the LORD lives, no rain or dew will fall during the
next few years unless I command it."

2Then the LORD spoke his word to Elijah: 3"Leave this place
and go east and hide near Kerith Ravine east of the Jordan
River. 4You may drink from the stream, and I have commanded
ravens to bring you food there." 5So Elijah did what the LORD
said; he went to Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and lived

there. 6The birds brought Elijah bread and meat every morning
and evening, and he drank water from the stream.
7After a while the stream dried up because there was no
rain. 8Then the LORD spoke his word to Elijah, 9"Go to Zarephath
in Sidon and live there. I have commanded a widow there to
take care of you."
10So Elijah went to Zarephath. When he reached the town
gate, he saw a widow gathering wood for a fire. Elijah asked
her, "Would you bring me a little water in a cup so I may have a
drink?" 11As she was going to get his water, Elijah said, "Please
bring me a piece of bread, too."
12The woman answered, "As surely as the LORD your God
lives, I have no bread. I have only a handful of flour in a jar and
only a little olive oil in a jug. I came here to gather some wood
so I could go home and cook our last meal. My son and I will eat
it and then die from hunger."
13"Don't worry," Elijah said to her. "Go home and cook your
food as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread from
the flour you have, and bring it to me. Then cook something for
yourself and your son. 14The LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'That
jar of flour will never be empty, and the jug will always have oil
in it, until the day the LORD sends rain to the land.'"
15So the woman went home and did what Elijah told her to
do. And the woman and her son and Elijah had enough food
every day. 16The jar of flour and the jug of oil were never empty,
just as the LORD, through Elijah, had promised.

## *Elijah Brings a Boy Back to Life*

17Some time later the son of the woman who owned the
house became sick. He grew worse and worse and finally
stopped breathing. 18The woman said to Elijah, "Man of God,
what have you done to me? Did you come here to remind me of
my sin and to kill my son?"
19Elijah said to her, "Give me your son." Elijah took the boy
from her, carried him upstairs, and laid him on the bed in the
room where he was staying. 20Then he prayed to the LORD: "LORD
my God, this widow is letting me stay in her house. Why have
you done this terrible thing to her and caused her son to die?"
21Then Elijah lay on top of the boy three times. He prayed to the
LORD, "LORD my God, let this boy live again!"
22The LORD answered Elijah's prayer; the boy began
breathing again and was alive. 23Elijah carried the boy
downstairs and gave him to his mother and said, "See! Your son
is alive!"
24"Now I know you really are a man from God," the woman
said to Elijah. "I know that the LORD truly speaks through you!"

## *Elijah Kills the Prophets of Baal*

18 During the third year without rain, the LORD spoke his word to
Elijah: “Go and meet King Ahab, and I will soon send rain.” 2So
Elijah went to meet Ahab.

By this time there was no food in Samaria. 3King Ahab sent
for Obadiah, who was in charge of the king’s palace. (Obadiah
was a true follower of the LORD. 4When Jezebel was killing all
the LORD’s prophets, Obadiah hid a hundred of them in two
caves, fifty in one cave and fifty in another. He also brought
them food and water.) 5Ahab said to Obadiah, “Let’s check
every spring and valley in the land. Maybe we can find enough
grass to keep our horses and mules alive and not have to kill
our animals.” 6So each one chose a part of the country to
search; Ahab went in one direction and Obadiah in another.

7While Obadiah was on his way, Elijah met him. Obadiah
recognized Elijah, so he bowed down to the ground and said,
“Elijah? Is it really you, master?”

8“Yes,” Elijah answered. “Go tell your master that I am
here.”

9Then Obadiah said, “What wrong have I done for you to
hand me over to Ahab like this? He will put me to death. 10As
surely as the LORD your God lives, the king has sent people to
every country to search for you. If the ruler said you were not
there, Ahab forced the ruler to swear you could not be found in
his country. 11Now you want me to go to my master and tell
him, ‘Elijah is here’? 12The Spirit of the LORD may carry you to
some other place after I leave. If I go tell King Ahab you are
here, and he comes and doesn’t find you, he will kill me! I have
followed the LORD since I was a boy. 13Haven’t you been told
what I did? When Jezebel was killing the LORD’s prophets, I hid a
hundred of them, fifty in one cave and fifty in another. I brought
them food and water. 14Now you want me to go and tell my
master you are here? He will kill me!”

15Elijah answered, “As surely as the LORD All-Powerful lives,
whom I serve, I will be seen by Ahab today.”

16So Obadiah went to Ahab and told him where Elijah was.
Then Ahab went to meet Elijah.

17When he saw Elijah, he asked, “Is it you—the biggest
troublemaker in Israel?”

18Elijah answered, “I have not made trouble in Israel. You
and your father’s family have made all this trouble by not
obeying the LORD’s commands. You have gone after the Baals.
19Now tell all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel. Also bring the
four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred
prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

20So Ahab called all the Israelites and those prophets to
Mount Carmel. 21Elijah approached the people and said, “How

long will you not decide between two choices? If the LORD is the true God, follow him, but if Baal is the true God, follow him!" But the people said nothing.

22 Elijah said, "I am the only prophet of the LORD here, but there are four hundred fifty prophets of Baal. 23 Bring two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose one bull and kill it and cut it into pieces. Then let them put the meat on the wood, but they are not to set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull, putting the meat on the wood but not setting fire to it. 24 You prophets of Baal, pray to your god, and I will pray to the LORD. The god who answers by setting fire to his wood is the true God."

All the people agreed that this was a good idea.

25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "There are many of you, so you go first. Choose a bull and prepare it. Pray to your god, but don't start the fire."

26 So they took the bull that was given to them and prepared it. They prayed to Baal from morning until noon, shouting "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound, and no one answered. They danced around the altar they had built.

27 At noon Elijah began to make fun of them. "Pray louder!" he said. "If Baal really is a god, maybe he is thinking, or busy, or traveling! Maybe he is sleeping so you will have to wake him!" 28 The prophets prayed louder, cutting themselves with swords and spears until their blood flowed, which was the way they worshiped. 29 The afternoon passed, and the prophets continued to act like this until it was time for the evening sacrifice. But no voice was heard; Baal did not answer, and no one paid attention.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Now come to me." So they gathered around him, and Elijah rebuilt the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. 31 He took twelve stones, one stone for each of the twelve tribes, the number of Jacob's sons. (The LORD changed Jacob's name to Israel.) 32 Elijah used these stones to rebuild the altar in honor of the LORD. Then he dug a ditch around the altar that was big enough to hold about thirteen quarts of seed. 33 Elijah put the wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. 34 Then he said, "Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the meat and on the wood." Then Elijah said, "Do it again," and they did it again. Then he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it the third time. 35 So the water ran off the altar and filled the ditch.

36 At the time for the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah went near the altar. "LORD, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel," he prayed. "Prove that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant. Show these people that you commanded me to do all these things. 37 LORD, answer my prayer so these people will know that you, LORD, are God and that you will change their minds."

38 Then fire from the LORD came down and burned the

sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the ground around the altar. It also dried up the water in the ditch. [39]When all the people saw this, they fell down to the ground, crying, “The LORD is God! The LORD is God!”

[40]Then Elijah said, “Capture the prophets of Baal! Don’t let any of them run away!” The people captured all the prophets. Then Elijah led them down to the Kishon Valley, where he killed them.

### *The Rain Comes Again*

[41]Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Now, go, eat, and drink, because a heavy rain is coming.” [42]So King Ahab went to eat and drink. At the same time Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, where he bent down to the ground with his head between his knees.

[43]Then Elijah said to his servant, “Go and look toward the sea.”

The servant went and looked. “I see nothing,” he said.

Elijah told him to go and look again. This happened seven times. [44]The seventh time, the servant said, “I see a small cloud, the size of a human fist, coming from the sea.”

Elijah told the servant, “Go to Ahab and tell him to get his chariot ready and go home now. Otherwise, the rain will stop him.”

[45]After a short time the sky was covered with dark clouds. The wind began to blow, and soon a heavy rain began to fall. Ahab got in his chariot and started back to Jezreel. [46]The LORD gave his power to Elijah, who tightened his clothes around him and ran ahead of King Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

## Psalm 69:29–36

[29]I am sad and hurting.
God, save me and protect me.

[30]I will praise God in a song
and will honor him by giving thanks.

[31]That will please the LORD more than offering him cattle,
more than sacrificing a bull with horns and hoofs.

32 Poor people will see this and be glad.
Be encouraged, you who worship God.

33 The LORD listens to those in need
and does not look down on captives.

34 Heaven and earth should praise him,
the seas and everything in them.

35 God will save Jerusalem
and rebuild the cities of Judah.

Then people will live there and own the land.
36 The descendants of his servants will inherit that land,
and those who love him will live there.

## Proverbs 17:27–28

27 The wise say very little,
and those with understanding stay calm.

28 Even fools seem to be wise if they keep quiet;
if they don't speak, they appear to understand.

## John 13:21–38

### *Jesus Talks About His Death*

21 After Jesus said this, he was very troubled. He said openly,
"I tell you the truth, one of you will turn against me."
22 The followers all looked at each other, because they did not
know whom Jesus was talking about. 23 One of the followers
sitting[n] next to Jesus was the follower Jesus loved. 24 Simon
Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus whom he was talking about.

25That follower leaned closer to Jesus and asked, “Lord, who
is it?”
26Jesus answered, “I will dip this bread into the dish. The
man I give it to is the man who will turn against me.” So Jesus
took a piece of bread, dipped it, and gave it to Judas Iscariot,
the son of Simon. 27As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan
entered him. Jesus said to him, “The thing that you will do—do
it quickly.” 28No one at the table understood why Jesus said this
to Judas. 29Since he was the one who kept the money box, some
of the followers thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was
needed for the feast or to give something to the poor.
30Judas took the bread Jesus gave him and immediately went
out. It was night.
31When Judas was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man
receives his glory, and God receives glory through him. 32If God
receives glory through him,[n] then God will give glory to the Son
through himself. And God will give him glory quickly.”
33Jesus said, “My children, I will be with you only a little
longer. You will look for me, and what I told the Jews, I tell you
now: Where I am going you cannot come.
34“I give you a new command: Love each other. You must
love each other as I have loved you. 35All people will know that
you are my followers if you love each other.”

## *Peter Will Say He Doesn’t Know Jesus*

36Simon Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, where are you going?”
Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow now,
but you will follow later.”
37Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I am ready
to die for you!”
38Jesus answered, “Are you ready to die for me? I tell you the
truth, before the rooster crows, you will say three times that
you don’t know me.”

# June 5

# Looking Up

*"Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need."*

John 14:8

Biographies of bold disciples begin with chapters of honest terror. Fear of death. Fear of failure. Fear of loneliness. Fear of a wasted life. Fear of failing to know God. Faith begins when you see God on the mountain and you are in the valley and you know that you're too weak to make the climb. You see what you need … you see what you have … and what you have isn't enough to accomplish anything …

Moses had a sea in front and an enemy behind. The Israelites could swim or they could fight. But neither option was enough …

Paul had mastered the Law. He had mastered the system. But one glimpse of God convinced him that sacrifice and symbols were not enough …

Faith that begins with fear will end up nearer the Father.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## 1 Kings 19:1—20:43

### *Elijah Runs Away*

19 King Ahab told Jezebel every thing Elijah had done and how
Elijah had killed all the prophets with a sword. 2So Jezebel sent
a messenger to Elijah, saying, "May the gods punish me terribly
if by this time tomorrow I don't kill you just as you killed those
prophets."

3When Elijah heard this, he was afraid and ran for his life,
taking his servant with him. When they came to Beersheba in
Judah, Elijah left his servant there. 4Then Elijah walked for a
whole day into the desert. He sat down under a bush and asked
to die. "I have had enough, LORD," he prayed. "Let me die. I am

no better than my ancestors.” 5Then he lay down under the tree and slept.

Suddenly an angel came to him and touched him. “Get up and eat,” the angel said. 6Elijah saw near his head a loaf baked over coals and a jar of water, so he ate and drank. Then he went back to sleep.

7Later the LORD’s angel came to him a second time. The angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat. If you don’t, the journey will be too hard for you.” 8So Elijah got up and ate and drank. The food made him strong enough to walk for forty days and nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. 9There Elijah went into a cave and stayed all night.

Then the LORD spoke his word to him: “Elijah! Why are you here?”

10He answered, “LORD God All-Powerful, I have always served you as well as I could. But the people of Israel have broken their agreement with you, destroyed your altars, and killed your prophets with swords. I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

11The LORD said to Elijah, “Go, stand in front of me on the mountain, and I will pass by you.” Then a very strong wind blew until it caused the mountains to fall apart and large rocks to break in front of the LORD. But the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12After the earthquake, there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a quiet, gentle sound. 13When Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his coat and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “Elijah! Why are you here?”

14He answered, “LORD God All-Powerful, I have always served you as well as I could. But the people of Israel have broken their agreement with you, destroyed your altars, and killed your prophets with swords. I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

15The LORD said to him, “Go back on the road that leads to the desert around Damascus. Enter that city, and pour olive oil on Hazael to make him king over Aram.16Then pour oil on Jehu son of Nimshi to make him king over Israel. Next, pour oil on Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to make him a prophet in your place. 17Jehu will kill anyone who escapes from Hazael’s sword, and Elisha will kill anyone who escapes from Jehu’s sword. 18I have seven thousand people left in Israel who have never bowed down before Baal and whose mouths have never kissed his idol.”

## *Elisha Becomes a Prophet*

19So Elijah left that place and found Elisha son of Shaphat

plowing a field with a team of oxen. He owned twelve teams of oxen and was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah came up to Elisha, took off his coat, and put it on Elisha. [20]Then Elisha left his oxen and ran to follow Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and my mother good-bye,” Elisha said. “Then I will go with you.”

Elijah answered, “Go back. It does not matter to me.”

[21]So Elisha went back and took his pair of oxen and killed them. He used their wooden yoke for a fire. Then he cooked the meat and gave it to the people. After they ate it, Elisha left and followed Elijah and became his helper.

## *Ben-Hadad and Ahab Go to War*

[20] Ben-Hadad king of Aram gathered together all his army. There were thirty-two kings with their horses and chariots who went with him and surrounded Samaria and attacked it. [2]The king sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel.

This was his message: “Ben-Hadad says, [3]‘Your silver and gold belong to me, as well as the best of your wives and children.’”

[4]Ahab king of Israel answered, “My master and king, I agree to what you say. I and everything I have belong to you.”

[5]Then the messengers came to Ahab again. They said, “Ben-Hadad says, ‘I told you before that you must give me your silver and gold, your wives and your children. [6]About this time tomorrow I will send my men, who will search everywhere in your palace and in the homes of your officers. Whatever they want they will take and carry off.’”

[7]Then Ahab called a meeting of all the elders of his country. He said, “Ben-Hadad is looking for trouble. First he said I had to give him my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold, and I have not refused him.”

[8]The elders and all the people said, “Don’t listen to him or agree to this.”

[9]So Ahab said to Ben-Hadad’s messengers, “Tell my master the king: ‘I will do what you said at first, but I cannot allow this second command.’” And King Ben-Hadad’s men carried the message back to him.

[10]Then Ben-Hadad sent another message to Ahab: “May the gods punish me terribly if I don’t completely destroy Samaria. There won’t be enough left for each of my men to get a handful of dust!”

[11]Ahab answered, “Tell Ben-Hadad, ‘The man who puts on his armor should not brag. It’s the man who lives to take it off who has the right to brag.’”

[12]Ben-Hadad was drinking in his tent with the other rulers when the message came from Ahab. Ben-Hadad commanded his men to prepare to attack the city, and they moved into place for

battle.

13 At the same time a prophet came to Ahab king of Israel.
The prophet said, “Ahab, the LORD says to you, ‘Do you see that
big army? I will hand it over to you today so you will know I am
the LORD.’”

14 Ahab asked, “Who will you use to defeat them?”

The prophet answered, “The LORD says, ‘The young officers of
the district governors will defeat them.’”

Then the king asked, “Who will command the main army?”

The prophet answered, “You will.”

15 So Ahab gathered the young officers of the district
governors, two hundred thirty-two of them. Then he called
together the army of Israel, about seven thousand people in all.

16 They marched out at noon, while Ben-Hadad and the thirty-
two rulers helping him were getting drunk in their tents. 17 The
young officers of the district governors attacked first. Ben-
Hadad sent out scouts who told him that soldiers were coming
from Samaria. 18 Ben-Hadad said, “They may be coming to fight,
or they may be coming to ask for peace. In either case capture
them alive.”

19 The young officers of the district governors led the attack,
followed by the army of Israel. 20 Each officer of Israel killed the
man who came against him. The men from Aram ran away as
Israel chased them, but Ben-Hadad king of Aram escaped on a
horse with some of his horsemen. 21 Ahab king of Israel led the
army and destroyed the Arameans’ horses and chariots. King
Ahab thoroughly defeated the Aramean army.

22 Then the prophet went to Ahab king of Israel and said,
“The king of Aram will attack you again next spring. So go home
now and strengthen your army and see what you need to do.”

23 Meanwhile the officers of Ben-Hadad king of Aram said to
him, “The gods of Israel are mountain gods. Since we fought in
a mountain area, Israel won. Let’s fight them on the flat land,
and then we will win. 24 This is what you should do. Don’t allow
the thirty-two rulers to command the armies, but put other
commanders in their places. 25 Gather an army like the one that
was destroyed and as many horses and chariots as before. We
will fight the Israelites on flat land, and then we will win.” Ben-
Hadad agreed with their advice and did what they said.

26 The next spring Ben-Hadad gathered the army of Aram and
went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

27 The Israelites also had prepared for war. They marched out
to meet the Arameans and camped opposite them. The
Israelites looked like two small flocks of goats, but the
Arameans covered the area.

28 A man of God came to the king of Israel with this message:
“The LORD says, ‘The people of Aram say that I, the LORD, am a
god of the mountains, not a god of the valleys. So I will allow
you to defeat this huge army, and then you will know I am the

LORD.’”

29The armies were camped across from each other for seven
days. On the seventh day the battle began. The Israelites killed
one hundred thousand Aramean soldiers in one day. 30The rest
of them ran away to the city of Aphek, where a city wall fell on
twenty-seven thousand of them. Ben-Hadad also ran away to the
city and hid in a room.

31His officers said to him, “We have heard that the kings of
Israel are trustworthy. Let’s dress in rough cloth to show our
sadness, and wear ropes on our heads. Then we will go to the
king of Israel, and perhaps he will let you live.”

32So they dressed in rough cloth and wore ropes on their
heads and went to the king of Israel. They said, “Your servant
Ben-Hadad says, ‘Please let me live.’”

Ahab answered, “Is he still alive? He is my brother.”

33Ben-Hadad’s men had wanted a sign from Ahab. So when
Ahab called Ben-Hadad his brother, they quickly said, “Yes!
Ben-Hadad is your brother.”

Ahab said, “Bring him to me.” When Ben-Hadad came, Ahab
asked him to join him in the chariot.

34Ben-Hadad said to him, “Ahab, I will give you back the
cities my father took from your father. And you may put shops in
Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.”

Ahab said, “If you agree to this, I will allow you to go free.”
So the two kings made a peace agreement. Then Ahab let Ben-
Hadad go free.

## *A Prophet Speaks Against Ahab*

35One prophet from one of the groups of prophets told
another, “Hit me!” He said this because the LORD had
commanded it, but the other man refused. 36The prophet said,
“You did not obey the LORD’s command, so a lion will kill you as
soon as you leave me.” When the man left, a lion found him and
killed him.

37The prophet went to another man and said, “Hit me,
please!” So the man hit him and hurt him. 38The prophet
wrapped his face in a cloth so no one could tell who he was.
Then he went and waited by the road for the king. 39As Ahab
king of Israel passed by, the prophet called out to him. “I went
to fight in the battle,” the prophet said. “One of our men
brought an enemy soldier to me. Our man said, ‘Guard this
man. If he runs away, you will have to give your life in his place.
Or, you will have to pay a fine of seventy-five pounds of silver.’
40But I was busy doing other things, so the man ran away.”

The king of Israel answered, “You have already said what the
punishment is. You must do what the man said.”

41Then the prophet quickly took the cloth from his face.
When the king of Israel saw him, he knew he was one of the

prophets. 42The prophet said to the king, “This is what the LORD says: ‘You freed the man I said should die, so your life will be taken instead of his. The lives of your people will also be taken instead of the lives of his people.’”

43Then King Ahab went back to his palace in Samaria, angry and upset.

## Psalm 70:1–5

### *A Cry for God to Help Quickly*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David. To help people remember.**

70 God, come quickly and save me.
LORD, hurry to help me.

2Let those who are trying to kill me
be ashamed and disgraced.

Let those who want to hurt me
run away in disgrace.

3Let those who make fun of me
stop because of their shame.

4But let all those who worship you
rejoice and be glad.

Let those who love your salvation
always say, “Praise the greatness of God.”

5I am poor and helpless;
God, hurry to me.

You help me and save me.
LORD, do not wait.

## Proverbs 18:1–2

18 Unfriendly people are selfish
and hate all good sense.

2Fools do not want to understand anything.
They only want to tell others what they think.

## John 14:1–31

### *Jesus Comforts His Followers*

14 Jesus said, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God,
and trust in me. 2There are many rooms in my Father’s house; I
would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to
prepare a place for you. 3After I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be
where I am. 4You know the way to the place where I am
going.”[n]
5Thomas said to Jesus, “Lord, we don’t know where you are
going. So how can we know the way?”
6Jesus answered, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
The only way to the Father is through me. 7If you really knew
me, you would know my Father, too. But now you do know him,
and you have seen him.”
8Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father. That is all we
need.”
9Jesus answered, “I have been with you a long time now. Do
you still not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen
the Father. So why do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10Don’t
you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The
words I say to you don’t come from me, but the Father lives in
me and does his own work. 11Believe me when I say that I am in
the Father and the Father is in me. Or believe because of the
miracles I have done. 12I tell you the truth, whoever believes in
me will do the same things that I do. Those who believe will do

even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13And if you ask for anything in my name, I will do it for you so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son. 14If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

## *The Promise of the Holy Spirit*

15"If you love me, you will obey my commands. 16I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper[n] to be with you forever— 17the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he lives with you and he will be in you.

18"I will not leave you all alone like orphans; I will come back to you. 19In a little while the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live, too. 20On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and that you are in me and I am in you. 21Those who know my commands and obey them are the ones who love me, and my Father will love those who love me. I will love them and will show myself to them."

22Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you plan to show yourself to us and not to the rest of the world?"

23Jesus answered, "If people love me, they will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Those who do not love me do not obey my teaching. This teaching that you hear is not really mine; it is from my Father, who sent me.

25"I have told you all these things while I am with you. 26But the Helper will teach you everything and will cause you to remember all that I told you. This Helper is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name.

27"I leave you peace; my peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don't let your hearts be troubled or afraid. 28You heard me say to you, 'I am going, but I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you should be happy that I am going back to the Father, because he is greater than I am. 29I have told you this now, before it happens, so that when it happens, you will believe. 30I will not talk with you much longer, because the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, 31but the world must know that I love the Father, so I do exactly what the Father told me to do.

"Come now, let us go.

# June 6

## The Branch and the Vine

*"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in the vine."*

John 15:4

God wants to be as close to us as a branch is to a vine. One is an extension of the other. It's impossible to tell where one starts and the other ends. The branch isn't connected only at the moment of bearing fruit. The gardener doesn't keep the branches in a box and then, on the day he wants grapes, glue them to the vine. No, the branch constantly draws nutrition from the vine …

God also uses the temple to depict the intimacy he desires. "You should know," Paul writes, "that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit, who is in you. You have received the Holy Spirit from God" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Think with me about the temple for a moment … God didn't come and go, appear and disappear. He was a permanent presence, always available.

What incredibly good news for us! We are NEVER away from God!

from *Just Like Jesus*

## 1 Kings 21:1—22:53

### *Ahab Takes Naboth's Vineyard*

21 After these things had happened, this is what followed. A man named Naboth owned a vineyard in Jezreel, near the palace of Ahab king of Israel. 2One day Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard. It is near my palace, and I want to make it into a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard in its place, or, if you prefer, I will pay you what it is worth."

3Naboth answered, "May the LORD keep me from ever giving

my land to you. It belongs to my family."

4Ahab went home angry and upset, because he did not like what Naboth from Jezreel had said. (Naboth had said, "I will not give you my family's land.") Ahab lay down on his bed, turned his face to the wall, and refused to eat.

5His wife, Jezebel, came in and asked him, "Why are you so upset that you refuse to eat?"

6Ahab answered, "I talked to Naboth, the man from Jezreel. I said, 'Sell me your vineyard, or, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it.' But Naboth refused."

7Jezebel answered, "Is this how you rule as king over Israel? Get up, eat something, and cheer up. I will get Naboth's vineyard for you."

8So Jezebel wrote some letters, signed Ahab's name to them, and used his own seal to seal them. Then she sent them to the elders and important men who lived in Naboth's town. 9The letter she wrote said: "Declare a day during which the people are to fast. Call the people together, and give Naboth a place of honor among them. 10Seat two troublemakers across from him, and have them say they heard Naboth speak against God and the king. Then take Naboth out of the city and kill him with stones."

11The elders and important men of Jezreel obeyed Jezebel's command, just as she wrote in the letters. 12They declared a special day on which the people were to fast. And they put Naboth in a place of honor before the people. 13Two troublemakers sat across from Naboth and said in front of everybody that they had heard him speak against God and the king. So the people carried Naboth out of the city and killed him with stones. 14Then the leaders sent a message to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been killed."

15When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been killed, she told Ahab, "Naboth of Jezreel is dead. Now you may go and take for yourself the vineyard he would not sell to you." 16When Ahab heard that Naboth of Jezreel was dead, he got up and went to the vineyard to take it for his own.

17At this time the LORD spoke his word to the prophet Elijah the Tishbite. The LORD said, 18"Go to Ahab king of Israel in Samaria. He is at Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take it as his own. 19Tell Ahab that I, the LORD, say to him, 'You have murdered Naboth and taken his land. So I tell you this: In the same place the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they will also lick up your blood!'"

20When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "So you have found me, my enemy!"

Elijah answered, "Yes, I have found you. You have always chosen to do what the LORD says is wrong. 21So the LORD says to you, 'I will soon destroy you. I will kill you and every male in

your family, both slave and free. 22Your family will be like the family of King Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the family of King Baasha son of Ahijah. I will destroy you, because you have made me angry and have led the people of Israel to sin.'

23"And the LORD also says, 'Dogs will eat the body of Jezebel in the city of Jezreel.'

24"Anyone in your family who dies in the city will be eaten by dogs, and anyone who dies in the fields will be eaten by birds."

25There was no one like Ahab who had chosen so often to do what the LORD said was wrong, because his wife Jezebel influenced him to do evil. 26Ahab sinned terribly by worshiping idols, just as the Amorite people did. And the LORD had taken away their land and given it to the people of Israel.

27After Elijah finished speaking, Ahab tore his clothes. He put on rough cloth, fasted, and even slept in the rough cloth to show how sad and upset he was.

28The LORD spoke his word to Elijah the Tishbite: 29"I see that Ahab is now sorry for what he has done. So I will not cause the trouble to come to him during his life, but I will wait until his son is king. Then I will bring this trouble to Ahab's family."

## *The Death of Ahab*

22 For three years there was peace between Israel and Aram. 2During the third year Jehoshaphat king of Judah went to visit Ahab king of Israel.

3At that time Ahab asked his officers, "Do you remember that the king of Aram took Ramoth in Gilead from us? Why have we done nothing to get it back?" 4So Ahab asked King Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight at Ramoth in Gilead?"

"I will go with you," Jehoshaphat answered. "My soldiers are yours, and my horses are yours." 5Jehoshaphat also said to Ahab, "But first we should ask if this is the LORD's will."

6Ahab called about four hundred prophets together and asked them, "Should I go to war against Ramoth in Gilead or not?"

They answered, "Go, because the Lord will hand them over to you."

7But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the LORD here? Let's ask him what we should do."

8Then King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "There is one other prophet. We could ask the LORD through him, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything good about me, but something bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah."

Jehoshaphat said, "King Ahab, you shouldn't say that!"

9So Ahab king of Israel told one of his officers to bring Micaiah to him at once.

10Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah had on

their royal robes and were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor, near the entrance to the gate of Samaria. All the prophets were standing before them, speaking their messages.
11 Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made some iron horns. He said to Ahab, “This is what the LORD says, ‘You will use these horns to fight the Arameans until they are destroyed.’”
12 All the other prophets said the same thing. “Attack Ramoth in Gilead and win, because the LORD will hand the Arameans over to you.”
13 The messenger who had gone to get Micaiah said to him, “All the other prophets are saying King Ahab will succeed. You should agree with them and give the king a good answer.”
14 But Micaiah answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what the LORD tells me.”
15 When Micaiah came to Ahab, the king asked him, “Micaiah, should we attack Ramoth in Gilead or not?”
Micaiah answered, “Attack and win! The LORD will hand them over to you.”
16 But Ahab said to Micaiah, “How many times do I have to tell you to speak only the truth to me in the name of the LORD?”
17 So Micaiah answered, “I saw the army of Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd. The LORD said, ‘They have no leaders. They should go home and not fight.’”
18 Then Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I told you! He never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad.”
19 But Micaiah said, “Hear the message from the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with his heavenly army standing near him on his right and on his left. 20 The LORD said, ‘Who will trick Ahab into attacking Ramoth in Gilead where he will be killed?’
“Some said one thing; some said another. 21 Then one spirit came and stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will trick him.’
22 “The LORD asked, ‘How will you do it?’
“The spirit answered, ‘I will go to Ahab’s prophets and make them tell lies.’
“So the LORD said, ‘You will succeed in tricking him. Go and do it.’”
23 Micaiah said, “Ahab, the LORD has made your prophets lie to you, and the LORD has decided that disaster should come to you.”
24 Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up to Micaiah and slapped him in the face. Zedekiah said, “Has the LORD’s spirit left me to speak through you?”
25 Micaiah answered, “You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inside room.”
26 Then Ahab king of Israel ordered, “Take Micaiah and send him to Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king’s son. 27 Tell them I said to put this man in prison and give him only bread and water until I return safely from the battle.”

[28]Micaiah said, “Ahab, if you come back safely from battle,
the LORD has not spoken through me. Remember my words, all
you people!”
[29]So Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went
to Ramoth in Gilead. [30]King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, “I will go
into battle, but I will wear other clothes so no one will recognize
me. But you wear your royal clothes.” So Ahab wore other
clothes and went into battle.
[31]The king of Aram had ordered his thirty-two chariot
commanders, “Don’t fight with anyone—important or
unimportant—except the king of Israel.” [32]When these
commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought he was certainly
the king of Israel, so they turned to attack him. But Jehoshaphat
began shouting. [33]When they saw he was not King Ahab, they
stopped chasing him.
[34]By chance, a soldier shot an arrow, but he hit Ahab king of
Israel between the pieces of his armor. King Ahab said to his
chariot driver, “Turn around and get me out of the battle,
because I am hurt!” [35]The battle continued all day. King Ahab
was held up in his chariot and faced the Arameans. His blood
flowed down to the bottom of the chariot. That evening he died.
[36]Near sunset a cry went out through the army of Israel: “Each
man go back to his own city and land.”
[37]In that way King Ahab died. His body was carried to
Samaria and buried there. [38]The men cleaned Ahab’s chariot at
a pool in Samaria where prostitutes bathed, and the dogs licked
his blood from the chariot. These things happened as the LORD
had said they would.
[39]Everything else Ahab did is written in the book of the
history of the kings of Israel. It tells about the palace Ahab built
and decorated with ivory and the cities he built. [40]So Ahab died,
and his son Ahaziah became king in his place.

## *Jehoshaphat King of Judah*

[41]Jehoshaphat son of Asa became king of Judah during
Ahab’s fourth year as king of Israel. [42]Jehoshaphat was thirty-
five years old when he became king, and he ruled in Jerusalem
for twenty-five years. His mother’s name was Azubah daughter
of Shilhi. [43]Jehoshaphat was good, like his father Asa, and he
did what the LORD said was right. But Jehoshaphat did not
destroy the places where gods were worshiped, so the people
continued offering sacrifices and burning incense there.
[44]Jehoshaphat was at peace with the king of Israel.
[45]Jehoshaphat fought many wars, and these wars and his
successes are written in the book of the history of the kings of
Judah. [46]There were male prostitutes still in the places of
worship from the days of his father, Asa. So Jehoshaphat forced

them to leave.
47During this time the land of Edom had no king; it was ruled by a governor.
48King Jehoshaphat built trading ships to sail to Ophir for gold. But the ships were wrecked at Ezion Geber, so they never set sail. 49Ahaziah son of Ahab went to help Jehoshaphat, offering to give Jehoshaphat some men to sail with his men, but Jehoshaphat refused.
50Jehoshaphat died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David, his ancestor. Then his son Jehoram became king in his place.

### *Ahaziah King of Israel*

51Ahaziah son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria during Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year as king over Judah. Ahaziah ruled Israel for two years, 52and he did what the LORD said was wrong. He did the same evil his father Ahab, his mother Jezebel, and Jeroboam son of Nebat had done. All these rulers led the people of Israel into more sin. 53Ahaziah worshiped and served the god Baal, and this made the LORD, the God of Israel, very angry. In these ways Ahaziah did what his father had done.

## Psalm 71:1–6

### *An Old Person's Prayer*

71 In you, LORD, is my protection.
Never let me be ashamed.

2Because you do what is right, save and rescue me;
listen to me and save me.

3Be my place of safety
where I can always come.

Give the command to save me,
because you are my rock and my strong, walled city.

4 My God, save me from the power of the wicked
and from the hold of evil and cruel people.

5 LORD, you are my hope.
LORD, I have trusted you since I was young.

6 I have depended on you since I was born;
you helped me even on the day of my birth.
I will always praise you.

## Proverbs 18:3–5

3 Do something evil, and people won't like you.
Do something shameful, and they will make fun of you.

4 Spoken words can be like deep water,
but wisdom is like a flowing stream.

5 It is not good to honor the wicked
or to be unfair to the innocent.

## John 15:1—16:4a

### *Jesus Is Like a Vine*

15 "I am the true vine; my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off
every branch of mine that does not produce fruit. And he trims
and cleans every branch that produces fruit so that it will
produce even more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the
words I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in
you. A branch cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in
the vine. In the same way, you cannot produce fruit alone but
must remain in me.

5 "I am the vine, and you are the branches. If any remain in
me and I remain in them, they produce much fruit. But without
me they can do nothing. 6 If any do not remain in me, they are

like a branch that is thrown away and then dies. People pick up dead branches, throw them into the fire, and burn them. 7If you remain in me and follow my teachings, you can ask anything you want, and it will be given to you. 8You should produce much fruit and show that you are my followers, which brings glory to my Father. 9I loved you as the Father loved me. Now remain in my love. 10I have obeyed my Father's commands, and I remain in his love. In the same way, if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. 11I have told you these things so that you can have the same joy I have and so that your joy will be the fullest possible joy.

12"This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you. 13The greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me; I chose you. And I gave you this work: to go and produce fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you anything you ask for in my name. 17This is my command: Love each other.

## *Jesus Warns His Followers*

18"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. 19If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own. But I have chosen you out of the world, so you don't belong to it. That is why the world hates you. 20Remember what I told you: A servant is not greater than his master. If people did wrong to me, they will do wrong to you, too. And if they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours, too. 21They will do all this to you on account of me, because they do not know the One who sent me. 22If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23Whoever hates me also hates my Father. 24I did works among them that no one else has ever done. If I had not done these works, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen what I have done, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. 25But this happened so that what is written in their law would be true: 'They hated me for no reason.'[n]

26"I will send you the Helper[n] from the Father; he is the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father. When he comes, he will tell about me, 27and you also must tell people about me, because you have been with me from the beginning.

16 "I have told you these things to keep you from giving up. 2People will put you out of their synagogues. Yes, the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are offering

service to God. [3]They will do this because they have not known
the Father and they have not known me. [4]I have told you these
things now so that when the time comes you will remember that
I warned you.

# June 7

## A Few More Scenes

*"In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world."*

John 16:33

God has kept no secrets. He has told us that, while on this yellow brick road [of life], we will experience trouble. Disease will afflict bodies. Divorce will break hearts. Death will make widows and devastation will destroy countries. We should not expect any less. But just because the devil shows up and cackles, we needn't panic.

Our Master speaks of an accomplished deed … "It is finished" (John 19:30). The battle is over. Be alert. But don't be alarmed … The manuscript has been published. The book has been bound. Satan is loosed for a season, but the season is oh-so-brief … Just a few more scenes, just a few more turns in the road, and his end will come.

from *When Christ Comes*

### 2 Kings 1:1—2:25

### *Elijah and King Ahaziah*

1 After Ahab died, Moab broke away from Israel's rule. 2Ahaziah
fell down through the wooden bars in his upstairs room in
Samaria and was badly hurt. He sent messengers and told
them, "Go, ask Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron, if I will recover from
my injuries."

3But the LORD's angel said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Go up and
meet the messengers sent by the king of Samaria. Ask them,
'Why are you going to ask questions of Baal-Zebub, god of
Ekron? Is it because you think there is no God in Israel?' 4This
is what the LORD says: 'You will never get up from the bed you
are lying on; you will die.'" Then Elijah left.

5When the messengers returned to Ahaziah, he asked them,
“Why have you returned?”
6They said, “A man came to meet us. He said, ‘Go back to the
king who sent you and tell him what the LORD says: “Why do you
send messengers to ask questions of Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron?
Is it because you think there is no God in Israel? You will never
get up from the bed you are lying on; you will die.”’”
7Ahaziah asked them, “What did the man look like who met
you and told you this?”
8They answered, “He was a hairy man and wore a leather
belt around his waist.”
Ahaziah said, “It was Elijah the Tishbite.”
9Then he sent a captain with his fifty men to Elijah. The
captain went to Elijah, who was sitting on top of the hill, and
said to him, “Man of God, the king says, ‘Come down!’”
10Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, let fire
come down from heaven and burn up you and your fifty men.”
Then fire came down from heaven and burned up the captain
and his fifty men.
11Ahaziah sent another captain and fifty men to Elijah. The
captain said to him, “Man of God, this is what the king says:
‘Come down quickly!’”
12Elijah answered, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down
from heaven and burn up you and your fifty men!” Then fire
came down from heaven and burned up the captain and his fifty
men.
13Ahaziah then sent a third captain with his fifty men. The
third captain came and fell down on his knees before Elijah and
begged, “Man of God, please respect my life and the lives of
your fifty servants. 14See, fire came down from heaven and
burned up the first two captains of fifty with all their men. But
now, respect my life.”
15The LORD’s angel said to Elijah, “Go down with him and
don’t be afraid of him.” So Elijah got up and went down with
him to see the king.
16Elijah told Ahaziah, “This is what the LORD says: ‘You have
sent messengers to ask questions of Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron.
Is it because you think there is no God in Israel to ask? Because
of this, you will never get up from your bed; you will die.’” 17So
Ahaziah died, just as the LORD, through Elijah, had said he
would.
Joram became king in Ahaziah’s place during the second
year Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat was king of Judah. Joram ruled
because Ahaziah had no son to take his place. 18The other
things Ahaziah did are written in the book of the history of the
kings of Israel.

## *Elijah Is Taken to Heaven*

2 It was almost time for the LORD to take Elijah by a whirlwind
up into heaven. While Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal,
2Elijah said to Elisha, “Please stay here. The LORD has told me to
go to Bethel.”

But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives, and as you live, I won’t
leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. 3The groups of
prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you
know the LORD will take your master away from you today?”

Elisha said, “Yes, I know, but don’t talk about it.”

4Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha, because the LORD has
sent me to Jericho.”

But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives, and as you live, I won’t
leave you.”

So they went to Jericho. 5The groups of prophets at Jericho
came to Elisha and said, “Do you know that the LORD will take
your master away from you today?”

Elisha answered, “Yes, I know, but don’t talk about it.”

6Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here. The LORD has sent me to
the Jordan River.”

Elisha answered, “As the LORD lives, and as you live, I won’t
leave you.”

So the two of them went on. 7Fifty men of the groups of
prophets came and stood far from where Elijah and Elisha were
by the Jordan. 8Elijah took off his coat, rolled it up, and hit the
water. The water divided to the right and to the left, and Elijah
and Elisha crossed over on dry ground.

9After they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, “What can
I do for you before I am taken from you?”

Elisha said, “Leave me a double share of your spirit.”[n]

10Elijah said, “You have asked a hard thing. But if you see me
when I am taken from you, it will be yours. If you don’t, it won’t
happen.”

11As they were walking and talking, a chariot and horses of
fire appeared and separated Elijah from Elisha. Then Elijah
went up to heaven in a whirlwind. 12Elisha saw it and shouted,
“My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and their
horsemen!” And Elisha did not see him anymore. Then Elisha
grabbed his own clothes and tore them to show how sad he was.

13He picked up Elijah’s coat that had fallen from him. Then
he returned and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14Elisha hit
the water with Elijah’s coat and said, “Where is the LORD, the
God of Elijah?” When he hit the water, it divided to the right
and to the left, and Elisha crossed over.

15The groups of prophets at Jericho were watching and said,
“Elisha now has the spirit Elijah had.” And they came to meet
him, bowing down to the ground before him. 16They said to him,
“There are fifty strong men with us. Please let them go and look
for your master. Maybe the Spirit of the LORD has taken Elijah

up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley."
But Elisha answered, "No, don't send them."
17When the groups of prophets had begged Elisha until he couldn't refuse them anymore, he said, "Send them." So they sent fifty men who looked for three days, but they could not find him. 18Then they came back to Elisha at Jericho where he was staying. He said to them, "I told you not to go, didn't I?"

### *Elisha Makes the Water Pure*

19The people of the city said to Elisha, "Look, master, this city is a nice place to live as you can see. But the water is so bad the land cannot grow crops."
20Elisha said, "Bring me a new bowl and put salt in it." So they brought it to him.
21Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt in it. He said, "This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. From now on it won't cause death, and it won't keep the land from growing crops.'" 22So the water has been healed to this day just as Elisha had said.

### *Boys Make Fun of Elisha*

23From there Elisha went up to Bethel. On the way some boys came out of the city and made fun of him. They said to him, "Go up too, you baldhead! Go up too, you baldhead!" 24Elisha turned around, looked at them, and put a curse on them in the name of the LORD. Then two mother bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys to pieces. 25Elisha went to Mount Carmel and from there he returned to Samaria.

## Psalm 71:7–16

7I am an example to many people,
because you are my strong protection.

8I am always praising you;
all day long I honor you.

9Do not reject me when I am old;
do not leave me when my strength is gone.

10 My enemies make plans against me,
and they meet together to kill me.

11 They say, “God has left him.
Go after him and take him,
because no one will save him.”

12 God, don’t be far off.
My God, hurry to help me.

13 Let those who accuse me
be ashamed and destroyed.

Let those who are trying to hurt me
be covered with shame and disgrace.

14 But I will always have hope
and will praise you more and more.

15 I will tell how you do what is right.
I will tell about your salvation all day long,
even though it is more than I can tell.

16 I will come and tell about your powerful works, Lord God.
I will remind people that only you do what is right.

## Proverbs 18:6–8

6 The words of fools start quarrels.
They make people want to beat them.

7 The words of fools will ruin them;
their own words will trap them.

[8]The words of a gossip are like tasty bits of food.
People like to gobble them up.

## John 16:4b–33

### *The Work of the Holy Spirit*

"I did not tell you these things at the beginning, because I was with you then. [5]Now I am going back to the One who sent me. But none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' [6]Your hearts are filled with sadness because I have told you these things. [7]But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go away. When I go away, I will send the Helper[n] to you. If I do not go away, the Helper will not come. [8]When the Helper comes, he will prove to the people of the world the truth about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment. [9]He will prove to them that sin is not believing in me. [10]He will prove to them that being right with God comes from my going to the Father and not being seen anymore. [11]And the Helper will prove to them that judgment happened when the ruler of this world was judged.

[12]"I have many more things to say to you, but they are too much for you now. [13]But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all truth. He will not speak his own words, but he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is to come. [14]The Spirit of truth will bring glory to me, because he will take what I have to say and tell it to you. [15]All that the Father has is mine. That is why I said that the Spirit will take what I have to say and tell it to you.

### *Sadness Will Become Happiness*

[16]"After a little while you will not see me, and then after a little while you will see me again."

[17]Some of the followers said to each other, "What does Jesus mean when he says, 'After a little while you will not see me, and then after a little while you will see me again'? And what does he mean when he says, 'Because I am going to the Father'?" [18]They also asked, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

[19]Jesus saw that the followers wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking each other what I meant when I said, 'After a little while you will not see me, and then after a little while you will see me again'? [20]I tell you the truth,

you will cry and be sad, but the world will be happy. You will be sad, but your sadness will become joy. 21When a woman gives birth to a baby, she has pain, because her time has come. But when her baby is born, she forgets the pain, because she is so happy that a child has been born into the world. 22It is the same with you. Now you are sad, but I will see you again and you will be happy, and no one will take away your joy. 23In that day you will not ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you anything you ask for in my name. 24Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy will be the fullest possible joy.

## *Victory over the World*

25"I have told you these things indirectly in stories. But the time will come when I will not use stories like that to tell you things; I will speak to you in plain words about the Father. 26In that day you will ask the Father for things in my name. I mean, I will not need to ask the Father for you. 27The Father himself loves you. He loves you because you loved me and believed that I came from God. 28I came from the Father into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

29Then the followers of Jesus said, "You are speaking clearly to us now and are not using stories that are hard to understand. 30We can see now that you know all things. You can answer a person's question even before it is asked. This makes us believe you came from God."

31Jesus answered, "So now you believe? 32Listen to me; a time is coming when you will be scattered, each to your own home. That time is now here. You will leave me alone, but I am never really alone, because the Father is with me.

33"I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world."

# June 8

## One Church, One Faith

*"Holy Father, keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they will be one, just as you and I are one."*

John 17:11

"so that they will be one," Jesus prayed. One. Not one in groups of two thousand. But one in One. One church. One faith. One Lord. Not Baptist, not Methodist, not Adventist. Just Christians. No denominations. No hierarchies. No traditions. Just Christ.

Too idealistic? Impossible to achieve? I don't think so. Harder things have been done, you know. For example, once upon a tree, a Creator gave his life for his creation. Maybe all we need are a few hearts that are willing to follow suit.

What about you? Can you build a bridge? Toss a rope? Span a chasm? Pray for oneness?

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## 2 Kings 3:1—4:44

### *War Between Israel and Moab*

3 Joram son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria in
Jehoshaphat's eighteenth year as king of Judah. And Joram
ruled twelve years. 2He did what the LORD said was wrong, but
he was not like his father and mother; he removed the stone
pillars his father had made for Baal. 3But he continued to sin
like Jeroboam son of Nebat who had led Israel to sin. Joram did
not stop doing these same sins.

4Mesha king of Moab raised sheep. He paid the king of Israel
one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred
thousand sheep. 5But when Ahab died, the king of Moab turned
against the king of Israel. 6So King Joram went out from
Samaria and gathered Israel's army. 7He also sent messengers

to Jehoshaphat king of Judah. “The king of Moab has turned against me,” he said. “Will you go with me to fight Moab?”

Jehoshaphat replied, “I will go with you. My soldiers and my horses are yours.”

8 Jehoshaphat asked, “Which way should we attack?”

Joram answered, “Through the Desert of Edom.”

9 So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom. After they had marched seven days, there was no more water for the army or for their animals that were with them. 10 The king of Israel said, “This is terrible! The LORD has called us three kings together to hand us over to the Moabites!”

11 But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there a prophet of the LORD here? We can ask the LORD through him.”

An officer of the king of Israel answered, “Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He was Elijah’s servant.”

12 Jehoshaphat said, “He speaks the LORD’s truth.” So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to see Elisha.

13 Elisha said to the king of Israel, “I have nothing to do with you. Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother!”

The king of Israel said to Elisha, “No, the LORD has called us three kings together to hand us over to the Moabites.”

14 Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD All-Powerful lives, whom I serve, I tell you the truth. I wouldn’t even look at you or notice you if Jehoshaphat king of Judah were not here. I respect him. 15 Now bring me someone who plays the harp.”

While the harp was being played, the LORD gave Elisha power. 16 Then Elisha said, “The LORD says to dig holes in the valley. 17 The LORD says you won’t see wind or rain, but the valley will be filled with water. Then you, your cattle, and your other animals can drink. 18 This is easy for the LORD to do; he will also hand Moab over to you. 19 You will destroy every strong, walled city and every important town. You will cut down every good tree and stop up all springs. You will ruin every good field with rocks.”

20 The next morning, about the time the sacrifice was offered, water came from the direction of Edom and filled the valley.

21 All the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them. So they gathered everyone old enough to put on armor and waited at the border. 22 But when the Moabites got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water. They saw the water across from them, and it looked as red as blood. 23 Then they said, “This is blood! The kings must have fought and killed each other! Come, Moabites, let’s take the valuables from the dead bodies!”

24 When the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites came out and fought them until they ran away. Then

the Israelites went on into the land, killing the Moabites. 25They tore down the cities and threw rocks all over every good field. They stopped up all the springs and cut down all the good trees. Kir Hareseth was the only city with its stones still in place, but the men with slingshots surrounded it and conquered it, too.

26When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too much for him, he took seven hundred men with swords to try to break through to the king of Edom. But they could not break through. 27Then the king of Moab took his oldest son, who would have been king after him, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. So there was great anger against the Israelites, who left and went back to their own land.

## *A Widow Asks Elisha for Help*

4 The wife of a man from the groups of prophets said to Elisha, "Your servant, my husband, is dead. You know he honored the LORD. But now the man he owes money to is coming to take my two boys as his slaves!"

2Elisha answered, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?"

The woman said, "I don't have anything there except a pot of oil."

3Then Elisha said, "Go and get empty jars from all your neighbors. Don't ask for just a few. 4Then go into your house and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and set the full ones aside."

5So she left Elisha and shut the door behind her and her sons. As they brought the jars to her, she poured out the oil. 6When the jars were all full, she said to her son, "Bring me another jar."

But he said, "There are no more jars." Then the oil stopped flowing.

7She went and told Elisha. And the prophet said to her, "Go, sell the oil and pay what you owe. You and your sons can live on what is left."

## *The Shunammite Woman*

8One day Elisha went to Shunem, where an important woman lived. She begged Elisha to stay and eat. So every time Elisha passed by, he stopped there to eat. 9The woman said to her husband, "I know that this is a holy man of God who passes by our house all the time. 10Let's make a small room on the roof[n] and put a bed in the room for him. We can put a table, a chair, and a lampstand there. Then when he comes by, he can stay there."

11One day Elisha came to the woman's house. After he went

to his room and rested, [12]he said to his servant Gehazi, “Call the Shunammite woman.”

When the servant had called her, she stood in front of him. [13]Elisha had told his servant, “Now say to her, ‘You have gone to all this trouble for us. What can I do for you? Do you want me to speak to the king or the commander of the army for you?’”

She answered, “I live among my own people.”

[14]Elisha said to Gehazi, “But what can we do for her?”

He answered, “She has no son, and her husband is old.”

[15]Then Elisha said to Gehazi, “Call her.” When he called her, she stood in the doorway. [16]Then Elisha said, “About this time next year, you will hold a son in your arms.”

The woman said, “No, master, man of God, don’t lie to me, your servant!”

[17]But the woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son at that time the next year, just as Elisha had told her.

[18]The boy grew up and one day went out to his father, who was with the grain harvesters. [19]The boy said to his father, “My head! My head!”

The father said to his servant, “Take him to his mother!” [20]The servant took him to his mother, and he lay on his mother’s lap until noon. Then he died. [21]So she took him up and laid him on Elisha’s bed. Then she shut the door and left.

[22]She called to her husband, “Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys. Then I can go quickly to the man of God and return.”

[23]The husband said, “Why do you want to go to him today? It isn’t the New Moon or the Sabbath day.”

She said, “It will be all right.”

[24]Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on. Don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.” [25]So she went to Elisha, the man of God, at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her coming from far away, he said to his servant Gehazi, “Look, there’s the Shunammite woman! [26]Run to meet her and ask, ‘Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is the boy all right?’”

She answered, “Everything is all right.”

[27]Then she came to Elisha at the hill and grabbed his feet. Gehazi came near to pull her away, but Elisha said to him, “Leave her alone. She’s very upset, and the LORD has not told me about it. He has hidden it from me.”

[28]She said, “Master, did I ask you for a son? Didn’t I tell you not to lie to me?”

[29]Then Elisha said to Gehazi, “Get ready. Take my walking stick in your hand and go quickly. If you meet anyone, don’t say hello. If anyone greets you, don’t respond. Lay my walking stick on the boy’s face.”

[30]The boy’s mother said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as

you live, I won't leave you!" So Elisha got up and followed her.

31 Gehazi went on ahead and laid the walking stick on the
boy's face, but the boy did not talk or move. Then Gehazi went
back to meet Elisha. "The boy has not awakened," he said.

32 When Elisha came into the house, the boy was lying dead
on his bed. 33 Elisha entered the room and shut the door, so only
he and the boy were in the room. Then he prayed to the LORD.
34 He went to the bed and lay on the boy, putting his mouth on
the boy's mouth, his eyes on the boy's eyes, and his hands on
the boy's hands. He stretched himself out on top of the boy.
Soon the boy's skin became warm. 35 Elisha turned away and
walked around the room. Then he went back and put himself on
the boy again. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his
eyes.

36 Elisha called Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite!" So
he did. When she came, Elisha said, "Pick up your son." 37 She
came in and fell at Elisha's feet, bowing facedown to the floor.
Then she picked up her son and went out.

## *Elisha and the Stew*

38 When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a shortage of
food in the land. While the groups of prophets were sitting in
front of him, he said to his servant, "Put the large pot on the
fire, and boil some stew for these men."

39 One of them went out into the field to gather plants.
Finding a wild vine, he picked fruit from the vine and filled his
robe with it. Then he came and cut up the fruit into the pot. But
they didn't know what kind of fruit it was. 40 They poured out
the stew for the others to eat. When they began to eat it, they
shouted, "Man of God, there's death in the pot!" And they could
not eat it.

41 Elisha told them to bring some flour. He threw it into the
pot and said, "Pour it out for the people to eat." Then there was
nothing harmful in the pot.

## *Elisha Feeds the People*

42 A man from Baal Shalishah came to Elisha, bringing him
twenty loaves of barley bread from the first harvest. He also
brought fresh grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the
people to eat."

43 Elisha's servant asked, "How can I feed a hundred people
with so little?"

"Give the bread to the people to eat," Elisha said. "This is
what the LORD says: 'They will eat and will have food left over.'"
44 After he gave it to them, the people ate and had food left over,
as the LORD had said.

## Psalm 71:17–24

17 God, you have taught me since I was young.
To this day I tell about the miracles you do.

18 Even though I am old and gray,
do not leave me, God.

I will tell the children about your power;
I will tell those who live after me about your might.

19 God, your justice reaches to the skies.
You have done great things;
God, there is no one like you.

20 You have given me many troubles and bad times,
but you will give me life again.

When I am almost dead,
you will keep me alive.

21 You will make me greater than ever,
and you will comfort me again.

22 I will praise you with the harp.
I trust you, my God.

I will sing to you with the lyre,
Holy One of Israel.

23 I will shout for joy when I sing praises to you.
You have saved me.

[24]I will tell about your justice all day long.
And those who want to hurt me
will be ashamed and disgraced.

## Proverbs 18:9

[9]A person who doesn't work hard
is just like someone who destroys things.

## John 17:1–26

### *Jesus Prays for His Followers*

[17] After Jesus said these things, he looked toward heaven and prayed, "Father, the time has come. Give glory to your Son so that the Son can give glory to you. [2]You gave the Son power over all people so that the Son could give eternal life to all those you gave him. [3]And this is eternal life: that people know you, the only true God, and that they know Jesus Christ, the One you sent. [4]Having finished the work you gave me to do, I brought you glory on earth. [5]And now, Father, give me glory with you; give me the glory I had with you before the world was made.

[6]"I showed what you are like to those you gave me from the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your teaching. [7]Now they know that everything you gave me comes from you. [8]I gave them the teachings you gave me, and they accepted them. They knew that I truly came from you, and they believed that you sent me. [9]I am praying for them. I am not praying for people in the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. [10]All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And my glory is shown through them. [11]I am coming to you; I will not stay in the world any longer. But they are still in the world. Holy Father, keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they will be one, just as you and I are one. [12]While I was with them, I kept them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me. I protected them, and only one of them, the one worthy of destruction, was lost so that the Scripture would come true.

[13]"I am coming to you now. But I pray these things while I

am still in the world so that these followers can have all of my joy in them. [14]I have given them your teaching. And the world has hated them, because they don't belong to the world, just as I don't belong to the world. [15]I am not asking you to take them out of the world but to keep them safe from the Evil One. [16]They don't belong to the world, just as I don't belong to the world. [17]Make them ready for your service through your truth; your teaching is truth. [18]I have sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world. [19]For their sake, I am making myself ready to serve so that they can be ready for their service of the truth.

[20]"I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. [21]Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. [22]I have given these people the glory that you gave me so that they can be one, just as you and I are one. [23]I will be in them and you will be in me so that they will be completely one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just as much as you loved me.

[24]"Father, I want these people that you gave me to be with me where I am. I want them to see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the world was made. [25]Father, you are the One who is good. The world does not know you, but I know you, and these people know you sent me. [26]I showed them what you are like, and I will show them again. Then they will have the same love that you have for me, and I will live in them."

# June 9

## God's Name in Your Heart

*The Lord is like a strong tower; those who do right can run to him for safety.*

Proverbs 18:10

when you are confused about the future, go to your *Jehovah-raah,* your caring shepherd. When you are anxious about provision, talk to *Jehovah-jireh,* the Lord who provides. Are your challenges too great? Seek the help of *Jehovah-shalom,* the Lord is peace. Is your body sick? Are your emotions weak? *Jehovah-rophe,* the Lord who heals you, will see you now. Do you feel like a soldier stranded behind enemy lines? Take refuge in *Jehovah-nissi,* the Lord my banner.

Meditating on the names of God reminds you of the character of God. Take these names and bury them in your heart.

God is
the shepherd who guides,
the Lord who provides,
the voice who brings peace in the storm,
the physician who heals the sick, and
the banner that guides the soldier.

from *The Great House of God*

## 2 Kings 5:1—6:23

### *Naaman Is Healed*

5 Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was honored by his master, and he had much respect because the LORD used him to give victory to Aram. He was a mighty and brave man, but he had a skin disease.

2The Arameans had gone out to raid the Israelites and had taken a little girl as a captive. This little girl served Naaman's

wife. 3She said to her mistress, “I wish my master would meet
the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his
disease.”
4Naaman went to the king and told him what the girl from
Israel had said. 5The king of Aram said, “Go ahead, and I will
send a letter to the king of Israel.” So Naaman left and took
with him about seven hundred fifty pounds of silver, as well as
one hundred fifty pounds of gold and ten changes of clothes.
6He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, “I am
sending my servant Naaman to you so you can heal him of his
skin disease.”
7When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes to
show how upset he was. He said, “I’m not God! I can’t kill and
make alive again! Why does this man send someone with a skin
disease for me to heal? You can see that the king of Aram is
trying to start trouble with me.”
8When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel
had torn his clothes, he sent the king this message: “Why have
you torn your clothes? Let Naaman come to me. Then he will
know there is a prophet in Israel.” 9So Naaman went with his
horses and chariots to Elisha’s house and stood outside the
door.
10Elisha sent Naaman a messenger who said, “Go and wash
in the Jordan River seven times. Then your skin will be healed,
and you will be clean.”
11Naaman became angry and left. He said, “I thought Elisha
would surely come out and stand before me and call on the
name of the LORD his God. I thought he would wave his hand
over the place and heal the disease. 12The Abana and the
Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, are better than all the waters
of Israel. Why can’t I wash in them and become clean?” So
Naaman went away very angry.
13Naaman’s servants came near and said to him, “My father,
if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, wouldn’t you
have done it? Doesn’t it make more sense just to do it? After all,
he only told you, ‘Wash, and you will be clean.’” 14So Naaman
went down and dipped in the Jordan seven times, just as Elisha
had said. Then his skin became new again, like the skin of a
child. And he was clean.
15Naaman and all his group returned to Elisha. He stood
before Elisha and said, “Look, I now know there is no God in all
the earth except in Israel. Now please accept a gift from me.”
16But Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD lives whom I serve, I
won’t accept anything.” Naaman urged him to take the gift, but
he refused.
17Then Naaman said, “If you won’t take the gift, then please
give me some soil—as much as two of my mules can carry. From
now on I’ll not offer any burnt offering or sacrifice to any other
gods but the LORD. 18But let the LORD pardon me for this: When

my master goes into the temple of Rimmon[n] to worship, he leans on my arm. Then I must bow in that temple. May the LORD pardon me when I do that."

19Elisha said to him, "Go in peace."

Naaman left Elisha and went a short way. 20Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, "My master has not accepted what Naaman the Aramean brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I'll run after him and get something from him." 21So Gehazi went after Naaman.

When Naaman saw someone running after him, he got off the chariot to meet Gehazi. He asked, "Is everything all right?"

22Gehazi said, "Everything is all right. My master has sent me. He said, 'Two young men from the groups of prophets in the mountains of Ephraim just came to me. Please give them seventy-five pounds of silver and two changes of clothes.'"

23Naaman said, "Please take one hundred fifty pounds," and he urged Gehazi to take it. He tied one hundred fifty pounds of silver in two bags with two changes of clothes. Then he gave them to two of his servants to carry for Gehazi. 24When they came to the hill, Gehazi took these things from Naaman's servants and put them in the house. Then he let Naaman's servants go, and they left.

25When he came in and stood before his master, Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?"

"I didn't go anywhere," he answered.

26But Elisha said to him, "My spirit was with you. I knew when the man turned from his chariot to meet you. This isn't a time to take money, clothes, olives, grapes, sheep, oxen, male servants, or female servants. 27So Naaman's skin disease will come on you and your children forever." When Gehazi left Elisha, he had the disease and was as white as snow.

## *An Axhead Floats*

6 The groups of prophets said to Elisha, "The place where we meet with you is too small for us. 2Let's go to the Jordan River. There everyone can get a log, and let's build a place there to live."

Elisha said, "Go."

3One of them said, "Please go with us."

Elisha answered, "I will go," 4so he went with them. When they arrived at the Jordan, they cut down some trees. 5As one man was cutting down a tree, the head of his ax fell into the water. He yelled, "Oh, my master! I borrowed that ax!"

6Elisha asked, "Where did it fall?" The man showed him the place. Then Elisha cut down a stick and threw it into the water, and it made the iron head float. 7Elisha said, "Pick up the axhead." Then the man reached out and took it.

## *Elisha and the Blinded Arameans*

8 The king of Aram was at war with Israel. He had a council
meeting with his officers and said, “I will set up my camp in this
place.”
9 Elisha, the man of God, sent a message to the king of Israel,
saying, “Be careful! Don’t pass that place, because the
Arameans are going down there!”
10 The king of Israel checked the place about which Elisha
had warned him. Elisha warned him several times, so the king
protected himself there.
11 The king of Aram was angry about this. He called his
officers together and demanded, “Tell me who of us is working
for the king of Israel.”
12 One of the officers said, “None, my master and king. It’s
Elisha, the prophet from Israel. He can tell you what you speak
in your bedroom.”
13 The king said, “Go and find him so I can send men and
catch him.”
The servants came back and reported, “He is in Dothan.”
14 Then the king sent horses, chariots, and many troops to
Dothan. They arrived at night and surrounded the city.
15 Elisha’s servant got up early, and when he went out, he
saw an army with horses and chariots all around the city. The
servant said to Elisha, “Oh, my master, what can we do?”
16 Elisha said, “Don’t be afraid. The army that fights for us is
larger than the one against us.”
17 Then Elisha prayed, “LORD, open my servant’s eyes, and let
him see.”
The LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw that
the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around
Elisha.
18 As the enemy came down toward Elisha, he prayed to the
LORD, “Make these people blind.” So he made the Aramean army
blind, as Elisha had asked.
19 Elisha said to them, “This is not the right road or the right
city. Follow me and I’ll take you to the man you are looking for.”
Then Elisha led them to Samaria.
20 After they entered Samaria, Elisha said, “LORD, open these
men’s eyes so they can see.” So the LORD opened their eyes, and
the Aramean army saw that they were inside the city of
Samaria!
21 When the king of Israel saw the Aramean army, he said to
Elisha, “My father, should I kill them? Should I kill them?”
22 Elisha answered, “Don’t kill them. You wouldn’t kill people
whom you captured with your sword and bow. Give them food
and water, and let them eat and drink and then go home to their
master.” 23 So he prepared a great feast for the Aramean army.

After they ate and drank, the king sent them away, and they went home to their master. The soldiers of Aram did not come anymore into the land of Israel.

## Psalm 72:1–7

### *A Prayer for the King*

**Of Solomon.**

72 God, give the king your good judgment
and the king's son your goodness.

2Help him judge your people fairly
and decide what is right for the poor.

3Let there be peace on the mountains
and goodness on the hills for the people.

4Help him be fair to the poor
and save the needy
and punish those who hurt them.

5May they respect you as long as the sun shines
and as long as the moon glows.

6Let him be like rain on the grass,
like showers that water the earth.

7Let goodness be plentiful while he lives.
Let peace continue as long as there is a moon.

## Proverbs 18:10–11

10 The LORD is like a strong tower;
those who do right can run to him for safety.

11 Rich people trust their wealth to protect them.
They think it is like the high walls of a city.

## John 18:1–18

### *Jesus Is Arrested*

18 When Jesus finished praying, he went with his followers
across the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden,
and Jesus and his followers went into it.
2 Judas knew where this place was, because Jesus met there
often with his followers. Judas was the one who turned against
Jesus. 3 So Judas came there with a group of soldiers and some
guards from the leading priests and the Pharisees. They were
carrying torches, lanterns, and weapons.
4 Knowing everything that would happen to him, Jesus went
out and asked, "Who is it you are looking for?"
5 They answered, "Jesus from Nazareth."
"I am he," Jesus said. (Judas, the one who turned against
Jesus, was standing there with them.) 6 When Jesus said, "I am
he," they moved back and fell to the ground.
7 Jesus asked them again, "Who is it you are looking for?"
They said, "Jesus of Nazareth."
8 "I told you that I am he," Jesus said. "So if you are looking
for me, let the others go." 9 This happened so that the words
Jesus said before would come true: "I have not lost any of the
ones you gave me."
10 Simon Peter, who had a sword, pulled it out and struck the
servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. (The
servant's name was Malchus.) 11 Jesus said to Peter, "Put your
sword back. Shouldn't I drink the cup[n] the Father gave me?"

### *Jesus Is Brought Before Annas*

12 Then the soldiers with their commander and the guards
arrested Jesus. They tied him 13 and led him first to Annas, the
father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. 14 Caiaphas
was the one who told the Jews that it would be better if one
man died for all the people.

## *Peter Says He Doesn't Know Jesus*

15 Simon Peter and another one of Jesus' followers went along
after Jesus. This follower knew the high priest, so he went with
Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. 16 But Peter waited
outside near the door. The follower who knew the high priest
came back outside, spoke to the girl at the door, and brought
Peter inside. 17 The girl at the door said to Peter, "Aren't you also
one of that man's followers?"

Peter answered, "No, I am not!"

18 It was cold, so the servants and guards had built a fire and
were standing around it, warming themselves. Peter also was
standing with them, warming himself.

# June 10

# Made for Heaven

*"My kingdom does not belong to this world."*

John 18:36

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

We are not happy here because we are not at home here. We are not happy here because we are not supposed to be happy here. We are "like foreigners and strangers in this world" (1 Peter 2:11) …

And you will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have your moments of joy. You will catch glimpses of light. You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## 2 Kings 6:24—8:29

### *A Shortage of Food*

24 Later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram gathered his whole army
and surrounded and attacked Samaria. 25 There was a shortage
of food in Samaria. It was so bad that a donkey's head sold for
about two pounds of silver, and half of a pint of dove's dung sold
for about two ounces of silver.
26 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman
yelled out to him, "Help me, my master and king!"
27 The king said, "If the LORD doesn't help you, how can I?
Can I get help from the threshing floor or from the winepress?"
28 Then the king said to her, "What is your trouble?"
She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so

we can eat him today. Then we will eat my son tomorrow.' 29So we boiled my son and ate him. Then the next day I said to her, 'Give up your son so we can eat him.' But she had hidden him."

30When the king heard the woman's words, he tore his clothes in grief. As he walked along the wall, the people looked and saw he had on rough cloth under his clothes to show his sadness. 31He said, "May God punish me terribly if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat isn't cut off from his body today!"

32The king sent a messenger to Elisha, who was sitting in his house with the elders. But before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to them, "See, this murderer is sending men to cut off my head. When the messenger arrives, shut the door and hold it; don't let him in. The sound of his master's feet is behind him."

33Elisha was still talking with the leaders when the messenger arrived. The king said, "This trouble has come from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"

7 Elisha said, "Listen to the LORD's word. This is what the LORD says: 'About this time tomorrow seven quarts of fine flour will be sold for two-fifths of an ounce of silver, and thirteen quarts of barley will be sold for two-fifths of an ounce of silver. This will happen at the gate of Samaria.'"

2Then the officer who was close to the king answered Elisha, "Even if the LORD opened windows in the sky, that couldn't happen."

Elisha said, "You will see it with your eyes, but you will not eat any of it."

3There were four men with a skin disease at the entrance to the city gate. They said to each other, "Why do we sit here until we die? 4There is no food in the city. So if we go into the city, we will die there. If we stay here, we will die. So let's go to the Aramean camp. If they let us live, we will live. If they kill us, we die."

5So they got up at twilight and went to the Aramean camp, but when they arrived, no one was there. 6The Lord had caused the Aramean army to hear the sound of chariots, horses, and a large army. They had said to each other, "The king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!" 7So they got up and ran away in the twilight, leaving their tents, horses, and donkeys. They left the camp standing and ran for their lives.

8When the men with the skin disease came to the edge of the camp, they went into one of the tents and ate and drank. They carried silver, gold, and clothes out of the camp and hid them. Then they came back and entered another tent. They carried things from this tent and hid them, also. 9Then they said to each other, "We're doing wrong. Today we have good news, but we are silent. If we wait until the sun comes up, we'll be discovered. Let's go right now and tell the people in the king's palace."

10So they went and called to the gatekeepers of the city.

They said, “We went to the Aramean camp, but no one is there;
we didn’t hear anyone. The horses and donkeys were still tied
up, and the tents were still standing.” 11Then the gatekeepers
shouted out and told the people in the palace.

12The king got up in the night and said to his officers, “I’ll
tell you what the Arameans are doing to us. They know we are
starving. They have gone out of the camp to hide in the field.
They’re saying, ‘When the Israelites come out of the city, we’ll
capture them alive. Then we’ll enter the city.’”

13One of his officers answered, “Let some men take five of
the horses that are still left in the city. These men are like all
the Israelites who are left; they are also about to die. Let’s send
them to see what has happened.”

14So the men took two chariots with horses. The king sent
them after the Aramean army, saying, “Go and see what has
happened.” 15The men followed the Aramean army as far as the
Jordan River. The road was full of clothes and equipment that
the Arameans had thrown away as they had hurriedly left. So
the messengers returned and told the king. 16Then the people
went out and took valuables from the Aramean camp. So seven
quarts of fine flour were sold for two-fifths of an ounce of silver,
and thirteen quarts of barley were sold for two-fifths of an
ounce of silver, just as the LORD had said.

17The king chose the officer who was close to him to guard
the gate, but the people trampled the officer to death. This
happened just as Elisha had told the king when the king came
to his house. 18He had said, “Thirteen quarts of barley and
seven quarts of fine flour will each sell for two-fifths of an ounce
of silver about this time tomorrow at the gate of Samaria.”

19But the officer had answered, “Even if the LORD opened
windows in the sky, that couldn’t happen.” And Elisha had told
him, “You will see it with your eyes, but you won’t eat any of it.”
20It happened to the officer just that way. The people trampled
him in the gateway, and he died.

## *The Shunammite Regains Her Land*

8 Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had brought back to
life. He said, “Get up and go with your family. Stay any place
you can, because the LORD has called for a time without food
that will last seven years.” 2So the woman got up and did as the
man of God had said. She left with her family, and they stayed in
the land of the Philistines for seven years. 3After seven years
she returned from the land of the Philistines and went to beg
the king for her house and land. 4The king was talking with
Gehazi, the servant of the man of God. The king had said,
“Please tell me all the great things Elisha has done.” 5Gehazi
was telling the king how Elisha had brought a dead boy back to

life. Just then the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came and begged the king for her house and land.

Gehazi said, “My master and king, this is the woman, and this is the son Elisha brought back to life.”

6The king asked the woman, and she told him about it. Then the king chose an officer to help her. “Give the woman everything that is hers,” the king said. “Give her all the money made from her land from the day she left until now.”

## *Ben-Hadad Is Killed*

7Then Elisha went to Damascus, where Ben-Hadad king of Aram was sick. Someone told him, “The man of God has arrived.”

8The king said to Hazael, “Take a gift in your hand and go meet him. Ask the LORD through him if I will recover from my sickness.”

9So Hazael went to meet Elisha, taking with him a gift of forty camels loaded with every good thing in Damascus. He came and stood before Elisha and said, “Your son Ben-Hadad king of Aram sent me to you. He asks if he will recover from his sickness.”

10Elisha said to Hazael, “Go and tell Ben-Hadad, ‘You will surely recover,’ but the LORD has told me he will really die.” 11Hazael stared at Elisha until he felt ashamed. Then Elisha cried.

12Hazael asked, “Why are you crying, master?”

Elisha answered, “Because I know what evil you will do to the Israelites. You will burn their strong, walled cities with fire and kill their young men with swords. You will throw their babies to the ground and split open their pregnant women.”

13Hazael said, “Am I a dog? How could I do such things?”

Elisha answered, “The LORD has shown me that you will be king over Aram.”

14Then Hazael left Elisha and came to his master. Ben-Hadad said to him, “What did Elisha say to you?”

Hazael answered, “He told me that you will surely recover.” 15But the next day Hazael took a blanket and dipped it in water. Then he put it over Ben-Hadad’s face, and he died. So Hazael became king in Ben-Hadad’s place.

## *Jehoram King of Judah*

16While Jehoshaphat was king in Judah, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat became king of Judah. This was during the fifth year Joram son of Ahab was king of Israel. 17Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he began to rule, and he ruled eight years in Jerusalem. 18He followed the ways of the kings of Israel, just

as the family of Ahab had done, because he married Ahab's daughter. Jehoram did what the LORD said was wrong. [19]But the LORD would not destroy Judah because of his servant David. The LORD had promised that one of David's descendants would always rule.

[20]In Jehoram's time Edom broke away from Judah's rule and chose their own king. [21]So Jehoram and all his chariots went to Zair. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders. Jehoram got up and attacked the Edomites at night, but his army ran away to their tents. [22]From then until now the country of Edom has fought against the rule of Judah. At the same time Libnah also broke away from Judah's rule.

[23]The other acts of Jehoram and all the things he did are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. [24]Jehoram died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, and Jehoram's son Ahaziah ruled in his place.

[25]Ahaziah son of Jehoram became king of Judah during the twelfth year Joram son of Ahab was king of Israel. [26]Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he ruled one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri king of Israel. [27]Ahaziah followed the ways of Ahab's family. He did what the LORD said was wrong, as Ahab's family had done, because he was a son-in-law to Ahab.

[28]Ahaziah went with Joram son of Ahab to Ramoth in Gilead, where they fought against Hazael king of Aram. The Arameans wounded Joram. [29]So King Joram returned to Jezreel to heal from the wound he had received from the Arameans at Ramoth when he fought Hazael king of Aram. Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to visit Joram son of Ahab at Jezreel, because he had been wounded.

## Psalm 72:8–14

[8]Let his kingdom go from sea to sea,
and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

[9]Let the people of the desert bow down to him,
and make his enemies lick the dust.

[10]Let the kings of Tarshish and the faraway lands
bring him gifts.

Let the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring their presents to him.

11 Let all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.

12 He will help the poor when they cry out
and will save the needy when no one else will help.

13 He will be kind to the weak and poor,
and he will save their lives.

14 He will save them from cruel people who try to hurt them,
because their lives are precious to him.

## Proverbs 18:12–13

12 Proud people will be ruined,
but the humble will be honored.

13 Anyone who answers without listening
is foolish and confused.

## John 18:19–40

### *The High Priest Questions Jesus*

19 The high priest asked Jesus questions about his followers and his teaching. 20 Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly to everyone. I have always taught in synagogues and in the Temple, where all the Jews come together. I never said anything in secret. 21 So why do you question me? Ask the people who heard my teaching. They know what I said.”

22 When Jesus said this, one of the guards standing there hit him. The guard said, “Is that the way you answer the high

priest?”
23 Jesus answered him, “If I said something wrong, then show
what it was. But if what I said is true, why do you hit me?”
24 Then Annas sent Jesus, who was still tied, to Caiaphas the
high priest.

## *Peter Says Again He Doesn’t Know Jesus*

25 As Simon Peter was standing and warming himself, they
said to him, “Aren’t you one of that man’s followers?”
Peter said it was not true; he said, “No, I am not.”
26 One of the servants of the high priest was there. This
servant was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off.
The servant said, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?”
27 Again Peter said it wasn’t true. At once a rooster crowed.

## *Jesus Is Brought Before Pilate*

28 Early in the morning they led Jesus from Caiaphas’s house
to the Roman governor’s palace. They would not go inside the
palace, because they did not want to make themselves unclean;[n]
they wanted to eat the Passover meal. 29 So Pilate went outside
to them and asked, “What charges do you bring against this
man?”
30 They answered, “If he were not a criminal, we wouldn’t
have brought him to you.”
31 Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by
your own law.”
“But we are not allowed to put anyone to death,” the Jews
answered. 32 (This happened so that what Jesus said about how
he would die would come true.)
33 Then Pilate went back inside the palace and called Jesus to
him and asked, “Are you the king of the Jews?”
34 Jesus said, “Is that your own question, or did others tell
you about me?”
35 Pilate answered, “I am not one of you. It was your own
people and their leading priests who handed you over to me.
What have you done wrong?”
36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this
world. If it belonged to this world, my servants would have
fought to keep me from being given over to the Jewish leaders.
But my kingdom is from another place.”
37 Pilate said, “So you are a king!”
Jesus answered, “You are the one saying I am a king. This is
why I was born and came into the world: to tell people the
truth. And everyone who belongs to the truth listens to me.”
38 Pilate said, “What is truth?” After he said this, he went out
to the crowd again and said to them, “I find nothing against this

man. [39]But it is your custom that I free one prisoner to you at Passover time. Do you want me to free the ‘king of the Jews’?”

[40]They shouted back, “No, not him! Let Barabbas go free!” (Barabbas was a robber.)

# June 11

# Jesus Planned It All

*"The only power you have over me is the power given to you by God."*

John 19:11

Jesus planned his own sacrifice. It means Jesus intentionally planted the tree from which his cross would be carved. It means he willingly placed the iron ore in the heart of the earth from which the nails would be cast.

It means he voluntarily placed his Judas in the womb of a woman.

It means Christ was the one who set in motion the political machinery that would send Pilate to Jerusalem.

And it also means he didn't have to do it—but he did.

from *God Came Near*

## 2 Kings 9:1—10:36

### *Jehu Is Chosen King*

9 At the same time, Elisha the prophet called a man from the
groups of prophets. Elisha said, "Get ready, and take this small
bottle of olive oil in your hand. Go to Ramoth in Gilead. 2When
you arrive, find Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi. Go
in and make Jehu get up from among his brothers, and take him
to an inner room. 3Then take the bottle and pour the oil on
Jehu's head and say, 'This is what the LORD says: I have
appointed you king over Israel.' Then open the door and run
away. Don't wait!"

4So the young man, the prophet, went to Ramoth in Gilead.
5When he arrived, he saw the officers of the army sitting
together. He said, "Commander, I have a message for you."

Jehu asked, "For which one of us?"

The young man said, "For you, commander."

[6]Jehu got up and went into the house. Then the young
prophet poured the olive oil on Jehu's head and said to him,
"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'I have appointed
you king over the LORD's people Israel. [7]You must destroy the
family of Ahab your master. I will punish Jezebel for the deaths
of my servants the prophets and for all the LORD's servants who
were murdered. [8]All of Ahab's family must die. I will not let any
male child in Ahab's family live in Israel, whether slave or free.
[9]I will make Ahab's family like the family of Jeroboam son of
Nebat and like the family of Baasha son of Ahijah. [10]The dogs
will eat Jezebel at Jezreel, and no one will bury her.'"

Then the young prophet opened the door and ran away.

[11]When Jehu went back to his master's officers, one of them
said to Jehu, "Is everything all right? Why did this crazy man
come to you?"

Jehu answered, "You know the man and how he talks."

[12]They answered, "That's not true. Tell us."

Jehu said, "He said to me, 'This is what the LORD says: I have
appointed you to be king over Israel.'"

[13]Then the officers hurried, and each man took off his own
coat and put it on the stairs for Jehu. They blew the trumpet
and shouted, "Jehu is king!"

## *Joram and Ahaziah Are Killed*

[14]So Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, made plans
against Joram. Now Joram and all Israel had been defending
Ramoth in Gilead from Hazael king of Aram. [15]But King Joram
had to return to Jezreel to heal from the injuries the Arameans
had given him when he fought against Hazael king of Aram.

Jehu said, "If you agree with this, don't let anyone leave the
city. They might tell the news in Jezreel." [16]Then he got into his
chariot and set out for Jezreel, where Joram was resting.
Ahaziah king of Judah had gone down to see him.

[17]The lookout was standing on the watchtower in Jezreel
when he saw Jehu's troops coming. He said, "I see some
soldiers!"

Joram said, "Take a horseman and send him to meet them.
Tell him to ask, 'Is all in order?'"

[18]The horseman rode out to meet Jehu, and he said, "This is
what the king says: 'Is all in order?'"

Jehu said, "Why bother yourself with order? Come along
behind me."

The lookout reported, "The messenger reached them, but he
is not coming back."

[19]Then Joram sent out a second horseman. This rider came
to Jehu's group and said, "This is what the king says: 'Is all in
order?'"

Jehu answered, “Why bother yourself with order? Come
along behind me.”
20The lookout reported, “The second man reached them, but
he is not coming back. The man in the chariot is driving like
Jehu son of Nimshi. He drives as if he were crazy!”
21Joram said, “Get my chariot ready.” Then the servant got
Joram’s chariot ready. Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of
Judah went out, each in his own chariot, to meet Jehu at the
property of Naboth the Jezreelite.
22When Joram saw Jehu, he said, “Is all in order, Jehu?”
Jehu answered, “There will never be any order as long as
your mother Jezebel worships idols and uses witchcraft.”
23Joram turned the horses to run away and yelled to Ahaziah,
“It’s a trick, Ahaziah!”
24Then Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between his
shoulders. The arrow went through Joram’s heart, and he fell
down in his chariot.
25Jehu ordered Bidkar, his chariot officer, “Pick up Joram’s
body, and throw it into the field of Naboth the Jezreelite.
Remember when you and I rode together with Joram’s father
Ahab. The LORD made this prophecy against him: 26‘Yesterday I
saw the blood of Naboth and his sons, says the LORD, so I will
punish Ahab in his field, says the LORD.’ Take Joram’s body and
throw it into the field, as the LORD has said.”
27When Ahaziah king of Judah saw this, he ran away toward
Beth Haggan. Jehu chased him, saying, “Shoot Ahaziah, too!”
Ahaziah was wounded in his chariot on the way up to Gur near
Ibleam. He got as far as Megiddo but died there. 28Ahaziah’s
servants carried his body in a chariot to Jerusalem and buried
him with his ancestors in his tomb in Jerusalem. 29(Ahaziah had
become king over Judah in the eleventh year Joram son of Ahab
was king.)

## *Death of Jezebel*

30When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard about it. She put
on her eye makeup and fixed her hair. Then she looked out the
window. 31When Jehu entered the city gate, Jezebel said, “Have
you come in peace, you Zimri,[n] you who killed your master?”
32Jehu looked up at the window and said, “Who is on my
side? Who?” Two or three servants looked out the window at
Jehu. 33He said to them, “Throw her down.” So they threw
Jezebel down, and the horses ran over her. Some of her blood
splashed on the wall and on the horses.
34Jehu went into the house and ate and drank. Then he said,
“Now see about this cursed woman. Bury her, because she is a
king’s daughter.”
35The men went to bury Jezebel, but they could not find her.

They found only her skull, feet, and the palms of her hands.
36When they came back and told Jehu, he said, “The LORD said
this through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: ‘The dogs will eat
Jezebel at Jezreel. 37Her body will be like manure on the field in
the land at Jezreel. No one will be able to say that this is
Jezebel.’”

## *Families of Ahab and Ahaziah Killed*

10 Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. Jehu wrote letters and
sent them to Samaria to the officers and elders of Jezreel and to
the guardians of the sons of Ahab. Jehu said, 2“You have your
master’s sons with you, and you have chariots, horses, a city
with strong walls, and weapons. When you get this letter,
3choose the best and most worthy person among your master’s
sons, and make him king. Then fight for your master’s family.”

4But the officers and leaders of Jezreel were frightened. They
said, “Two kings could not stand up to Jehu, so how can we?”

5The palace manager, the city governor, the leaders, and the
guardians sent a message to Jehu. “We are your servants,” they
said. “We will do everything you tell us to do. We won’t make
any man king, so do whatever you think is best.”

6Then Jehu wrote a second letter, saying, “If you are on my
side and will obey me, cut off the heads of your master’s sons
and come to me at Jezreel tomorrow about this time.”

Now the seventy sons of the king’s family were with the
leading men of the city who were their guardians. 7When the
leaders received the letter, they took the king’s sons and killed
all seventy of them. They put their heads in baskets and sent
them to Jehu at Jezreel. 8The messenger came to Jehu and told
him, “They have brought the heads of the king’s sons.”

Then Jehu said, “Lay the heads in two piles at the city gate
until morning.”

9In the morning, Jehu went out and stood before the people
and said to them, “You are innocent. Look, I made plans against
my master and killed him. But who killed all these? 10You should
know that everything the LORD said about Ahab’s family will
come true. The LORD has spoken through his servant Elijah, and
the LORD has done what he said.” 11So Jehu killed everyone of
Ahab’s family in Jezreel who was still alive. He also killed all
Ahab’s leading men, close friends, and priests. No one who had
helped Ahab was left alive.

12Then Jehu left and went to Samaria by way of the road to
Beth Eked of the Shepherds. 13There Jehu met some relatives of
Ahaziah king of Judah. Jehu asked, “Who are you?”

They answered, “We are relatives of Ahaziah. We have come
down to get revenge for the families of the king and the king’s
mother.”

14Then Jehu said, “Take them alive!” So they captured
Ahaziah’s relatives alive and killed them at the well near Beth
Eked—forty-two of them. Jehu did not leave anyone alive.
15After Jehu left there, he met Jehonadab son of Recab, who
was also on his way to meet Jehu. Jehu greeted him and said,
“Are you as good a friend to me as I am to you?”
Jehonadab answered, “Yes, I am.”
Jehu said, “If you are, then give me your hand.” So
Jehonadab gave him his hand, and Jehu pulled him into the
chariot. 16“Come with me,” Jehu said. “You can see how strong
my feelings are for the LORD.” So Jehu had Jehonadab ride in his
chariot.
17When Jehu came to Samaria, he killed all of Ahab’s family
in Samaria. He destroyed all those who were left, just as the
LORD had told Elijah it would happen.

## *Baal Worshipers Killed*

18Then Jehu gathered all the people together and said to
them, “Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve Baal much.
19Now call for me all Baal’s prophets and priests and all the
people who worship Baal. Don’t let anyone miss this meeting,
because I have a great sacrifice for Baal. Anyone who is not
there will not live.” But Jehu was tricking them so he could
destroy the worshipers of Baal. 20He said, “Prepare a holy
meeting for Baal.” So they announced the meeting. 21Then Jehu
sent word through all Israel, and all the worshipers of Baal
came; not one stayed home. They came into the temple of Baal,
and the temple was filled from one side to the other.
22Jehu said to the man who kept the robes, “Bring out robes
for all the worshipers of Baal.” After he brought out robes for
them, 23Jehu and Jehonadab son of Recab went into the temple
of Baal. Jehu said to the worshipers of Baal, “Look around, and
make sure there are no servants of the LORD with you. Be sure
there are only worshipers of Baal.” 24Then the worshipers of
Baal went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings.
Jehu had eighty men waiting outside. He had told them,
“Don’t let anyone escape. If you do, you must pay with your own
life.”
25As soon as Jehu finished offering the burnt offering, he
ordered the guards and the captains, “Go in and kill the
worshipers of Baal. Don’t let anyone come out.” So the guards
and captains killed the worshipers of Baal with the sword and
threw their bodies out. Then they went to the inner rooms of the
temple 26and brought out the pillars of the temple of Baal and
burned them. 27They tore down the stone pillar of Baal, as well
as the temple of Baal. And they made it into a sewage pit, as it
is today.

28 So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel, 29 but he did not
stop doing the sins Jeroboam son of Nebat had done. Jeroboam
had led Israel to sin by worshiping the golden calves in Bethel
and Dan.
30 The LORD said to Jehu, “You have done well in obeying what
I said was right. You have done to the family of Ahab as I
wanted. Because of this, your descendants as far as your great-
great-grandchildren will be kings of Israel.” 31 But Jehu was not
careful to follow the teachings of the LORD, the God of Israel,
with all his heart. He did not stop doing the same sins Jeroboam
had done, by which he had led Israel to sin.
32 At that time the LORD began to make Israel smaller. Hazael
defeated the Israelites in all the land of Israel, 33 taking all the
land of the Jordan known as the land of Gilead. (It was the
region of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh.) He took land from
Aroer by the Arnon Ravine through Gilead to Bashan.
34 The other things Jehu did—everything he did and all his
victories—are recorded in the book of the history of the kings of
Israel. 35 Jehu died and was buried in Samaria, and his son
Jehoahaz became king in his place. 36 Jehu was king over Israel
in Samaria for twenty-eight years.

## Psalm 72:15–20

15 Long live the king!
Let him receive gold from Sheba.

Let people always pray for him
and bless him all day long.

16 Let the fields grow plenty of grain
and the hills be covered with crops.

Let the land be as fertile as Lebanon,
and let the cities grow like the grass in a field.

17 Let the king be famous forever;
let him be remembered as long as the sun shines.

Let the nations be blessed because of him,
and may they all bless him.

18 Praise the LORD God, the God of Israel,
who alone does such miracles.

19 Praise his glorious name forever.
Let his glory fill the whole world.
Amen and amen.

20 This ends the prayers of David son of Jesse.

## Proverbs 18:14–15

14 The will to live can get you through sickness,
but no one can live with a broken spirit.

15 The mind of a person with understanding gets knowledge;
the wise person listens to learn more.

## John 19:1–16a

19 Then Pilate ordered that Jesus be taken away and whipped.
2 The soldiers made a crown from some thorny branches and put
it on Jesus' head and put a purple robe around him. 3 Then they
came to him many times and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and
hit him in the face.
4 Again Pilate came out and said to them, "Look, I am
bringing Jesus out to you. I want you to know that I find nothing
against him." 5 So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns
and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"
6 When the leading priests and the guards saw Jesus, they
shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"
But Pilate answered, "Crucify him yourselves, because I find
nothing against him."
7 The leaders answered, "We have a law that says he should
die, because he said he is the Son of God."

[8]When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. [9]He went back inside the palace and asked Jesus, “Where do you come from?” But Jesus did not answer him. [10]Pilate said, “You refuse to speak to me? Don’t you know I have power to set you free and power to have you crucified?”

[11]Jesus answered, “The only power you have over me is the power given to you by God. The man who turned me in to you is guilty of a greater sin.”

[12]After this, Pilate tried to let Jesus go. But some in the crowd cried out, “Anyone who makes himself king is against Caesar. If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar.”

[13]When Pilate heard what they were saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at the place called The Stone Pavement. (In the Hebrew language[n] the name is Gabbatha.) [14]It was about noon on Preparation Day of Passover week. Pilate said to the crowd, “Here is your king!”

[15]They shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”

Pilate asked them, “Do you want me to crucify your king?”

The leading priests answered, “The only king we have is Caesar.”

[16]So Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

# June 12

# The Message of God to Man

*When Jesus tasted the vinegar, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and died.*

John 19:30

"It is finished." Stop and listen a moment. Let the words wind through your heart. Imagine the cry from the cross. The sky is dark. The other two victims are moaning. Jeering mouths of the crowd are silent. Perhaps there is thunder. Perhaps there is weeping. Perhaps there is silence. Then Jesus draws in a deep breath, pushes his feet down on that Roman nail, and cries, "It is finished!"

What was finished?

The history-long plan of redeeming man was finished. The message of God to man was finished. The works done by Jesus as a man on earth were finished ... The sting of death had been removed. It was over.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## 2 Kings 11:1—13:25

### *Athaliah and Joash*

11 When Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, saw that her son was dead,
she killed all the royal family. 2But Jehosheba, King Jehoram's
daughter and Ahaziah's sister, took Joash, Ahaziah's son. She
stole him from among the other sons of the king who were
about to be murdered. She put Joash and his nurse in a
bedroom to hide him from Athaliah, so he was not killed. 3He
hid with her in the Temple of the LORD for six years. During that
time Athaliah ruled the land.

4In the seventh year Jehoiada sent for the commanders of
groups of a hundred men, as well as the Carites.[n] He brought
them together in the Temple of the LORD and made an

agreement with them. There, in the Temple of the LORD, he made them promise loyalty, and then he showed them the king's son. 5He commanded them, "This is what you must do. A third of you who go on duty on the Sabbath will guard the king's palace. 6A third of you will be at the Sur Gate, and another third will be at the gate behind the guard. This way you will guard the Temple. 7The two groups who go off duty on the Sabbath must protect the Temple of the LORD for the king. 8All of you must stand around the king, with weapons in hand. Kill anyone who comes near. Stay close to the king when he goes out and when he comes in."

9The commanders over a hundred men obeyed everything Jehoiada the priest had commanded. Each one took his men who came on duty on the Sabbath and those who went off duty on the Sabbath, and they came to Jehoiada the priest. 10He gave the commanders the spears and shields that had belonged to King David and that were kept in the Temple of the LORD.

## *Joash Becomes King*

11Then each guard took his place with his weapons in his hand. There were guards from the south side of the Temple to the north side. They stood by the altar and the Temple and around the king. 12Jehoiada brought out the king's son and put the crown on him and gave him a copy of the agreement. They appointed him king and poured olive oil on him. Then they clapped their hands and said, "Long live the king!"

13When Athaliah heard the noise of the guards and the people, she went to them at the Temple of the LORD. 14She looked, and there was the king, standing by the pillar, as the custom was. The officers and trumpeters were standing beside him, and all the people of the land were very happy and were blowing trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and screamed, "Traitors! Traitors!"

15Jehoiada the priest gave orders to the commanders of a hundred men, who led the army. He said, "Surround her with soldiers and kill with a sword anyone who follows her." He commanded this because he had said, "Don't put Athaliah to death in the Temple of the LORD." 16So they caught her when she came to the horses' entrance near the palace. There she was put to death.

17Then Jehoiada made an agreement between the LORD and the king and the people that they would be the LORD's special people. He also made an agreement between the king and the people. 18All the people of the land went to the temple of Baal and tore it down, smashing the altars and idols. They also killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars.

Then Jehoiada the priest placed guards at the Temple of the

LORD. 19He took with him the commanders of a hundred men and the Carites, the royal bodyguards, as well as the guards and all the people of the land. Together they took the king out of the Temple of the LORD and went into the palace through the gate of the guards. Then the king sat on the royal throne. 20So all the people of the land were very happy, and Jerusalem had peace, because Athaliah had been put to death with the sword at the palace.

21Joash was seven years old when he became king.

12 Joash became king of Judah in Jehu's seventh year as king of Israel, and he ruled for forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah, and she was from Beersheba. 2Joash did what the LORD said was right as long as Jehoiada the priest taught him. 3But the places where gods were worshiped were not removed; the people still made sacrifices and burned incense there.

## *Joash Repairs the Temple*

4Joash said to the priests, "Take all the money brought as offerings to the Temple of the LORD. This includes the money each person owes in taxes and the money each person promises or brings freely to the LORD. 5Each priest will take the money from the people he serves. Then the priests must repair any damage they find in the Temple."

6But by the twenty-third year Joash was king, the priests still had not repaired the Temple. 7So King Joash called for Jehoiada the priest and the other priests and said to them, "Why aren't you repairing the damage of the Temple? Don't take any more money from the people you serve, but hand over the money for the repair of the Temple." 8The priests agreed not to take any more money from the people and not to repair the Temple themselves.

9Jehoiada the priest took a box and made a hole in the top of it. Then he put it by the altar, on the right side as the people came into the Temple of the LORD. The priests guarding the doorway put all the money brought to the Temple of the LORD into the box.

10Each time the priests saw that the box was full of money, the king's royal secretary and the high priest came. They counted the money that had been brought to the Temple of the LORD, and they put it into bags. 11Next they weighed the money and gave it to the people in charge of the work on the Temple. With it they paid the carpenters and the builders who worked on the Temple of the LORD, 12as well as the bricklayers and stonecutters. They also used the money to buy timber and cut stone to repair the damage of the Temple of the LORD. It paid for everything.

13 The money brought into the Temple of the LORD was not
used to make silver cups, wick trimmers, bowls, trumpets, or
gold or silver vessels. 14 They paid the money to the workers,
who used it to repair the Temple of the LORD. 15 They did not
demand to know how the money was spent, because the
workers were honest. 16 The money from the penalty offerings
and sin offerings was not brought into the Temple of the LORD,
because it belonged to the priests.

## *Joash Saves Jerusalem*

17 About this time Hazael king of Aram attacked Gath and
captured it. Then he went to attack Jerusalem. 18 Joash king of
Judah took all the holy things given by his ancestors, the kings
of Judah—Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah. He also took his
own holy things as well as the gold that was found in the
treasuries of the Temple of the LORD and the gold from the
palace. Joash sent all this treasure to Hazael king of Aram, who
turned away from Jerusalem.

19 Everything else Joash did is written in the book of the
history of the kings of Judah. 20 His officers made plans against
him and killed him at Beth Millo on the road down to Silla.
21 The officers who killed him were Jozabad son of Shimeath and
Jehozabad son of Shomer. Joash was buried with his ancestors
in Jerusalem, and Amaziah, his son, became king in his place.

## *Jehoahaz King of Israel*

13 Jehoahaz son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria
during the twenty-third year Joash son of Ahaziah was king of
Judah. Jehoahaz ruled seventeen years, 2 and he did what the
LORD said was wrong. Jehoahaz did the same sins Jeroboam son
of Nebat had done. Jeroboam had led Israel to sin, and Jehoahaz
did not stop doing these same sins. 3 So the LORD was angry with
Israel and handed them over to Hazael king of Aram and his son
Ben-Hadad for a long time.

4 Then Jehoahaz begged the LORD, and the LORD listened to
him. The LORD had seen the troubles of Israel; he saw how
terribly the king of Aram was treating them. 5 He gave Israel a
man to save them, and they escaped from the Arameans. The
Israelites then lived in their own homes as they had before, 6 but
they still did not stop doing the same sins that the family of
Jeroboam had done. He had led Israel to sin, and they continued
doing those sins. The Asherah idol also was left standing in
Samaria.

7 Nothing was left of Jehoahaz's army except fifty horsemen,
ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers. The king of Aram
had destroyed them and made them like chaff.

[8]Everything else Jehoahaz did and all his victories are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. [9]Jehoahaz died and was buried in Samaria, and his son Jehoash became king in his place.

## *Jehoash King of Israel*

[10]Jehoash son of Jehoahaz became king of Israel in Samaria during Joash's thirty-seventh year as king of Judah. Jehoash ruled sixteen years, [11]and he did what the LORD said was wrong. He did not stop doing the same sins Jeroboam son of Nebat had done. Jeroboam had led Israel to sin, and Jehoash continued to do the same thing. [12]Everything else he did and all his victories, including his war against Amaziah king of Judah, are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. [13]Jehoash died, and Jeroboam took his place on the throne. Jehoash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

## *The Death of Elisha*

[14]At this time Elisha became sick. Before he died, Jehoash king of Israel went to Elisha and cried for him. Jehoash said, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and their horsemen!"

[15]Elisha said to Jehoash, "Take a bow and arrows." So he took a bow and arrows. [16]Then Elisha said to him, "Put your hand on the bow." So Jehoash put his hand on the bow. Then Elisha put his hands on the king's hands. [17]Elisha said, "Open the east window." So Jehoash opened the window. Then Elisha said, "Shoot," and Jehoash shot. Elisha said, "The LORD's arrow of victory over Aram! You will defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you destroy them."

[18]Elisha said, "Take the arrows." So Jehoash took them. Then Elisha said to him, "Strike the ground." So Jehoash struck the ground three times and stopped. [19]The man of God was angry with him. "You should have struck five or six times!" Elisha said. "Then you would have struck Aram until you had completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times."

[20]Then Elisha died and was buried.

At that time groups of Moabites would rob the land in the springtime. [21]Once as some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a group of Moabites coming. The Israelites threw the dead man into Elisha's grave. When the man touched Elisha's bones, the man came back to life and stood on his feet.

## *War with Aram*

22During all the days Jehoahaz was king, Hazael king of
Aram troubled Israel. 23But the LORD was kind to the Israelites;
he had mercy on them and helped them because of his
agreement with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To this day he has
never wanted to destroy them or reject them.
24When Hazael king of Aram died, his son Ben-Hadad
became king in his place. 25During a war Hazael had taken
some cities from Jehoahaz, Jehoash's father. Now Jehoash took
back those cities from Hazael's son Ben-Hadad. He defeated
Ben-Hadad three times and took back the cities of Israel.

## Psalm 73:1–14

## Book 3

### *Should the Wicked Be Rich?*

**A psalm of Asaph.**

73 God is truly good to Israel,
to those who have pure hearts.

2But I had almost stopped believing;
I had almost lost my faith

3because I was jealous of proud people.
I saw wicked people doing well.

4They are not suffering;
they are healthy and strong.

5They don't have troubles like the rest of us;
they don't have problems like other people.

6They wear pride like a necklace
and put on violence as their clothing.

[7]They are looking for profits
and do not control their selfish desires.

[8]They make fun of others and speak evil;
proudly they speak of hurting others.

[9]They brag to the sky.
They say that they own the earth.

[10]So their people turn to them
and give them whatever they want.

[11]They say, “How can God know?
What does God Most High know?”

[12]These people are wicked,
always at ease, and getting richer.

[13]So why have I kept my heart pure?
Why have I kept my hands from doing wrong?

[14]I have suffered all day long;
I have been punished every morning.

## Proverbs 18:16–17

[16]Taking gifts to important people
will help get you in to see them.

[17]The person who tells one side of a story seems right,
until someone else comes and asks questions.

## John 19:16b–42

## *Jesus Is Crucified*

The soldiers took charge of Jesus. [17]Carrying his own cross,
Jesus went out to a place called The Place of the Skull, which in
the Hebrew language[n] is called Golgotha. [18]There they crucified
Jesus. They also crucified two other men, one on each side, with
Jesus in the middle. [19]Pilate wrote a sign and put it on the
cross. It read: jesus of nazareth, the king of the jews. [20]The sign was
written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Many of the people
read the sign, because the place where Jesus was crucified was
near the city. [21]The leading priests said to Pilate, "Don't write,
'The King of the Jews.' But write, 'This man said, "I am the King
of the Jews."'"

[22]Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

[23]After the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and
divided them into four parts, with each soldier getting one part.
They also took his long shirt, which was all one piece of cloth,
woven from top to bottom. [24]So the soldiers said to each other,
"We should not tear this into parts. Let's throw lots to see who
will get it." This happened so that this Scripture would come
true:

"They divided my clothes among them,
and they threw lots for my clothing."

Psalm 22:18

So the soldiers did this.

[25]Standing near his cross were Jesus' mother, his mother's
sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. [26]When
Jesus saw his mother and the follower he loved standing nearby,
he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son." [27]Then
he said to the follower, "Here is your mother." From that time
on, the follower took her to live in his home.

## *Jesus Dies*

[28]After this, Jesus knew that everything had been done. So
that the Scripture would come true, he said, "I am thirsty."[n]
[29]There was a jar full of vinegar there, so the soldiers soaked a
sponge in it, put the sponge on a branch of a hyssop plant, and
lifted it to Jesus' mouth. [30]When Jesus tasted the vinegar, he
said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and died.

[31]This day was Preparation Day, and the next day was a
special Sabbath day. Since the religious leaders did not want

the bodies to stay on the cross on the Sabbath day, they asked Pilate to order that the legs of the men be broken[n] and the bodies be taken away. 32So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man on the cross beside Jesus. Then they broke the legs of the man on the other cross beside Jesus. 33But when the soldiers came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34But one of the soldiers stuck his spear into Jesus' side, and at once blood and water came out. 35(The one who saw this happen is the one who told us this, and whatever he says is true. And he knows that he tells the truth, and he tells it so that you might believe.) 36These things happened to make the Scripture come true: "Not one of his bones will be broken."[n] 37And another Scripture says, "They will look at the one they stabbed."[n]

## *Jesus Is Buried*

38Later, Joseph from Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take the body of Jesus. (Joseph was a secret follower of Jesus, because he was afraid of some of the leaders.) Pilate gave his permission, so Joseph came and took Jesus' body away. 39Nicodemus, who earlier had come to Jesus at night, went with Joseph. He brought about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. 40These two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it with the spices in pieces of linen cloth, which is how they bury the dead. 41In the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden. In the garden was a new tomb that had never been used before. 42The men laid Jesus in that tomb because it was nearby, and they were preparing to start their Sabbath day.

# June 13

## Jesus Offers Peace

*"Peace be with you."*

John 20:19

The church of Jesus Christ began with a group of frightened men in a second-floor room in Jerusalem. Though they'd marched with Jesus for three years, they now sat … afraid. They were timid soldiers, reluctant warriors, speechless messengers.

Daring to dream that the master had left them some word, some plan, some direction, they came back.

But little did they know their wildest dream wasn't wild enough. Just as someone mumbles, "It's no use," they hear a noise. They hear a voice: "Peace be with you."

The one betrayed sought his betrayers. What did he say to them? Not "What a bunch of flops!" Not "I told you so." No "Where-were-you-when-I-needed-you?" speeches. But simply one phrase, "Peace be with you." The very thing they didn't have was the very thing he offered: peace.

from *Six Hours One Friday*

### 2 Kings 14:1–29

#### *Amaziah King of Judah*

14 Amaziah son of Joash became king of Judah during the
second year Jehoash son of Jehoahaz was king of Israel.
2Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and
he ruled twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother was named
Jehoaddin, and she was from Jerusalem. 3Amaziah did what the
LORD said was right. He did everything his father Joash had
done, but he did not do as his ancestor David had done. 4The
places where gods were worshiped were not removed, so the
people still sacrificed and burned incense there.

5As soon as Amaziah took control of the kingdom, he

executed the officers who had murdered his father the king.
6But he did not put to death the children of the murderers
because of the rule written in the Book of the Teachings of
Moses. The LORD had commanded: “Parents must not be put to
death when their children do wrong, and children must not be
put to death when their parents do wrong. Each must die for his
own sins.”[n]
7In battle Amaziah killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley
of Salt. He also took the city of Sela. He called it Joktheel, as it
is still called today.
8Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, the
son of Jehu, king of Israel. They said, “Come, let’s meet face to
face.”
9Then Jehoash king of Israel answered Amaziah king of
Judah, “A thornbush in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar tree
in Lebanon. It said, ‘Let your daughter marry my son.’ But then
a wild animal from Lebanon came by, walking on and crushing
the thornbush. 10You have defeated Edom, but you have become
proud. Stay at home and brag. Don’t ask for trouble, or you and
Judah will be defeated.”
11But Amaziah would not listen, so Jehoash king of Israel
went to attack. He and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other
in battle at Beth Shemesh in Judah. 12Israel defeated Judah, and
every man of Judah ran away to his home. 13At Beth Shemesh
Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah.
(Amaziah was the son of Joash, who was the son of Ahaziah.)
Jehoash went up to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of
Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate, which
was about six hundred feet. 14He took all the gold and silver
and all the utensils in the Temple of the LORD, and he took the
treasuries of the palace and some hostages. Then he returned
to Samaria.
15The other acts of Jehoash and his victories, including his
war against Amaziah king of Judah, are written in the book of
the history of the kings of Israel. 16Jehoash died and was buried
in Samaria with the kings of Israel, and his son Jeroboam
became king in his place.
17Amaziah son of Joash, the king of Judah, lived fifteen years
after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, the king of Israel.
18The other things Amaziah did are written in the book of the
history of the kings of Judah. 19The people in Jerusalem made
plans against him. So he ran away to the town of Lachish, but
they sent men after him to Lachish and killed him. 20They
brought his body back on horses, and he was buried with his
ancestors in Jerusalem, in the city of David.
21Then all the people of Judah made Uzziah[n] king in place of
his father Amaziah. Uzziah was sixteen years old. 22He rebuilt
the town of Elath and made it part of Judah again after Amaziah

died.

## *Jeroboam King of Israel*

23 Jeroboam son of Jehoash became king of Israel in Samaria
during the fifteenth year Amaziah was king of Judah. (Amaziah
was the son of Joash.) Jeroboam ruled forty-one years, 24 and he
did what the LORD said was wrong. Jeroboam son of Nebat had
led Israel to sin, and Jeroboam son of Jehoash did not stop doing
the same sins. 25 Jeroboam won back Israel's border from Lebo
Hamath to the Dead Sea. This happened as the LORD, the God of
Israel, had said through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the
prophet from Gath Hepher. 26 The LORD had seen how the
Israelites, both slave and free, were suffering terribly. No one
was left who could help Israel. 27 The LORD had not said he would
completely destroy Israel from the world, so he saved the
Israelites through Jeroboam son of Jehoash.
28 Everything else Jeroboam did is written down—all his
victories and how he won back from Judah the towns of
Damascus and Hamath for Israel. All this is written in the book
of the history of the kings of Israel. 29 Jeroboam died and was
buried with his ancestors, the kings of Israel. Jeroboam's son
Zechariah became king in his place.

## Psalm 73:15–20

15 God, if I had decided to talk like this,
I would have let your people down.

16 I tried to understand all this,
but it was too hard for me to see

17 until I went to the Temple of God.
Then I understood what will happen to them.

18 You have put them in danger;
you cause them to be destroyed.

19 They are destroyed in a moment;

they are swept away by terrors.

[20]It will be like waking from a dream.
Lord, when you rise up, they will disappear.

## Proverbs 18:18–19

[18]Throwing lots can settle arguments
and keep the two sides from fighting.

[19]A brother who has been insulted is harder to win back than a walled city,
and arguments separate people like the barred gates of a palace.

## John 20:1–31

### *Jesus' Tomb Is Empty*

[20] Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb while it was still dark. When she saw that the large stone had been moved away from the tomb, [2]she ran to Simon Peter and the follower whom Jesus loved. Mary said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him."

[3]So Peter and the other follower started for the tomb. [4]They were both running, but the other follower ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. [5]He bent down and looked in and saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, but he did not go in. [6]Then following him, Simon Peter arrived and went into the tomb and saw the strips of linen lying there. [7]He also saw the cloth that had been around Jesus' head, which was folded up and laid in a different place from the strips of linen. [8]Then the other follower, who had reached the tomb first, also went in. He saw and believed. [9](They did not yet understand from the Scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead.)

### *Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene*

10 Then the followers went back home. 11 But Mary stood
outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she bent down and
looked inside the tomb. 12 She saw two angels dressed in white,
sitting where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and one at
the feet.
13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"
She answered, "They have taken away my Lord, and I don't
know where they have put him." 14 When Mary said this, she
turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not
know it was Jesus.
15 Jesus asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Whom are
you looking for?"
Thinking he was the gardener, she said to him, "Did you take
him away, sir? Tell me where you put him, and I will get him."
16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."
Mary turned toward Jesus and said in the Hebrew language,[n]
"Rabboni." (This means "Teacher.")
17 Jesus said to her, "Don't hold on to me, because I have not
yet gone up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them,
'I am going back to my Father and your Father, to my God and
your God.'"
18 Mary Magdalene went and said to the followers, "I saw the
Lord!" And she told them what Jesus had said to her.

## *Jesus Appears to His Followers*

19 When it was evening on the first day of the week, Jesus'
followers were together. The doors were locked, because they
were afraid of the elders. Then Jesus came and stood right in
the middle of them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he
said this, he showed them his hands and his side. His followers
were thrilled when they saw the Lord.
21 Then Jesus said again, "Peace be with you. As the Father
sent me, I now send you." 22 After he said this, he breathed on
them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone
his sins, they are forgiven. If you don't forgive them, they are
not forgiven."

## *Jesus Appears to Thomas*

24 Thomas (called Didymus), who was one of the twelve, was
not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other followers kept
telling Thomas, "We saw the Lord."
But Thomas said, "I will not believe it until I see the nail
marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and
put my hand into his side."
26 A week later the followers were in the house again, and

Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came in and stood right in the middle of them. He said, “Peace be with you.” [27]Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand here in my side. Stop being an unbeliever and believe.”

[28]Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

[29]Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you see me. Those who believe without seeing me will be truly blessed.”

## *Why John Wrote This Book*

[30]Jesus did many other miracles in the presence of his followers that are not written in this book. [31]But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Then, by believing, you may have life through his name.

# June 14

## A Positive Power

*What you say can mean life or death.*

Proverbs 18:21

Nathaniel Hawthorne came home heartbroken. He'd just been fired from his job in the custom house. His wife, rather than responding with anxiety, surprised him with joy. "Now you can write your book!"

He wasn't so positive. "And what shall we live on while I'm writing it?"

To his amazement she opened a drawer and revealed a wad of money she'd saved out of her housekeeping budget. "I always knew you were a man of genius," she told him. "I always knew you'd write a masterpiece."

She believed in her husband. And because she did, he wrote. And because he wrote, every library in America has a copy of *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

You have the power to change someone's life simply by the words that you speak. "What you say can mean life or death."

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### 2 Kings 15:1—16:20

#### *Uzziah King of Judah*

15 Uzziah son of Amaziah became king of Judah during
Jeroboam's twenty-seventh year as king of Israel. 2Uzziah was
sixteen years old when he became king, and he ruled fifty-two
years in Jerusalem. His mother was named Jecoliah, and she
was from Jerusalem. 3He did what the LORD said was right, just
as his father Amaziah had done. 4But the places where gods
were worshiped were not removed, so the people still made
sacrifices and burned incense there.

5The LORD struck Uzziah with a skin disease, which he had

until the day he died. So he had to live in a separate house. Jotham, the king's son, was in charge of the palace, and he governed the people of the land.

6 All the other things Uzziah did are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. 7 Uzziah died and was buried near his ancestors in Jerusalem, and his son Jotham became king in his place.

## *Zechariah King of Israel*

8 Zechariah son of Jeroboam was king over Israel in Samaria. He ruled for six months during Uzziah's[n] thirty-eighth year as king of Judah. 9 Zechariah did what the LORD said was wrong, just as his ancestors had done. Jeroboam son of Nebat had led the people of Israel to sin, and Zechariah did not stop doing the same sins.

10 Shallum son of Jabesh made plans against Zechariah and killed him in front of the people. Then Shallum became king in his place. 11 The other acts of Zechariah are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. 12 The LORD had told Jehu: "Your sons down to your great-great-grandchildren will be kings of Israel," and the LORD's word came true.

## *Shallum King of Israel*

13 Shallum son of Jabesh became king during Uzziah's thirty-ninth year as king of Judah. Shallum ruled for a month in Samaria. 14 Then Menahem son of Gadi came up from Tirzah to Samaria and attacked Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria. He killed him and became king in Shallum's place.

15 The other acts of Shallum and his secret plans are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel.

## *Menahem King of Israel*

16 Menahem started out from Tirzah and attacked Tiphsah, destroying the city and the area nearby. This was because the people had refused to open the city gate for him. He defeated them and ripped open all their pregnant women.

17 Menahem son of Gadi became king over Israel during Uzziah's thirty-ninth year as king of Judah. Menahem ruled ten years in Samaria, 18 and he did what the LORD said was wrong. Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to sin, and all the time Menahem was king, he did not stop doing the same sins.

19 Pul king of Assyria came to attack the land. Menahem gave him about seventy-four thousand pounds of silver so Pul would support him and make his hold on the kingdom stronger.

20 Menahem taxed Israel to pay about one and one-fourth
pounds of silver to each soldier of the king of Assyria. So the
king left and did not stay in the land.
21 Everything else Menahem did is written in the book of the
history of the kings of Israel. 22 Then Menahem died, and his son
Pekahiah became king in his place.

## *Pekahiah King of Israel*

23 Pekahiah son of Menahem became king over Israel in
Samaria during Uzziah's[n] fiftieth year as king of Judah.
Pekahiah ruled two years, 24 and he did what the LORD said was
wrong. Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to sin, and
Pekahiah did not stop doing the same sins.
25 Pekah son of Remaliah was one of Pekahiah's captains, and
he made plans against Pekahiah. He took fifty men of Gilead
with him and killed Pekahiah, as well as Argob and Arieh, in the
palace at Samaria. Then Pekah became king in Pekahiah's
place.
26 Everything else Pekahiah did is written in the book of the
history of the kings of Israel.

## *Pekah King of Israel*

27 Pekah son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria
during Uzziah's[n] fifty-second year as king of Judah. Pekah ruled
twenty years, 28 and he did what the LORD said was wrong.
Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to sin, and Pekah did not
stop doing the same sins.
29 Tiglath-Pileser[n] was king of Assyria. He attacked while
Pekah was king of Israel, capturing the cities of Ijon, Abel Beth
Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor. He also captured Gilead
and Galilee and all the land of Naphtali and carried the people
away to Assyria. 30 Then Hoshea son of Elah made plans against
Pekah son of Remaliah and attacked and killed him. Then
Hoshea became king in Pekah's place during the twentieth year
Jotham son of Uzziah was king.
31 Everything else Pekah did is written in the book of the
history of the kings of Israel.

## *Jotham King of Judah*

32 Jotham son of Uzziah became king of Judah during the
second year Pekah son of Remaliah was king of Israel. 33 Jotham
was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled
sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha
daughter of Zadok. 34 Jotham did what the LORD said was right,

just as his father Uzziah had done. 35But the places where gods were worshiped were not removed, and the people still made sacrifices and burned incense there. Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the Temple of the LORD.

36The other things Jotham did while he was king are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. 37At that time the LORD began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah. 38Jotham died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David, his ancestor. Then Jotham's son Ahaz became king in his place.

## *Ahaz King of Judah*

16 Ahaz was the son of Jotham king of Judah. Ahaz became king of Judah in the seventeenth year Pekah son of Remaliah was king of Israel. 2Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. Unlike his ancestor David, he did not do what the LORD his God said was right. 3Ahaz did the same things the kings of Israel had done. He even made his son pass through fire. He did the same hateful sins as the nations had done whom the LORD had forced out of the land ahead of the Israelites. 4Ahaz offered sacrifices and burned incense at the places where gods were worshiped, on the hills, and under every green tree.

5Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, came up to attack Jerusalem. They surrounded Ahaz but could not defeat him. 6At that time Rezin king of Aram took back the city of Elath for Aram, and he forced out all the people of Judah. Then Edomites moved into Elath, and they still live there today.

7Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your friend. Come and save me from the king of Aram and the king of Israel, who are attacking me." 8Ahaz took the silver and gold that was in the Temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the palace, and he sent these as a gift to the king of Assyria. 9So the king of Assyria listened to Ahaz. He attacked Damascus and captured it and sent all its people away to Kir. And he killed Rezin.

10Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. Ahaz saw an altar at Damascus, and he sent plans and a pattern of this altar to Uriah the priest. 11So Uriah the priest built an altar, just like the plans King Ahaz had sent him from Damascus. Uriah finished the altar before King Ahaz came back from Damascus. 12When the king arrived from Damascus, he saw the altar and went near and offered sacrifices on it. 13He burned his burnt offerings and grain offerings and poured out his drink offering. He also sprinkled the blood of his fellowship offerings on the altar.

14 Ahaz moved the bronze altar that was before the LORD at
the front of the Temple. It was between Ahaz's altar and the
Temple of the LORD, but he put it on the north side of his altar.
15 King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, "On the large altar
burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the
king's burnt offering and grain offering, and the whole burnt
offering, the grain offering, and the drink offering for all the
people of the land. Sprinkle on the altar all the blood of the
burnt offering and of the sacrifice. But I will use the bronze
altar to ask questions of God." 16 So Uriah the priest did
everything as King Ahaz commanded him.
17 Then King Ahaz took off the side panels from the bases and
removed the washing bowls from the top of the bases. He also
took the large bowl, which was called the Sea, off the bronze
bulls that held it up, and he put it on a stone base. 18 Ahaz took
away the platform for the royal throne, which had been built at
the Temple of the LORD. He also took away the outside entrance
for the king. He did these things because of the king of Assyria.
19 The other things Ahaz did as king are written in the book
of the history of the kings of Judah. 20 Ahaz died and was buried
with his ancestors in Jerusalem, and Ahaz's son Hezekiah
became king in his place.

## Psalm 73:21–28

21 When my heart was sad
and I was angry,

22 I was senseless and stupid.
I acted like an animal toward you.

23 But I am always with you;
you have held my hand.

24 You guide me with your advice,
and later you will receive me in honor.

25 I have no one in heaven but you;
I want nothing on earth besides you.

[26]My body and my mind may become weak,
but God is my strength.
He is mine forever.

[27]Those who are far from God will die;
you destroy those who are unfaithful.

[28]But I am close to God, and that is good.
The Lord God is my protection.
I will tell all that you have done.

## Proverbs 18:20–21

[20]People will be rewarded for what they say;
they will be rewarded by how they speak.

[21]What you say can mean life or death.
Those who speak with care will be rewarded.

## John 21:1–25

### *Jesus Appears to Seven Followers*

21 Later, Jesus showed himself to his followers again—this time
at Lake Galilee.[n] This is how he showed himself: [2]Some of the
followers were together: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus),
Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the two sons of Zebedee, and
two other followers. [3]Simon Peter said, “I am going out to fish.”
The others said, “We will go with you.” So they went out and
got into the boat. They fished that night but caught nothing.
[4]Early the next morning Jesus stood on the shore, but the
followers did not know it was Jesus. [5]Then he said to them,
“Friends, did you catch any fish?”
They answered, “No.”
[6]He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and
you will find some.” So they did, and they caught so many fish
they could not pull the net back into the boat.

7The follower whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the
Lord!” When Peter heard him say this, he wrapped his coat
around himself. (Peter had taken his clothes off.) Then he
jumped into the water. 8The other followers went to shore in the
boat, dragging the net full of fish. They were not very far from
shore, only about a hundred yards. 9When the followers stepped
out of the boat and onto the shore, they saw a fire of hot coals.
There were fish on the fire, and there was bread.

10Then Jesus said, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.”

11Simon Peter went into the boat and pulled the net to the
shore. It was full of big fish, one hundred fifty-three in all, but
even though there were so many, the net did not tear. 12Jesus
said to them, “Come and eat.” None of the followers dared ask
him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. 13Jesus
came and took the bread and gave it to them, along with the
fish.

14This was now the third time Jesus showed himself to his
followers after he was raised from the dead.

## *Jesus Talks to Peter*

15When they finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter,
“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

16Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

17A third time he said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do
you love me?” Peter said, “Lord, you know everything; you know
that I love you!”

He said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18I tell you the truth, when
you were younger, you tied your own belt and went where you
wanted. But when you are old, you will put out your hands and
someone else will tie you and take you where you don’t want to
go.” 19(Jesus said this to show how Peter would die to give glory
to God.) Then Jesus said to Peter, “Follow me!”

20Peter turned and saw that the follower Jesus loved was
walking behind them. (This was the follower who had leaned
against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who will turn
against you?”) 21When Peter saw him behind them, he asked
Jesus, “Lord, what about him?”

22Jesus answered, “If I want him to live until I come back,
that is not your business. You follow me.”

23So a story spread among the followers that this one would
not die. But Jesus did not say he would not die. He only said, “If
I want him to live until I come back, that is not your business.”

[24]That follower is the one who is telling these things and who has now written them down. We know that what he says is true.

[25]There are many other things Jesus did. If every one of them were written down, I suppose the whole world would not be big enough for all the books that would be written.

# June 15

## The Place of Prayer

*They went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives ... They all continued praying together.*

Acts 1:12, 14

Desire power for your life? ... It will come as you pray. For ten days the disciples prayed. Ten days of prayer plus a few minutes of preaching led to three thousand saved souls. Perhaps we invert the numbers. We're prone to pray for a few minutes and preach for ten days. Not the apostles. Like the boat waiting for Christ, they lingered in his presence. They never left the place of prayer ...

The Upper Room was occupied by 120 disciples. Since there were about 4,000,000 people in Palestine at the time, this means that fewer than 1 in 30,000 was a Christian. Yet look at the fruit of their work. Better said, look at the fruit of God's Spirit in them. We can only wonder what would happen today if we, who *still* struggle, did what they did: wait on the Lord in the right place.

from *Come Thirsty*

## 2 Kings 17:1—18:37

### *Hoshea, Last King of Israel*

17 Hoshea son of Elah became king over Israel during Ahaz's
twelfth year as king of Judah. Hoshea ruled in Samaria nine
years. 2He did what the LORD said was wrong, but he was not as
bad as the kings of Israel who had ruled before him.

3Shalmaneser king of Assyria came to attack Hoshea.
Hoshea had been Shalmaneser's servant and had made the
payments to Shalmaneser that he had demanded. 4But the king
of Assyria found out that Hoshea had made plans against him by
sending messengers to So, the king of Egypt. Hoshea had also

stopped giving Shalmaneser the payments, which he had paid every year in the past. For that, the king put Hoshea in prison.
5Then the king of Assyria came and attacked all the land of Israel. He surrounded Samaria and attacked it for three years.
6He defeated Samaria in the ninth year Hoshea was king, and he took the Israelites away to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River, and in the cities of the Medes.

## *Israelites Punished for Sin*

7All these things happened because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God. He had brought them out of Egypt and had rescued them from the power of the king of Egypt, but the Israelites had honored other gods. 8They lived like the nations the LORD had forced out of the land ahead of them. They lived as their evil kings had shown them, 9secretly sinning against the LORD their God. They built places to worship gods in all their cities, from the watchtower to the strong, walled city.
10They put up stone pillars to gods and Asherah idols on every high hill and under every green tree. 11The Israelites burned incense everywhere gods were worshiped, just as the nations who lived there before them had done, whom the LORD had forced out of the land. The Israelites did wicked things that made the LORD angry. 12They served idols when the LORD had said, “You must not do this.” 13The LORD used every prophet and seer to warn Israel and Judah. He said, “Stop your evil ways and obey my commands and laws. Follow all the teachings that I commanded your ancestors, the teachings that I gave you through my servants the prophets.”

14But the people would not listen. They were stubborn, just as their ancestors had been who did not believe in the LORD their God. 15They rejected the LORD’s laws and the agreement he had made with their ancestors. And they refused to listen to his warnings. They worshiped useless idols and became useless themselves. They did what the nations around them did, which the LORD had warned them not to do.

16The people rejected all the commands of the LORD their God. They molded statues of two calves, and they made an Asherah idol. They worshiped all the stars of the sky and served Baal. 17They made their sons and daughters pass through fire and tried to find out the future by magic and witchcraft. They always chose to do what the LORD said was wrong, which made him angry. 18Because he was very angry with the people of Israel, he removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left.

## *Judah Is Also Guilty*

19But even Judah did not obey the commands of the LORD
their God. They did what the Israelites had done, 20so the LORD
rejected all the people of Israel. He punished them and let
others destroy them; he threw them out of his presence. 21When
the LORD separated them from the family of David, the Israelites
made Jeroboam son of Nebat their king. Jeroboam led the
Israelites away from the LORD and led them to sin greatly. 22So
they continued to do all the sins Jeroboam did. They did not
stop doing these sins 23until the LORD removed the Israelites
from his presence, just as he had said through all his servants
the prophets. So the Israelites were taken out of their land to
Assyria, and they have been there to this day.

## *The Beginning of the Samaritan People*

24The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah,
Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and put them in the cities of
Samaria to replace the Israelites. These people took over
Samaria and lived in the cities. 25At first they did not worship
the LORD, so he sent lions among them which killed some of
them. 26The king of Assyria was told, “You sent foreigners into
the cities of Samaria who do not know the law of the god of the
land. This is why he has sent lions among them. The lions are
killing them because they don’t know what the god wants.”

27Then the king of Assyria commanded, “Send back one of
the priests you took away. Let him live there and teach the
people what the god wants.” 28So one of the priests who had
been carried away from Samaria returned to live in Bethel. And
he taught the people how to honor the LORD.

29But each nation made gods of its own and put them in the
cities where they lived and in the temples where gods were
worshiped. These temples had been built by the Samaritans.
30The people from Babylon made Succoth Benoth their god. The
people from Cuthah worshiped Nergal. The people of Hamath
worshiped Ashima. 31The Avvites worshiped Nibhaz and Tartak.
The Sepharvites burned their children in the fire, sacrificing
them to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of
Sepharvaim. 32They also honored the LORD, but they chose
priests for the places where gods were worshiped. The priests
were chosen from among themselves, and they made sacrifices
for the people. 33The people honored the LORD but also served
their own gods, just as the nations did from which they had
been brought. 34Even today they do as they did in the past.
They do not worship the LORD nor obey his rules and commands.
They do not obey the teachings or the commands of the LORD,
which he gave to the children of Jacob, whom he had named
Israel. 35The LORD had made an agreement with them and had
commanded them, “Do not honor other gods. Do not bow down

to them or worship them or offer sacrifices to them. [36]Worship the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and strength. Bow down to him and offer sacrifices to him. [37]Always obey the rules, orders, teachings, and commands he wrote for you. Do not honor other gods. [38]Do not forget the agreement I made with you, and do not honor other gods. [39]Instead worship the LORD your God, who will save you from all your enemies."

[40]But the Israelites did not listen. They kept on doing the same things they had done before. [41]So these nations honored the LORD but also worshiped their idols, and their children and grandchildren still do as their ancestors did.

## *Hezekiah King of Judah*

[18] Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah became king during the third year Hoshea son of Elah was king of Israel. [2]Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. [3]Hezekiah did what the LORD said was right, just as his ancestor David had done. [4]He removed the places where gods were worshiped. He smashed the stone pillars and cut down the Asherah idols. Also the Israelites had been burning incense to Nehushtan, the bronze snake Moses had made. But Hezekiah broke it into pieces.

[5]Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. [6]Hezekiah was loyal to the LORD and did not stop following him; he obeyed the commands the LORD had given Moses. [7]And the LORD was with Hezekiah, so he had success in everything he did. He turned against the king of Assyria and stopped serving him. [8]Hezekiah defeated the Philistines all the way to Gaza and its borders, including the watchtowers and the strong, walled cities.

## *The Assyrians Capture Samaria*

[9]Shalmaneser king of Assyria surrounded Samaria and attacked it in the fourth year Hezekiah was king. This was the seventh year Hoshea son of Elah was king of Israel. [10]After three years the Assyrians captured Samaria. This was in the sixth year Hezekiah was king, which was Hoshea's ninth year as king of Israel. [11]The king of Assyria took the Israelites away to Assyria and settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River, and in the cities of the Medes. [12]This happened because they did not obey the LORD their God. They broke his agreement and did not obey all that Moses, the LORD's servant, had commanded. They would not listen to the commands or do

them.

## *Assyria Attacks Judah*

13During Hezekiah's fourteenth year as king, Sennacherib
king of Assyria attacked all the strong, walled cities of Judah
and captured them. 14Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent a
message to the king of Assyria at Lachish. He said, "I have done
wrong. Leave me alone, and I will pay anything you ask." So the
king of Assyria made Hezekiah pay about twenty-two thousand
pounds of silver and two thousand pounds of gold. 15Hezekiah
gave him all the silver that was in the Temple of the LORD and in
the palace treasuries. 16Hezekiah stripped all the gold that
covered the doors and doorposts of the Temple of the LORD.
Hezekiah had put gold on these doors himself, but he gave it all
to the king of Assyria.

17The king of Assyria sent out his supreme commander, his
chief officer, and his field commander. They went with a large
army from Lachish to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. When they
came near the waterway from the upper pool on the road where
people do their laundry, they stopped. 18They called for the
king, so the king sent Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah out to meet
them. Eliakim son of Hilkiah was the palace manager, Shebna
was the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph was the
recorder.

19The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah this:

"'The great king, the king of Assyria, says: What can you
trust in now? 20You say you have battle plans and power for war,
but your words mean nothing. Whom are you trusting for help
so that you turn against me? 21Look, you are depending on
Egypt to help you, but Egypt is like a splintered walking stick. If
you lean on it for help, it will stab your hand and hurt you. The
king of Egypt will hurt all those who depend on him. 22You
might say, "We are depending on the LORD our God," but
Hezekiah destroyed the LORD's altars and the places of worship.
Hezekiah told Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship only at
this one altar in Jerusalem."

23"'Now make an agreement with my master, the king of
Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses if you can find
enough men to ride them. 24You cannot defeat one of my
master's least important officers, so why do you depend on
Egypt to give you chariots and horsemen? 25I have not come to
attack and destroy this place without an order from the LORD.
The LORD himself told me to come to this country and destroy
it.'"

26Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to the
field commander, "Please speak to us in the Aramaic language.
We understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew, because the

people on the city wall can hear you."

27"No," the commander said, "my master did not send me to tell these things only to you and your king. He sent me to speak also to those people sitting on the wall who will have to eat their own dung and drink their own urine like you."

28Then the commander stood and shouted loudly in the Hebrew language, "Listen to what the great king, the king of Assyria, says! 29The king says you should not let Hezekiah fool you, because he can't save you from my power. 30Don't let Hezekiah talk you into trusting the LORD by saying, 'The LORD will surely save us. This city won't be handed over to the king of Assyria.'

31"Don't listen to Hezekiah. The king of Assyria says, 'Make peace with me, and come out of the city to me. Then everyone will be free to eat the fruit from his own grapevine and fig tree and to drink water from his own well. 32After that I will come and take you to a land like your own—a land with grain and new wine, bread and vineyards, olives, and honey. Choose to live and not to die!'

"Don't listen to Hezekiah. He is fooling you when he says, 'The LORD will save us.' 33Has a god of any other nation saved his people from the power of the king of Assyria? 34Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? They did not save Samaria from my power. 35Not one of all the gods of these countries has saved his people from me. Neither can the LORD save Jerusalem from my power."

36The people were silent. They didn't answer the commander at all, because King Hezekiah had ordered, "Don't answer him."

37Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah tore their clothes to show how upset they were. (Eliakim son of Hilkiah was the palace manager, Shebna was the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph was the recorder.) The three men went to Hezekiah and told him what the field commander had said.

## Psalm 74:1–11

### *A Nation in Trouble Prays*

**A maskil of Asaph.**

74 God, why have you rejected us for so long?
Why are you angry with us, the sheep of your pasture?

[2]Remember the people you bought long ago.
You saved us, and we are your very own.
After all, you live on Mount Zion.

[3]Make your way through these old ruins;
the enemy wrecked everything in the Temple.

[4]Those who were against you shouted in your meeting place
and raised their flags there.

[5]They came with axes raised
as if to cut down a forest of trees.

[6]They smashed the carved panels
with their axes and hatchets.

[7]They burned your Temple to the ground;
they have made the place where you live unclean.

[8]They thought, “We will completely crush them!”
They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land.

[9]We do not see any signs.
There are no more prophets,
and no one knows how long this will last.

[10]God, how much longer will the enemy make fun of you?
Will they insult you forever?

[11]Why do you hold back your power?
Bring your power out in the open and destroy them!

## Proverbs 18:22–24

22 When a man finds a wife, he finds something good.
It shows that the LORD is pleased with him.

23 The poor beg for mercy,
but the rich give rude answers.

24 Some friends may ruin you,
but a real friend will be more loyal than a brother.

# Acts 1:1–26

## *Luke Writes Another Book*

1 To Theophilus. The first book I wrote was about everything
Jesus began to do and teach 2 until the day he was taken up into
heaven. Before this, with the help of the Holy Spirit, Jesus told
the apostles he had chosen what they should do. 3 After his
death, he showed himself to them and proved in many ways that
he was alive. The apostles saw Jesus during the forty days after
he was raised from the dead, and he spoke to them about the
kingdom of God. 4 Once when he was eating with them, he told
them not to leave Jerusalem. He said, "Wait here to receive the
promise from the Father which I told you about. 5 John baptized
people with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with
the Holy Spirit."

## *Jesus Is Taken Up into Heaven*

6 When the apostles were all together, they asked Jesus,
"Lord, are you now going to give the kingdom back to Israel?"
7 Jesus said to them, "The Father is the only One who has the
authority to decide dates and times. These things are not for
you to know. 8 But when the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will
receive power. You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of
Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world."
9 After he said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up,
and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 As he was going, they
were looking into the sky. Suddenly, two men wearing white
clothes stood beside them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why
are you standing here looking into the sky? Jesus, whom you
saw taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same
way you saw him go."

## *A New Apostle Is Chosen*

12 Then they went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of
Olives. (This mountain is about half a mile from Jerusalem.)
13 When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room
where they were staying. Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip,
Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon
(known as the Zealot), and Judas son of James were there.
14 They all continued praying together with some women,
including Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus' brothers.

15 During this time there was a meeting of the believers
(about one hundred twenty of them). Peter stood up and said,
16–17 "Brothers and sisters, in the Scriptures the Holy Spirit said
through David something that must happen involving Judas. He
was one of our own group and served together with us. He led
those who arrested Jesus." 18 (Judas bought a field with the
money he got for his evil act. But he fell to his death, his body
burst open, and all his intestines poured out. 19 Everyone in
Jerusalem learned about this so they named this place
Akeldama. In their language Akeldama means "Field of Blood.")
20 "In the Book of Psalms," Peter said, "this is written:

'May his place be empty;
leave no one to live in it.'

Psalm 69:25

And it is also written:

'Let another man replace him as leader.'

Psalm 109:8

21–22 "So now a man must become a witness with us of Jesus'
being raised from the dead. He must be one of the men who
were part of our group during all the time the Lord Jesus was
among us—from the time John was baptizing people until the
day Jesus was taken up from us to heaven."

23 They put the names of two men before the group. One was
Joseph Barsabbas, who was also called Justus. The other was
Matthias. 24–25 The apostles prayed, "Lord, you know the
thoughts of everyone. Show us which one of these two you have
chosen to do this work. Show us who should be an apostle in
place of Judas, who turned away and went where he belongs."
26 Then they used lots to choose between them, and the lots
showed that Matthias was the one. So he became an apostle
with the other eleven.

# June 16

## To Tell the Truth

*It is better to be poor and honest than to be foolish and tell lies.*

Proverbs 19:1

Are you in a dilemma, wondering if you should tell the truth or not? The question to ask in such moments is, Will God bless my deceit? Will he, who hates lies, bless a strategy built on lies? Will the Lord, who loves the truth, bless the business of falsehoods? Will God honor the career of the manipulator? … I don't think so either.

Examine your heart. Ask yourself some tough questions.

Am I being completely honest with my spouse and children? Are my relationships marked by candor? What about my work or school environment? Am I honest in my dealings? Am I a trustworthy student? An honest taxpayer? …

Do you tell the truth … always?

If not, start today. Don't wait until tomorrow. The ripple of today's lie is tomorrow's wave and next year's flood.

from *Just Like Jesus*

### 2 Kings 19:1—21:26

### *Jerusalem Will Be Saved*

19 When King Hezekiah heard the message, he tore his clothes
and put on rough cloth to show how sad he was. Then he went
into the Temple of the LORD. 2Hezekiah sent Eliakim, the palace
manager, and Shebna, the royal secretary, and the older priests
to Isaiah. They were all wearing rough cloth when they came to
Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. 3They told Isaiah, "This is
what Hezekiah says: Today is a day of sorrow and punishment
and disgrace, as when a child should be born, but the mother is
not strong enough to give birth to it. 4The king of Assyria sent
his field commander to make fun of the living God. Maybe the

LORD your God will hear what the commander said and will punish him for it. So pray for the few of us who are left alive."

5When Hezekiah's officers came to Isaiah, 6he said to them, "Tell your master this: The LORD says, 'Don't be afraid of what you have heard. Don't be frightened by the words the servants of the king of Assyria have spoken against me. 7Listen! I am going to put a spirit in the king of Assyria. He will hear a report that will make him return to his own country, and I will cause him to die by the sword there.'"

8The field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish. When he went back, he found the king fighting against the city of Libnah.

9The king received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was coming to attack him. When the king of Assyria heard this, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10"Tell Hezekiah king of Judah: Don't be fooled by the god you trust. Don't believe him when he says Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria. 11You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done. They have completely defeated every country, so do not think you will be saved. 12Did the gods of those people save them? My ancestors destroyed them, defeating the cities of Gozan, Haran, and Rezeph, and the people of Eden living in Tel Assar. 13Where are the kings of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the kings of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?"

## *Hezekiah Prays to the Lord*

14When Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the Temple of the LORD. He spread the letter out before the LORD 15and prayed to the LORD: "LORD, God of Israel, whose throne is between the gold creatures with wings, only you are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. 16Hear, LORD, and listen. Open your eyes, LORD, and see. Listen to the words Sennacherib has said to insult the living God. 17It is true, LORD, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed these countries and their lands. 18They have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire, but they were only wood and rock statues that people made. So the kings have destroyed them. 19Now, LORD our God, save us from the king's power so that all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you, LORD, are the only God."

## *God Answers Hezekiah*

20Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah that said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria.

21 This is what the LORD has said against Sennacherib:

‘The people of Jerusalem
hate you and make fun of you.

The people of Jerusalem
laugh at you as you run away.

22 You have insulted me and spoken against me;
you have raised your voice against me.

You have a proud look on your face,
which is against me, the Holy One of Israel.

23 You have sent your messengers to insult the Lord.
You have said, “With my many chariots

I have gone to the tops of the mountains,
to the highest mountains of Lebanon.

I have cut down its tallest cedars
and its best pine trees.

I have gone to its farthest places
and to its best forests.

24 I have dug wells in foreign countries
and drunk water there.

By the soles of my feet,
I have dried up all the rivers of Egypt.”

25 “‘King of Assyria, surely you have heard.
Long ago I, the LORD, planned these things.

Long ago I designed them,
and now I have made them happen.

I allowed you to turn those strong, walled cities
into piles of rocks.

26 The people in those cities were weak;
they were frightened and put to shame.

They were like grass in the field,
like tender, young grass,

like grass on the housetop
that is burned by the wind before it can grow.

27 "'I know when you rest,
when you come and go,
and how you rage against me.

28 Because you rage against me,
and because I have heard your proud words,

I will put my hook in your nose
and my bit in your mouth.

Then I will force you to leave my country
the same way you came.'

29 "Then the LORD said, 'Hezekiah, I will give you this sign:

This year you will eat the grain that grows wild,
and the second year you will eat what grows wild from that.

But in the third year, plant grain and harvest it.
Plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

30 Some of the people in the family of Judah
will escape.

Like plants that take root,
they will grow strong and have many children.

31 A few people will come out of Jerusalem alive;
a few from Mount Zion will live.

The strong love of the LORD All-Powerful
will make this happen.'

32 "So this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria:

'He will not enter this city
or even shoot an arrow here.

He will not fight against it with shields
or build a ramp to attack the city walls.

33 He will return to his country the same way he came,
and he will not enter this city,'
says the LORD.

34 'I will defend and save this city
for my sake and for the sake of David, my servant.'"

35 That night the angel of the LORD went out and killed one hundred eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up early the next morning, they saw all the dead bodies. 36 So Sennacherib king of Assyria left and went back to Nineveh and stayed there.

37 One day as Sennacherib was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with a sword. Then they escaped to the land of Ararat. So Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon became king of Assyria.

## *Hezekiah's Illness*

20 At that time Hezekiah became so sick he almost died. The

prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to see him and told him, “This is what the LORD says: Make arrangements because you are not going to live, but die.”

2Hezekiah turned toward the wall and prayed to the LORD,
3“LORD, please remember that I have always obeyed you. I have given myself completely to you and have done what you said was right.” Then Hezekiah cried loudly.

4Before Isaiah had left the middle courtyard, the LORD spoke his word to Isaiah: 5“Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people: ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears, so I will heal you. Three days from now you will go up to the Temple of the LORD. 6I will add fifteen years to your life. I will save you and this city from the king of Assyria; I will protect the city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.’”

7Then Isaiah said, “Make a paste from figs.” So they made it and put it on Hezekiah’s boil, and he got well.

8Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, “What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me and that I will go up to the Temple of the LORD on the third day?”

9Isaiah said, “The LORD will do what he says. This is the sign from the LORD to show you: Do you want the shadow to go forward ten steps or back ten steps?”

10Hezekiah answered, “It’s easy for the shadow to go forward ten steps. Instead, let it go back ten steps.”

11Then Isaiah the prophet called to the LORD, and the LORD brought the shadow ten steps back up the stairway of Ahaz that it had gone down.

## *Messengers from Babylon*

12At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan was king of Babylon. He sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah was sick. 13Hezekiah listened to the messengers, so he showed them what was in his storehouses: the silver, gold, spices, expensive perfumes, his swords and shields, and all his wealth. He showed them everything in his palace and his kingdom.

14Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked him, “What did these men say? Where did they come from?”

Hezekiah said, “They came from a faraway country—from Babylon.”

15So Isaiah asked him, “What did they see in your palace?”

Hezekiah said, “They saw everything in my palace. I showed them all my wealth.”

16Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Listen to the words of the LORD: 17‘In the future everything in your palace and everything your ancestors have stored up until this day will be taken away

to Babylon. Nothing will be left,' says the LORD. 18'Some of your own children, those who will be born to you, will be taken away. And they will become servants in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"

19Hezekiah told Isaiah, "These words from the LORD are good." He said this because he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."

20Everything else Hezekiah did—all his victories, his work on the pool, his work on the tunnel to bring water into the city—is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. 21Then Hezekiah died, and his son Manasseh became king in his place.

## *Manasseh King of Judah*

21 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he was king fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. 2He did what the LORD said was wrong. He did the hateful things the other nations had done—the nations that the LORD had forced out of the land ahead of the Israelites. 3Manasseh's father, Hezekiah, had destroyed the places where gods were worshiped, but Manasseh rebuilt them. He built altars for Baal, and he made an Asherah idol as Ahab king of Israel had done. Manasseh also worshiped all the stars of the sky and served them. 4The LORD had said about the Temple, "I will be worshiped in Jerusalem," but Manasseh built altars in the Temple of the LORD. 5He built altars to worship the stars in the two courtyards of the Temple of the LORD. 6He made his own son pass through fire. He practiced magic and told the future by explaining signs and dreams, and he got advice from mediums and fortune-tellers. He did many things the LORD said were wrong, which made the LORD angry.

7Manasseh carved an Asherah idol and put it in the Temple. The LORD had said to David and his son Solomon about the Temple, "I will be worshiped forever in this Temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel. 8I will never again make the Israelites wander out of the land I gave their ancestors. But they must obey everything I have commanded them and all the teachings my servant Moses gave them." 9But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them to do more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed ahead of the Israelites.

10The LORD said through his servants the prophets, 11"Manasseh king of Judah has done these hateful things. He has done more evil than the Amorites before him. He also has led Judah to sin with his idols. 12So this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I will bring so much trouble on Jerusalem and Judah that anyone who hears about it will be shocked. 13I will stretch the measuring line of Samaria over Jerusalem, and

the plumb line used against Ahab's family will be used on Jerusalem. I will wipe out Jerusalem as a person wipes a dish and turns it upside down. 14I will throw away the rest of my people who are left. I will give them to their enemies, and they will be robbed by all their enemies, 15because my people did what I said was wrong. They have made me angry from the day their ancestors left Egypt until now.'"

16Manasseh also killed many innocent people, filling Jerusalem from one end to the other with their blood. This was besides the sin he led Judah to do; he led Judah to do what the LORD said was wrong.

17The other things Manasseh did as king, even the sin he did, are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. 18Manasseh died and was buried in the garden of his own palace, the garden of Uzza. Then Manasseh's son Amon became king in his place.

### *Amon King of Judah*

19Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he was king for two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth daughter of Haruz, who was from Jotbah. 20Amon did what the LORD said was wrong, as his father Manasseh had done. 21He lived in the same way his father had lived: he worshiped the idols his father had worshiped, and he bowed down before them. 22Amon rejected the LORD, the God of his ancestors, and did not follow the ways of the LORD.

23Amon's officers made plans against him and killed him in his palace. 24Then the people of the land killed all those who had made plans to kill King Amon, and they made his son Josiah king in his place.

25Everything else Amon did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. 26He was buried in his grave in the garden of Uzza, and his son Josiah became king in his place.

## Psalm 74:12–17

12God, you have been our king for a long time.
You bring salvation to the earth.

13You split open the sea by your power
and broke the heads of the sea monster.

14 You smashed the heads of the monster Leviathan
and gave it to the desert creatures as food.

15 You opened up the springs and streams
and made the flowing rivers run dry.

16 Both the day and the night are yours;
you made the sun and the moon.

17 You set all the limits on the earth;
you created summer and winter.

## Proverbs 19:1–2

19 It is better to be poor and honest
than to be foolish and tell lies.

2 Enthusiasm without knowledge is not good.
If you act too quickly, you might make a mistake.

## Acts 2:1–21

### *The Coming of the Holy Spirit*

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one
place. 2 Suddenly a noise like a strong, blowing wind came from
heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.
3 They saw something like flames of fire that were separated and
stood over each person there. 4 They were all filled with the
Holy Spirit, and they began to speak different languages[n] by the
power the Holy Spirit was giving them.

5 There were some religious Jews staying in Jerusalem who
were from every country in the world. 6 When they heard this
noise, a crowd came together. They were all surprised, because
each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 They were

completely amazed at this. They said, “Look! Aren’t all these people that we hear speaking from Galilee? 8Then how is it possible that we each hear them in our own languages? We are from different places: 9Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, 10Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, the areas of Libya near Cyrene, Rome 11(both Jews and those who had become Jews), Crete, and Arabia. But we hear them telling in our own languages about the great things God has done!” 12They were all amazed and confused, asking each other, “What does this mean?”

13But others were making fun of them, saying, “They have had too much wine.”

## *Peter Speaks to the People*

14But Peter stood up with the eleven apostles, and in a loud voice he spoke to the crowd: “My fellow Jews, and all of you who are in Jerusalem, listen to me. Pay attention to what I have to say. 15These people are not drunk, as you think; it is only nine o’clock in the morning! 16But Joel the prophet wrote about what is happening here today:

17‘God says: In the last days
I will pour out my Spirit on all kinds of people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.
Your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.

18At that time I will pour out my Spirit
also on my male slaves and female slaves,
and they will prophesy.

19I will show miracles
in the sky and on the earth:
blood, fire, and thick smoke.

20The sun will become dark,
the moon red as blood,
before the overwhelming and glorious day of the Lord will come.

[21]Then anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved.’

Joel 2:28–32

# June 17

## They Couldn’t Forget Him

*“Jesus is the One whom God raised from the dead. And we are all witnesses to this.”*

Acts 2:32

we don’t know where the disciples went when they fled the garden, but we do know what they took: a memory. They took a heart-stopping memory of a man who called himself no less than God in the flesh. And they couldn’t get him out of their minds. Try as they might to lose him in the crowd, they couldn’t forget him.

If they saw a leper, they thought of his compassion.

If they heard a storm, they would remember the day he silenced one.

If they saw a child, they would think of the day he held one.

And if they saw a lamb being carried to the temple, they would remember his face streaked with blood and his eyes flooded with love.

No, they couldn’t forget him. As a result, they came back. And, as a result, the church of our Lord began with a group of frightened men in an upper room.

from *Six Hours One Friday*

### 2 Kings 22:1—24:20a

### *Josiah King of Judah*

22 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he ruled thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah, who was from Bozkath. 2Josiah did what the LORD said was right. He lived as his ancestor David had lived, and he did not stop doing what was right.

3In Josiah’s eighteenth year as king, he sent Shaphan to the Temple of the LORD. Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of

Meshullam, was the royal secretary. Josiah said, [4]"Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, and have him empty out the money the gatekeepers have gathered from the people. This is the money they have brought into the Temple of the LORD. [5]Have him give the money to the supervisors of the work on the Temple of the LORD. They must pay the workers who repair the Temple of the LORD— [6]the carpenters, builders, and bricklayers. Also use the money to buy timber and cut stone to repair the Temple. [7]They do not need to report how they use the money given to them, because they are working honestly."

## *The Book of the Teachings Is Found*

[8]Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the royal secretary, "I've found the Book of the Teachings in the Temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it.

[9]Then Shaphan the royal secretary went to the king and reported to Josiah, "Your officers have paid out the money that was in the Temple of the LORD. They have given it to the workers and supervisors at the Temple." [10]Then Shaphan the royal secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from the book to the king.

[11]When the king heard the words of the Book of the Teachings, he tore his clothes to show how upset he was. [12]He gave orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the royal secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant. These were the orders: [13]"Go and ask the LORD about the words in the book that was found. Ask for me, for all the people, and for all Judah. The LORD's anger is burning against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book; they did not do all the things written for us to do."

[14]So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to talk to Huldah the prophetess. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, who took care of the king's clothes. Huldah lived in Jerusalem, in the new area of the city.

[15]She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, [16]'This is what the LORD says: I will bring trouble to this place and to the people living here, as it is written in the book which the king of Judah has read. [17]The people of Judah have left me and have burned incense to other gods. They have made me angry by all that they have done. My anger burns against this place like a fire, and it will not be put out.' [18]Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to ask the LORD, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about the words you heard: [19]When you heard my words against this place and its people, you became sorry for what you had done and humbled yourself before me. I said they would be

cursed and would be destroyed. You tore your clothes to show how upset you were, and you cried in my presence. This is why I have heard you, says the LORD. 20So I will let you die, and you will be buried in peace. You won't see all the trouble I will bring to this place.'"

So they took her message back to the king.

## *The People Hear the Agreement*

23 Then the king gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem together. 2He went up to the Temple of the LORD, and all the people from Judah and Jerusalem went with him. The priests, prophets, and all the people—from the least important to the most important—went with him. He read to them all the words of the Book of the Agreement that was found in the Temple of the LORD. 3The king stood by the pillar and made an agreement in the presence of the LORD to follow the LORD and obey his commands, rules, and laws with his whole being, and to obey the words of the agreement written in this book. Then all the people promised to obey the agreement.

## *Josiah Destroys the Places for Idol Worship*

4The king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the next rank and the gatekeepers to bring out of the Temple of the LORD everything made for Baal, Asherah, and all the stars of the sky. Then Josiah burned them outside Jerusalem in the open country of the Kidron Valley and carried their ashes to Bethel. 5The kings of Judah had chosen priests for these gods. These priests burned incense in the places where gods were worshiped in the cities of Judah and the towns around Jerusalem. They burned incense to Baal, the sun, the moon, the planets, and all the stars of the sky. But Josiah took those priests away. 6He removed the Asherah idol from the Temple of the LORD and took it outside Jerusalem to the Kidron Valley, where he burned it and beat it into dust. Then he threw the dust on the graves of the common people. 7He also tore down the houses of the male prostitutes who were in the Temple of the LORD, where the women did weaving for Asherah.

8King Josiah brought all the false priests from the cities of Judah. He ruined the places where gods were worshiped, where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba. He destroyed the places of worship at the entrance to the Gate of Joshua, the ruler of the city, on the left side of the city gate. 9The priests at the places where gods were worshiped were not allowed to serve at the LORD's altar in Jerusalem. But they could eat bread made without yeast with their brothers.

10Josiah ruined Topheth, in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no

one could sacrifice his son or daughter to Molech. 11Judah's kings had placed horses at the front door of the Temple of the LORD in the courtyard near the room of Nathan-Melech, an officer. These horses were for the worship of the sun. So Josiah removed them and burned the chariots that were for sun worship also.

12The kings of Judah had built altars on the roof[n] of the upstairs room of Ahaz. Josiah broke down these altars and the altars Manasseh had made in the two courtyards of the Temple of the LORD. Josiah smashed them to pieces and threw their dust into the Kidron Valley. 13King Josiah ruined the places where gods were worshiped east of Jerusalem, south of the Mount of Olives.[n] Solomon king of Israel had built these places. One was for Ashtoreth, the hated goddess of the Sidonians. One was for Chemosh, the hated god of Moab. And one was for Molech, the hated god of the Ammonites. 14Josiah smashed to pieces the stone pillars they worshiped, and he cut down the Asherah idols. Then he covered the places with human bones.

15Josiah also broke down the altar at Bethel—the place of worship made by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had led Israel to sin. Josiah burned that place, broke the stones of the altar into pieces, then beat them into dust. He also burned the Asherah idol. 16When he turned around, he saw the graves on the mountain. He had the bones taken from the graves, and he burned them on the altar to ruin it. This happened as the LORD had said it would through the man of God.

17Josiah asked, "What is that monument I see?"

The people of the city answered, "It's the grave of the man of God who came from Judah. This prophet announced the things you have done against the altar of Bethel."

18Josiah said, "Leave the grave alone. No one may move this man's bones." So they left his bones and the bones of the prophet who had come from Samaria.

19The kings of Israel had built temples for worshiping gods in the cities of Samaria, which had caused the LORD to be angry. Josiah removed all those temples and did the same things as he had done at Bethel. 20He killed all the priests of those places of worship; he killed them on the altars and burned human bones on the altars. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

## *Josiah Celebrates the Passover*

21The king commanded all the people, "Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God as it is written in this Book of the Agreement." 22The Passover had not been celebrated like this since the judges led Israel. Nor had one like it happened while there were kings of Israel and kings of Judah. 23This Passover was celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem in the eighteenth year

of King Josiah's rule.

24Josiah destroyed the mediums, fortune-tellers, house gods, and idols. He also destroyed all the hated gods seen in the land of Judah and Jerusalem. This was to obey the words of the teachings written in the book Hilkiah the priest had found in the Temple of the LORD.

25There was no king like Josiah before or after him. He obeyed the LORD with all his heart, soul, and strength, following all the Teachings of Moses.

26Even so, the LORD did not stop his strong and terrible anger. His anger burned against Judah because of all Manasseh had done to make him angry. 27The LORD said, "I will send Judah out of my sight, as I have sent Israel away. I will reject Jerusalem, which I chose. And I will take away the Temple about which I said, 'I will be worshiped there.'"

28Everything else Josiah did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah.

29While Josiah was king, Neco king of Egypt went to help the king of Assyria at the Euphrates River. King Josiah marched out to fight against Neco, but at Megiddo, Neco faced him and killed him. 30Josiah's servants carried his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem and buried him in his own grave. Then the people of Judah chose Josiah's son Jehoahaz and poured olive oil on him to make him king in his father's place.

## *Jehoahaz King of Judah*

31Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for three months. His mother's name was Hamutal, who was the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. 32Jehoahaz did what the LORD said was wrong, just as his ancestors had done.

33King Neco took Jehoahaz prisoner at Riblah in the land of Hamath so that Jehoahaz could not rule in Jerusalem. Neco made the people of Judah pay about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver and about seventy-five pounds of gold.

34King Neco made Josiah's son Eliakim the king in place of Josiah his father. Then Neco changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Jehoahaz to Egypt, where he died. 35Jehoiakim gave King Neco the silver and gold he demanded. Jehoiakim taxed the land and took silver and gold from the people of the land to give to King Neco. Each person had to pay his share.

## *Jehoiakim King of Judah*

36Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's

name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah, who was from Rumah.
37 Jehoiakim did what the LORD said was wrong, just as his
ancestors had done.
24 While Jehoiakim was king, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon
attacked the land of Judah. So Jehoiakim became
Nebuchadnezzar's servant for three years. Then he turned
against Nebuchadnezzar and broke away from his rule. 2 The
LORD sent raiding parties from Babylon, Aram, Moab, and
Ammon against Jehoiakim to destroy Judah. This happened as
the LORD had said it would through his servants the prophets.
3 The LORD commanded this to happen to the people of Judah,
to remove them from his presence, because of all the sins of
Manasseh. 4 He had killed many innocent people and had filled
Jerusalem with their blood. And the LORD would not forgive
these sins.
5 The other things that happened while Jehoiakim was king
and all he did are written in the book of the history of the kings
of Judah. 6 Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin became king
in his place.
7 The king of Egypt did not leave his land again, because the
king of Babylon had captured all that belonged to the king of
Egypt, from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates River.

## *Jehoiachin King of Judah*

8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king,
and he was king three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name
was Nehushta daughter of Elnathan from Jerusalem.
9 Jehoiachin did what the LORD said was wrong, just as his father
had done.
10 At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon came up to Jerusalem. When they reached the city, they
attacked it. 11 Nebuchadnezzar himself came to the city while
his officers were attacking it. 12 Jehoiachin king of Judah
surrendered to the king of Babylon, along with Jehoiachin's
mother, servants, nobles, and officers. So Nebuchadnezzar
made Jehoiachin a prisoner in the eighth year he was king of
Babylon. 13 Nebuchadnezzar took all the treasures from the
Temple of the LORD and from the palace. He cut up all the gold
objects Solomon king of Israel had made for the Temple of the
LORD. This happened as the LORD had said it would.
14 Nebuchadnezzar took away all the people of Jerusalem,
including all the leaders, all the wealthy people, and all the
craftsmen and metal workers. There were ten thousand
prisoners in all. Only the poorest people in the land were left.
15 Nebuchadnezzar carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, as well
as the king's mother and his wives, the officers, and the leading
men of the land. They were taken captive from Jerusalem to

Babylon. [16]The king of Babylon also took all seven thousand soldiers, who were strong and able to fight in war, and about a thousand craftsmen and metal workers. Nebuchadnezzar took them as prisoners to Babylon. [17]Then he made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in Jehoiachin's place. He also changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah.

### *Zedekiah King of Judah*

[18]Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah[n] from Libnah. [19]Zedekiah did what the LORD said was wrong, just as Jehoiakim had done. [20]All this happened in Jerusalem and Judah because the LORD was angry with them. Finally, he threw them out of his presence.

## Psalm 74:18–23

[18]LORD, remember how the enemy insulted you.
Remember how those foolish people made fun of you.

[19]Do not give us, your doves, to those wild animals.
Never forget your poor people.

[20]Remember the agreement you made with us,
because violence fills every dark corner of this land.

[21]Do not let your suffering people be disgraced.
Let the poor and helpless praise you.

[22]God, arise and defend yourself.
Remember the insults that come from those foolish people all day long.

[23]Don't forget what your enemies said;
don't forget their roar as they rise against you always.

## Proverbs 19:3

3 People's own foolishness ruins their lives,
but in their minds they blame the LORD.

## Acts 2:22–47

22 "People of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus from
Nazareth was a very special man. God clearly showed this to
you by the miracles, wonders, and signs he did through Jesus.
You all know this, because it happened right here among you.
23 Jesus was given to you, and with the help of those who don't
know the law, you put him to death by nailing him to a cross.
But this was God's plan which he had made long ago; he knew
all this would happen. 24 God raised Jesus from the dead and set
him free from the pain of death, because death could not hold
him. 25 For David said this about him:

'I keep the Lord before me always.
Because he is close by my side,
I will not be hurt.

26 So I am glad, and I rejoice.
Even my body has hope,

27 because you will not leave me in the grave.
You will not let your Holy One rot.

28 You will teach me how to live a holy life.
Being with you will fill me with joy.'

Psalm 16:8–11

29 "Brothers and sisters, I can tell you truly that David, our
ancestor, died and was buried. His grave is still here with us
today. 30 He was a prophet and knew God had promised him that
he would make a person from David's family a king just as he
was.[n] 31 Knowing this before it happened, David talked about the
Christ rising from the dead. He said:

‘He was not left in the grave.
His body did not rot.’

32So Jesus is the One whom God raised from the dead. And we
are all witnesses to this. 33Jesus was lifted up to heaven and is
now at God’s right side. The Father has given the Holy Spirit to
Jesus as he promised. So Jesus has poured out that Spirit, and
this is what you now see and hear. 34David was not the one who
was lifted up to heaven, but he said:

‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit by me at my right side,
35 until I put your enemies under your control.”’[n]

Psalm 110:1

36“So, all the people of Israel should know this truly: God has
made Jesus—the man you nailed to the cross—both Lord and
Christ.”
37When the people heard this, they felt guilty and asked
Peter and the other apostles, “What shall we do?”
38Peter said to them, “Change your hearts and lives and be
baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the
forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the
Holy Spirit. 39This promise is for you, for your children, and for
all who are far away. It is for everyone the Lord our God calls to
himself.”
40Peter warned them with many other words. He begged
them, “Save yourselves from the evil of today’s people!” 41Then
those people who accepted what Peter said were baptized.
About three thousand people were added to the number of
believers that day. 42They spent their time learning the apostles’
teaching, sharing, breaking bread,[n] and praying together.

## *The Believers Share*

43The apostles were doing many miracles and signs, and
everyone felt great respect for God. 44All the believers were
together and shared everything. 45They would sell their land
and the things they owned and then divide the money and give
it to anyone who needed it. 46The believers met together in the
Temple every day. They ate together in their homes, happy to
share their food with joyful hearts. 47They praised God and
were liked by all the people. Every day the Lord added those
who were being saved to the group of believers.

# June 18

# The Journey to the Cross

*"God said through the prophets that his Christ would suffer and die. And now God has made these things come true in this way."*

Acts 3:18

Jesus died … on purpose. No surprise. No hesitation. No faltering. You can tell a lot about a person by the way he dies. And the way Jesus marched to his death leaves no doubt: he had come to earth for this moment. Read the words of Peter. "Jesus was given to you, and with the help of those who don't know the law, you put him to death by nailing him to a cross. But this was God's plan which he had made long ago; he knew all this would happen" (Acts 2:23).

No, the journey to the Cross didn't begin in Jericho. It didn't begin in Galilee. It didn't begin in Nazareth. It didn't even begin in Bethlehem.

The journey to the Cross began long before. As the echo of the crunching of the fruit was still sounding in the garden, Jesus was leaving for Calvary.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## 2 Kings 24:20b—25:30

### *The Fall of Jerusalem*

Zedekiah turned against the king of Babylon.
25 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem
with his whole army during Zedekiah's ninth year as king, on
the tenth day of the tenth month. He made a camp around the
city and piled dirt against the city walls to attack it. 2The city
was under attack until Zedekiah's eleventh year as king. 3By the
ninth day of the fourth month, the hunger was terrible in the
city. There was no food for the people to eat. 4Then the city was
broken into, and the whole army ran away at night through the

gate between the two walls by the king's garden. While the Babylonians were still surrounding the city, Zedekiah and his men ran away toward the Jordan Valley. [5]But the Babylonian army chased King Zedekiah and caught up with him in the plains of Jericho. All of his army was scattered from him, [6]so they captured Zedekiah and took him to the king of Babylon at Riblah. There he passed sentence on Zedekiah. [7]They killed Zedekiah's sons as he watched. Then they put out his eyes and put bronze chains on him and took him to Babylon.

[8]Nebuzaradan was the commander of the king's special guards. This officer of the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem on the seventh day of the fifth month, in Nebuchadnezzar's nineteenth year as king of Babylon. [9]Nebuzaradan set fire to the Temple of the LORD and the palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building was burned.

[10]The whole Babylonian army, led by the commander of the king's special guards, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. [11]Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guards, captured the people left in Jerusalem, those who had surrendered to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the people. [12]But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to take care of the vineyards and fields.

[13]The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the bronze stands, and the large bronze bowl, which was called the Sea, in the Temple of the LORD. Then they carried the bronze to Babylon. [14]They also took the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, dishes, and all the bronze objects used to serve in the Temple. [15]The commander of the king's special guards took away the pans for carrying hot coals, the bowls, and everything made of pure gold or silver. [16]There were two pillars and the large bronze bowl and the movable stands which Solomon had made for the Temple of the LORD. There was so much bronze that it could not be weighed. [17]Each pillar was about twenty-seven feet high. The bronze capital on top of the pillar was about four and one-half feet high. It was decorated with a net design and bronze pomegranates all around it. The other pillar also had a net design and was like the first pillar.

## *Judah Is Taken Prisoner*

[18]The commander of the guards took some prisoners—Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank, and the three doorkeepers. [19]Of the people who were still in the city, he took the officer in charge of the fighting men, as well as five people who advised the king. He took the royal secretary who selected people for the army and sixty other men who were in the city. [20]Nebuzaradan, the commander, took all these people and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. [21]There at

Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them killed. So the people of Judah were led away from their country as captives.

### *Gedaliah Becomes Governor*

22 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon left some people in the land of Judah. He appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, as governor.

23 The army captains and their men heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, so they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. They were Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite, and their men. 24 Then Gedaliah promised these army captains and their men, “Don’t be afraid of the Babylonian officers. Live in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and everything will go well for you.”

25 In the seventh month Ishmael son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama from the king’s family, came with ten men and killed Gedaliah. They also killed the men of Judah and Babylon who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah. 26 Then all the people, from the least important to the most important, along with the army leaders, ran away to Egypt, because they were afraid of the Babylonians.

### *Jehoiachin Is Set Free*

27 Jehoiachin king of Judah was held in Babylon for thirty-seven years. In the thirty-seventh year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, and he let Jehoiachin out of prison on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month. 28 Evil-Merodach spoke kindly to Jehoiachin and gave him a seat of honor above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. 29 So Jehoiachin put away his prison clothes. For the rest of his life, he ate at the king’s table. 30 Every day, for as long as Jehoiachin lived, the king gave him an allowance.

## Psalm 75:1–10

### *God the Judge*

**For the director of music. To the tune of “Do Not Destroy.” A psalm of Asaph. A song.**

75 God, we thank you;
we thank you because you are near.
We tell about the miracles you do.

2 You say, “I set the time for trial,
and I will judge fairly.

3 The earth with all its people may shake,
but I am the one who holds it steady. *Selah*

4 I say to those who are proud, ‘Don’t brag,’
and to the wicked, ‘Don’t show your power.

5 Don’t try to use your power against heaven.
Don’t be stubborn.’”

6 No one from the east or the west
or the desert can judge you.

7 God is the judge;
he judges one person as guilty and another as innocent.

8 The LORD holds a cup of anger in his hand;
it is full of wine mixed with spices.

He pours it out even to the last drop,
and the wicked drink it all.

9 I will tell about this forever;
I will sing praise to the God of Jacob.

10 He will take all power away from the wicked,
but the power of good people will grow.

## Proverbs 19:4–5

4 Wealthy people are always finding more friends,
but the poor lose all theirs.

5 A witness who lies will not go free;
liars will never escape.

## Acts 3:1–26

### *Peter Heals a Crippled Man*

3 One day Peter and John went to the Temple at three o'clock,
the time set each day for the afternoon prayer service. 2 There,
at the Temple gate called Beautiful Gate, was a man who had
been crippled all his life. Every day he was carried to this gate
to beg for money from the people going into the Temple. 3 The
man saw Peter and John going into the Temple and asked them
for money. 4 Peter and John looked straight at him and said,
"Look at us!" 5 The man looked at them, thinking they were
going to give him some money. 6 But Peter said, "I don't have
any silver or gold, but I do have something else I can give you.
By the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, stand up and
walk!" 7 Then Peter took the man's right hand and lifted him up.
Immediately the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He
jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk. He went into
the Temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God.
9–10 All the people recognized him as the crippled man who
always sat by the Beautiful Gate begging for money. Now they
saw this same man walking and praising God, and they were
amazed. They wondered how this could happen.

### *Peter Speaks to the People*

11 While the man was holding on to Peter and John, all the
people were amazed and ran to them at Solomon's Porch.
12 When Peter saw this, he said to them, "People of Israel, why
are you surprised? You are looking at us as if it were our own
power or goodness that made this man walk. 13 The God of
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, gave glory
to Jesus, his servant. But you handed him over to be killed.
Pilate decided to let him go free, but you told Pilate you did not

want Jesus. 14You did not want the One who is holy and good
but asked Pilate to give you a murderer[n] instead. 15And so you
killed the One who gives life, but God raised him from the dead.
We are witnesses to this. 16It was faith in Jesus that made this
crippled man well. You can see this man, and you know him. He
was made completely well because of trust in Jesus, and you all
saw it happen!

17"Brothers and sisters, I know you did those things to Jesus
because neither you nor your leaders understood what you were
doing. 18God said through the prophets that his Christ would
suffer and die. And now God has made these things come true
in this way. 19So you must change your hearts and lives! Come
back to God, and he will forgive your sins. Then the Lord will
send the time of rest. 20And he will send Jesus, the One he
chose to be the Christ. 21But Jesus must stay in heaven until the
time comes when all things will be made right again. God told
about this time long ago when he spoke through his holy
prophets. 22Moses said, 'The Lord your God will give you a
prophet like me, who is one of your own people. You must listen
to everything he tells you. 23Anyone who does not listen to that
prophet will die, cut off from God's people.'[n] 24Samuel, and all
the other prophets who spoke for God after Samuel, told about
this time now. 25You are descendants of the prophets. You have
received the agreement God made with your ancestors. He said
to your father Abraham, 'Through your descendants all the
nations on the earth will be blessed.'[n] 26God has raised up his
servant Jesus and sent him to you first to bless you by turning
each of you away from doing evil."

# June 19

## Our Plight

*"Jesus is the only One who can save people. No one else in the world is able to save us."*

Acts 4:12

God did for us what I did for one of my daughters in the shop at New York's La Guardia Airport. The sign above the ceramic pieces read Do Not Touch. But the wanting was stronger than the warning, and she touched. And it fell. By the time I looked up, ten-year-old Sara was holding the two pieces of a New York City skyline. Next to her was an unhappy store manager. Over them both was the written rule. Between them hung a nervous silence. My daughter had no money. He had no mercy. So I stepped in. "How much do we owe you?" I asked.

How was it that I owed anything? Simple. She was my daughter. And since she could not pay, I did.

Since you and I cannot pay, Christ did. We've broken so much more than souvenirs. We've … broken God's heart.

With the law on the wall and shattered commandments on the floor, Christ steps near (like a neighbor) and offers a gift (like a Savior).

from *Next Door Savior*

## 1 Chronicles 1:1—2:55

### *From Adam to Abraham*

1 Adam was the father of Seth. Seth was the father of Enosh.
Enosh was the father of Kenan. 2 Kenan was the father of
Mahalalel. Mahalalel was the father of Jared. Jared was the
father of Enoch. 3 Enoch was the father of Methuselah.
Methuselah was the father of Lamech, and Lamech was the
father of Noah.

4 The sons of Noah were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

5 Japheth’s sons were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal,
Meshech, and Tiras.
6 Gomer’s sons were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.
7 Javan’s sons were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim,[n] and Rodanim.
8 Ham’s sons were Cush, Mizraim,[n] Put, and Canaan.
9 Cush’s sons were Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Raamah, and
Sabteca.
Raamah’s sons were Sheba and Dedan.
10 Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew up to become a
mighty warrior on the earth.
11 Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites,
Lehabites, and Naphtuhites,
12 Pathrusites, Casluhites, and Caphtorites. (The Philistines
came from the Casluhites.)
13 Canaan’s first child was Sidon. He was also the father of
the Hittites, 14 Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, 15 Hivites,
Arkites, Sinites, 16 Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites.
17 Shem’s sons were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.
Aram’s sons were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech.
18 Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, who was the father of
Eber.
19 Eber had two sons. One son was named Peleg,[n] because
the people on the earth were divided into different languages
during his life. Peleg’s brother was named Joktan.
20 Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth,
Jerah, 21 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 22 Obal, Abimael, Sheba,
23 Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were Joktan’s sons. 24 The
family line included Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, 25 Eber, Peleg,
Reu, 26 Serug, Nahor, Terah, 27 and Abram, who was called
Abraham.

## *Abraham’s Family*

28 Abraham’s sons were Isaac and Ishmael.
29 These were the sons of Isaac and Ishmael. Ishmael’s first
son was Nebaioth. His other sons were Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,
30 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, 31 Jetur, Naphish, and
Kedemah. These were Ishmael’s sons. 32 Keturah, Abraham’s
slave woman, gave birth to Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian,
Ishbak, and Shuah.
Jokshan’s sons were Sheba and Dedan.
33 Midian’s sons were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and
Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.
34 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac’s sons were
Esau and Israel.
35 Esau’s sons were Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.
36 Eliphaz’s sons were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, Kenaz,

Timna, and Amalek.
37 Reuel's sons were Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.

## The Edomites from Seir

38 Seir's sons were Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon,
Ezer, and Dishan.
39 Lotan's sons were Hori and Homam, and his sister was
Timna.
40 Shobal's sons were Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and
Onam.
Zibeon's sons were Aiah and Anah.
41 Anah's son was Dishon.
Dishon's sons were Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Keran.
42 Ezer's sons were Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.
Dishan's sons were Uz and Aran.

## The Kings of Edom

43 These kings ruled in Edom before there were kings in
Israel. Bela son of Beor was king of Edom, and his city was
named Dinhabah.
44 When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah became king. He was
from Bozrah.
45 When Jobab died, Husham became king. He was from the
land of the Temanites.
46 When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad became king, and
his city was named Avith. Hadad defeated Midian in the country
of Moab.
47 When Hadad died, Samlah became king. He was from
Masrekah.
48 When Samlah died, Shaul became king. He was from
Rehoboth by the river.
49 When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Acbor became king.
50 When Baal-Hanan died, Hadad became king, and his city
was named Pau. Hadad's wife was named Mehetabel, and she
was the daughter of Matred, who was the daughter of Me-
Zahab. 51 Then Hadad died.
The leaders of the family groups of Edom were Timna, Alvah,
Jetheth, 52 Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, 53 Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar,
54 Magdiel, and Iram. These were the leaders of Edom.

## Israel's Family

2 The sons of Israel[n] were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah,
Issachar, Zebulun, 2 Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and
Asher.

## *Judah's Family*

3 Judah's sons were Er, Onan, and Shelah. A Canaanite
woman, the daughter of Shua, was their mother. Judah's first
son, Er, did what the LORD said was wicked, so the LORD put him
to death. 4 Judah's daughter-in-law Tamar gave birth to Perez
and Zerah. Judah was the father, so Judah had five sons.
5 Perez's sons were Hezron and Hamul.
6 Zerah had five sons: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and
Darda.
7 Carmi's son was Achan, who caused trouble for Israel
because he took things that had been given to the LORD to be
destroyed.
8 Ethan's son was Azariah.
9 Hezron's sons were Jerahmeel, Ram, and Caleb.
10 Ram was Amminadab's father, and Amminadab was
Nahshon's father. Nahshon was the leader of the people of
Judah. 11 Nahshon was the father of Salmon, who was the father
of Boaz. 12 Boaz was the father of Obed, and Obed was the
father of Jesse.
13 Jesse's first son was Eliab. His second son was Abinadab,
his third was Shimea, 14 his fourth was Nethanel, his fifth was
Raddai, 15 his sixth was Ozem, and his seventh son was David.
16 Their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail. Zeruiah's three sons
were Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. 17 Abigail was the mother of
Amasa, and his father was Jether, an Ishmaelite.

## *Caleb's Family*

18 Caleb son of Hezron had children by his wife Azubah and
by Jerioth. Caleb and Azubah's sons were Jesher, Shobab, and
Ardon. 19 When Azubah died, Caleb married Ephrath. They had a
son named Hur, 20 who was the father of Uri, who was the father
of Bezalel.
21 Later, when Hezron was sixty years old, he married the
daughter of Makir, Gilead's father. Hezron had sexual relations
with Makir's daughter, and she had a son named Segub.
22 Segub was the father of Jair. Jair controlled twenty-three
cities in the country of Gilead. 23 (But Geshur and Aram
captured the Towns of Jair, as well as Kenath and the small
towns around it—sixty towns in all.) All these were descendants
of Makir, the father of Gilead.
24 After Hezron died in Caleb Ephrathah, his wife Abijah had
his son, named Ashhur. Ashhur became the father of Tekoa.

## *Jerahmeel's Family*

[25]Hezron's first son was Jerahmeel. Jerahmeel's sons were Ram, Bunah, Oren, Ozem, and Ahijah. Ram was Jerahmeel's first son. [26]Jerahmeel had another wife, named Atarah. She was the mother of Onam.

[27]Jerahmeel's first son, Ram, had sons. They were Maaz, Jamin, and Eker.

[28]Onam's sons were Shammai and Jada.

Shammai's sons were Nadab and Abishur.

[29]Abishur's wife was named Abihail, and their sons were Ahban and Molid.

[30]Nadab's sons were Seled and Appaim. Seled died without having children.

[31]Appaim's son was Ishi, who became the father of Sheshan.

Sheshan was the father of Ahlai.

[32]Jada was Shammai's brother, and Jada's sons were Jether and Jonathan. Jether died without having children.

[33]Jonathan's sons were Peleth and Zaza.

These were Jerahmeel's descendants.

[34]Sheshan did not have any sons, only daughters. He had a servant from Egypt named Jarha. [35]Sheshan let his daughter marry his servant Jarha, and she had a son named Attai.

[36]Attai was the father of Nathan. Nathan was the father of Zabad. [37]Zabad was the father of Ephlal. Ephlal was the father of Obed. [38]Obed was the father of Jehu. Jehu was the father of Azariah. [39]Azariah was the father of Helez. Helez was the father of Eleasah. [40]Eleasah was the father of Sismai. Sismai was the father of Shallum. [41]Shallum was the father of Jekamiah, and Jekamiah was the father of Elishama.

## *Caleb's Family*

[42]Caleb was Jerahmeel's brother. Caleb's first son was Mesha. Mesha was the father of Ziph, and his son Mareshah was the father of Hebron.

[43]Hebron's sons were Korah, Tappuah, Rekem, and Shema. [44]Shema was the father of Raham, who was the father of Jorkeam. Rekem was the father of Shammai. [45]Shammai was the father of Maon, and Maon was the father of Beth Zur.

[46]Caleb's slave woman was named Ephah, and she was the mother of Haran, Moza, and Gazez. Haran was the father of Gazez.

[47]Jahdai's sons were Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah, and Shaaph.

[48]Caleb had another slave woman named Maacah. She was the mother of Sheber, Tirhanah, [49]Shaaph, and Sheva. Shaaph was the father of Madmannah. Sheva was the father of Macbenah and Gibea. Caleb's daughter was Acsah.

50–51These were Caleb's descendants: Caleb's son Hur was
the first son of his mother Ephrathah. Hur's sons were Shobal,
Salma, and Hareph. Shobal was the father of Kiriath Jearim.
Salma was the father of Bethlehem. And Hareph was the father
of Beth Gader.
52Shobal was the father of Kiriath Jearim. Shobal's
descendants were Haroeh, half the Manahathites, 53and the
family groups of Kiriath Jearim: the Ithrites, Puthites,
Shumathites, and Mishraites. The Zorathites and the
Eshtaolites came from the Mishraite people.
54Salma's descendants were Bethlehem, the Netophathites,
Atroth Beth Joab, half the Manahathites, and the Zorites. 55His
descendants included the families who lived at Jabez, who wrote
and copied important papers. They were called the Tirathites,
Shimeathites, and Sucathites and were from the Kenite family
group who came from Hammath. He was the father of the
people living in Recab.

## Psalm 76:1–10

### *The God Who Always Wins*

**For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of Asaph. A song.**

76 People in Judah know God;
his fame is great in Israel.

2His Tent is in Jerusalem;
his home is on Mount Zion.

3There God broke the flaming arrows,
the shields, the swords, and the weapons of war. *Selah*

4God, how wonderful you are!
You are more splendid than the hills full of animals.

5The brave soldiers were stripped
as they lay asleep in death.

Not one warrior
had the strength to stop it.

6 God of Jacob, when you spoke strongly,
horses and riders fell dead.

7 You are feared;
no one can stand against you when you are angry.

8 From heaven you gave the decision,
and the earth was afraid and silent.

9 God, you stood up to judge
and to save the needy people of the earth. *Selah*

10 People praise you for your anger against evil.
Those who live through your anger are stopped from doing more evil.

## Proverbs 19:6–7

6 Many people want to please a leader,
and everyone is friends with those who give gifts.

7 Poor people's relatives avoid them;
even their friends stay far away.

They run after them, begging,
but they are gone.

## Acts 4:1–22

## *Peter and John at the Council*

4 While Peter and John were speaking to the people, priests, the
captain of the soldiers that guarded the Temple, and Sadducees
came up to them. 2They were upset because the two apostles
were teaching the people and were preaching that people will
rise from the dead through the power of Jesus. 3The older
leaders grabbed Peter and John and put them in jail. Since it
was already night, they kept them in jail until the next day. 4But
many of those who had heard Peter and John preach believed
the things they said. There were now about five thousand in the
group of believers.

5The next day the rulers, the elders, and the teachers of the
law met in Jerusalem. 6Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John,
and Alexander were there, as well as everyone from the high
priest's family. 7They made Peter and John stand before them
and then asked them, "By what power or authority did you do
this?"

8Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers
of the people and you elders, 9are you questioning us about a
good thing that was done to a crippled man? Are you asking us
who made him well? 10We want all of you and all the people to
know that this man was made well by the power of Jesus Christ
from Nazareth. You crucified him, but God raised him from the
dead. This man was crippled, but he is now well and able to
stand here before you because of the power of Jesus. 11Jesus is

'the stone[n] that you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.'

Psalm 118:22

12Jesus is the only One who can save people. No one else in the
world is able to save us."

13The leaders saw that Peter and John were not afraid to
speak, and they understood that these men had no special
training or education. So they were amazed. Then they realized
that Peter and John had been with Jesus. 14Because they saw
the healed man standing there beside the two apostles, they
could say nothing against them. 15After the leaders ordered
them to leave the meeting, they began to talk to each other.
16They said, "What shall we do with these men? Everyone in
Jerusalem knows they have done a great miracle, and we cannot
say it is not true. 17But to keep it from spreading among the
people, we must warn them not to talk to people anymore using
that name."

18So they called Peter and John in again and told them not to
speak or to teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19But Peter and

John answered them, “You decide what God would want. Should
we obey you or God? [20]We cannot keep quiet. We must speak
about what we have seen and heard.” [21]The leaders warned the
apostles again and let them go free. They could not find a way
to punish them, because all the people were praising God for
what had been done. [22]The man who received the miracle of
healing was more than forty years old.

# June 20

# One Explanation

*With great power the apostles were telling people that the Lord Jesus was truly raised from the dead.*

Acts 4:33

Remember [Christ's] followers' fear at the crucifixion? They ran. Scared as cats in a dog pound … But fast-forward forty days. Bankrupt traitors have become a force of life-changing fury. Peter is preaching in the very precinct where Christ was arrested. Followers of Christ defy the enemies of Christ. Whip them and they'll worship. Lock them up and they'll launch a jailhouse ministry. As bold after the Resurrection as they were cowardly before it.

Explanation:

Greed? They made no money.

Power? They gave all the credit to Christ.

Popularity? Most were killed for their beliefs.

Only one explanation remains—a resurrected Christ and his Holy Spirit. The courage of these men and women was forged in the fire of the empty tomb.

from *Next Door Savior*

## 1 Chronicles 3:1—4:43

### *David's Family*

3 These are David's sons who were born in Hebron. The first
was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel. The
second son was Daniel, whose mother was Abigail from Carmel.
2 The third son was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah
daughter of Talmai, the king of Geshur. The fourth son was
Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith. 3 The fifth son was
Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital. The sixth son was
Ithream, whose mother was Eglah. 4 These six sons of David

were born to him in Hebron, where David ruled for seven and one-half years.

David ruled in Jerusalem thirty-three years. [5]These were his children who were born in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon—the four children of David and Bathsheba, Ammiel's daughter. [6–8]David's other nine children were Ibhar, Elishua, Eliphelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet. [9]These were all of David's sons, except for those born to his slave women. David also had a daughter named Tamar.

## *The Kings of Judah*

[10]Solomon's son was Rehoboam. Rehoboam's son was Abijah. Abijah's son was Asa. Asa's son was Jehoshaphat. [11]Jehoshaphat's son was Jehoram. Jehoram's son was Ahaziah. Ahaziah's son was Joash. [12]Joash's son was Amaziah. Amaziah's son was Azariah. Azariah's son was Jotham. [13]Jotham's son was Ahaz. Ahaz's son was Hezekiah. Hezekiah's son was Manasseh. [14]Manasseh's son was Amon, and Amon's son was Josiah.

[15]These were Josiah's sons: His first son was Johanan, his second was Jehoiakim, his third was Zedekiah, and his fourth was Shallum.

[16]Jehoiakim was followed by Jehoiachin, and he was followed by Zedekiah.

## *David's Descendants After the Babylonian Captivity*

[17]Jehoiachin was taken as a prisoner. His sons were Shealtiel, [18]Malkiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah.

[19]Pedaiah's sons were Zerubbabel and Shimei.

Zerubbabel's sons were Meshullam and Hananiah, and their sister was Shelomith. [20]Zerubbabel also had five other sons: Hashubah, Ohel, Berekiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-Hesed.

[21]Hananiah's descendants were Pelatiah and Jeshaiah, and the sons of Rephaiah, Arnan, Obadiah, and Shecaniah.

[22]Shecaniah's son was Shemaiah. Shemaiah's sons were Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah, and Shaphat. There were six in all.

[23]Neariah had three sons: Elioenai, Hizkiah, and Azrikam.

[24]Elioenai had seven sons: Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pelaiah, Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah, and Anani.

## *Other Family Groups of Judah*

4 Judah’s descendants were Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and
Shobal.
2Reaiah was Shobal’s son. Reaiah was the father of Jahath,
and Jahath was the father of Ahumai and Lahad. They were the
family groups of the Zorathite people.
3–4Hur was the oldest son of Caleb and his wife Ephrathah.
Hur was the leader of Bethlehem. His three sons were Etam,
Penuel, and Ezer. Etam’s sons were Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash.
They had a sister named Hazzelelponi. Penuel was the father of
Gedor, and Ezer was the father of Hushah.
5Tekoa’s father was Ashhur. Ashhur had two wives named
Helah and Naarah.
6The sons of Ashhur and Naarah were Ahuzzam, Hepher,
Temeni, and Haahashtari. These were the descendants of
Naarah.
7Helah’s sons were Zereth, Zohar, Ethnan, 8and Koz. Koz was
the father of Anub, Hazzobebah, and the Aharhel family group.
Aharhel was the son of Harum.
9There was a man named Jabez, who was respected more
than his brothers. His mother named him Jabez[n] because she
said, “I was in much pain when I gave birth to him.” 10Jabez
prayed to the God of Israel, “Please do good things for me and
give me more land. Stay with me, and don’t let anyone hurt me.
Then I won’t have any pain.” And God did what Jabez had
asked.
11Kelub, Shuhah’s brother, was the father of Mehir. Mehir
was the father of Eshton. 12Eshton was the father of Beth
Rapha, Paseah, and Tehinnah. Tehinnah was the father of the
people from the town of Nahash. These people were from
Recah.
13The sons of Kenaz were Othniel and Seraiah.
Othniel’s sons were Hathath and Meonothai. 14Meonothai
was the father of Ophrah.
Seraiah was the father of Joab. Joab was the ancestor of the
people from Craftsmen’s Valley, named that because the people
living there were craftsmen.
15Caleb was Jephunneh’s son. Caleb’s sons were Iru, Elah,
and Naam. Elah’s son was Kenaz.
16Jehallelel’s sons were Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria, and Asarel.
17–18Ezrah’s sons were Jether, Mered, Epher, and Jalon.
Mered married Bithiah, the daughter of the king of Egypt. The
children of Mered and Bithiah were Miriam, Shammai, and
Ishbah. Ishbah was the father of Eshtemoa. Mered also had a
wife from Judah, who gave birth to Jered, Heber, and Jekuthiel.
Jered became the father of Gedor. Heber became the father of
Soco. And Jekuthiel became the father of Zanoah.
19Hodiah’s wife was Naham’s sister. The sons of Hodiah’s
wife were Eshtemoa and the father of Keilah. Keilah was from
the Garmite people, and Eshtemoa was from the Maacathite

people.

[20]Shimon's sons were Amnon, Rinnah, Ben-Hanan, and Tilon.
Ishi's sons were Zoheth and Ben-Zoheth.

[21–22]Shelah was Judah's son. Shelah's sons were Er, Laadah, Jokim, the men from Cozeba, Joash, and Saraph. Er was the father of Lecah. Laadah was the father of Mareshah and the family groups of linen workers at Beth Ashbea. Joash and Saraph ruled in Moab and Jashubi Lehem. The writings about this family are very old. [23]These sons of Shelah were potters. They lived in Netaim and Gederah and worked for the king.

## *Simeon's Children*

[24]Simeon's sons were Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zerah, and Shaul. [25]Shaul's son was Shallum. Shallum's son was Mibsam. Mibsam's son was Mishma.

[26]Mishma's son was Hammuel. Hammuel's son was Zaccur. Zaccur's son was Shimei. [27]Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters, but his brothers did not have many children, so there were not as many people in their family group as there were in Judah.

[28]Shimei's children lived in Beersheba, Moladah, Hazar Shual, [29]Bilhah, Ezem, Tolad, [30]Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag, [31]Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susim, Beth Biri, and Shaaraim. They lived in these cities until David became king. [32]The five villages near these cities were Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Token, and Ashan. [33]There were also other villages as far away as Baalath. This is where they lived. And they wrote the history of their family.

[34–38]The men in this list were leaders of their family groups: Meshobab, Jamlech, Joshah son of Amaziah, Joel, Jehu son of Joshibiah (Joshibiah was the son of Seraiah, who was the son of Asiel), Elioenai, Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah, and Ziza. (Ziza was the son of Shiphi, who was the son of Allon. Allon was the son of Jedaiah, who was the son of Shimri. And Shimri was the son of Shemaiah.)

These families grew very large. [39]They went outside the city of Gedor to the east side of the valley to look for pasture for their flocks. [40]They found good pastures with plenty of grass, and the land was open country and peaceful and quiet. Ham's descendants had lived there in the past.

[41]These men who were listed came to Gedor while Hezekiah was king of Judah. They fought against the Hamites, destroying their tents, and also against the Meunites who lived there, and completely destroyed them. So there are no Meunites there even today. Then these men began to live there, because there was pasture for their flocks. [42]Ishi's sons, Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and Uzziel, led five hundred of the Simeonites and attacked the people living in the mountains of Edom. [43]They

killed the few Amalekites who were still alive. From that time until now these Simeonites have lived in Edom.

## Psalm 76:11–12

[11]Make and keep your promises to the LORD your God.
From all around, gifts should come to the God we worship.

[12]God breaks the spirits of great leaders;
the kings on earth fear him.

## Proverbs 19:8–9

[8]Those who get wisdom do themselves a favor,
and those who love learning will succeed.

[9]A witness who lies will not go free,
liars will die.

## Acts 4:23–37

### *The Believers Pray*

[23]After Peter and John left the meeting of leaders, they went to their own group and told them everything the leading priests and the elders had said to them. [24]When the believers heard this, they prayed to God together, “Lord, you are the One who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. [25]By the Holy Spirit, through our father David your servant, you said:

‘Why are the nations so angry?
Why are the people making useless plans?

[26]The kings of the earth prepare to fight,
and their leaders make plans together

against the Lord
and his Christ.’

Psalm 2:1–2

[27]These things really happened when Herod, Pontius Pilate, and some Jews and non-Jews all came together against Jesus here in Jerusalem. Jesus is your holy servant, the One you made to be the Christ. [28]These people made your plan happen because of your power and your will. [29]And now, Lord, listen to their threats. Lord, help us, your servants, to speak your word without fear. [30]Show us your power to heal. Give proofs and make miracles happen by the power of Jesus, your holy servant.”

[31]After they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke God’s word without fear.

## *The Believers Share*

[32]The group of believers were united in their hearts and spirit. All those in the group acted as though their private property belonged to everyone in the group. In fact, they shared everything. [33]With great power the apostles were telling people that the Lord Jesus was truly raised from the dead. And God blessed all the believers very much. [34]There were no needy people among them. From time to time those who owned fields or houses sold them, brought the money, [35]and gave it to the apostles. Then the money was given to anyone who needed it.

[36]One of the believers was named Joseph, a Levite born in Cyprus. The apostles called him Barnabas (which means “one who encourages”). [37]Joseph owned a field, sold it, brought the money, and gave it to the apostles.

# June 21

## God Hears Our Prayers

*I cry out to God; I call to God, and he will hear me.*

Psalm 77:1

when [a friend] told Jesus of the illness [of Lazarus] he said, "Lord, the one you love is sick." He doesn't base his appeal on the imperfect love of the one in need, but on the perfect love of the Savior. He doesn't say, "The one *who loves you* is sick." He says, "The one *you love* is sick." The power of the prayer, in other words, does not depend on the one who makes the prayer, but on the one who hears the prayer.

We can and must repeat the phrase in manifold ways. "The one you love is tired, sad, hungry, lonely, fearful, depressed." The words of the prayer vary, but the response never changes. The Savior hears the prayer. He silences heaven, so he won't miss a word. He hears the prayer.

from *The Great House of God*

## 1 Chronicles 5:1—6:81

### *Reuben's Children*

5 Reuben was Israel's first son. Reuben should have received
the special privileges of the oldest son, but he had sexual
relations with his father's slave woman. So those special
privileges were given to Joseph's sons. (Joseph was a son of
Israel.) In the family history Reuben's name is not listed as the
first son. 2Judah became stronger than his brothers, and a
leader came from his family. But Joseph's family received the
privileges that belonged to the oldest son. 3Reuben was Israel's
first son. Reuben's sons were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and
Carmi.

4These were the children of Joel: Shemaiah was Joel's son.
Gog was Shemaiah's son. Shimei was Gog's son. 5Micah was

Shimei's son. Reaiah was Micah's son. Baal was Reaiah's son.
6 Beerah was Baal's son. Beerah was a leader of the tribe of
Reuben. Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria captured him and took
him away.

7 Joel's brothers and all his family groups are listed just as
they are written in their family histories: Jeiel was the first, then
Zechariah, 8 and Bela. (Bela was the son of Azaz. Azaz was the
son of Shema, and Shema was the son of Joel.) They lived in the
area of Aroer all the way to Nebo and Baal Meon. 9 Bela's people
lived to the east—as far as the edge of the desert, which is
beside the Euphrates River—because they had too many cattle
for the land of Gilead.

10 When Saul was king, Bela's people fought a war against
the Hagrite people and defeated them. Then Bela's people lived
in the tents that had belonged to the Hagrites in all the area
east of Gilead.

## *Gad's Children*

11 The people from the tribe of Gad lived near the Reubenites.
The Gadites lived in the area of Bashan all the way to Salecah.
12 Joel was the main leader, Shapham was second, and then
Janai and Shaphat were leaders in Bashan.

13 The seven relatives in their families were Michael,
Meshullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia, and Eber. 14 They were the
descendants of Abihail. Abihail was Huri's son. Huri was
Jaroah's son. Jaroah was Gilead's son. Gilead was Michael's son.
Michael was Jeshishai's son. Jeshishai was Jahdo's son, and
Jahdo was the son of Buz. 15 Ahi was Abdiel's son, and Abdiel
was Guni's son. Ahi was the leader of their family.

16 The Gadites lived in Gilead, Bashan and the small towns
around it, and on all the pasturelands in the Plain of Sharon all
the way to the borders.

17 All these names were written in the family history of Gad
during the time Jotham was king of Judah and Jeroboam was
king of Israel.

## *Soldiers Skilled in War*

18 There were forty-four thousand seven hundred sixty
soldiers from the tribes of Reuben and Gad and East Manasseh
who carried shields and swords and bows. They were skilled in
war. 19 They started a war against the Hagrites and the people
of Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab. 20 The men from the tribes of
Manasseh, Reuben, and Gad prayed to God during the war,
asking him to help them. So he helped them because they
trusted him. He handed over to them the Hagrites and all those
who were with them. 21 They took the animals that belonged to

the Hagrites: fifty thousand camels, two hundred fifty thousand sheep, and two thousand donkeys. They also captured one hundred thousand people. 22Many Hagrites were killed because God helped the people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. Then they lived there until Babylon captured them and took them away.

## *East Manasseh*

23There were many people in East Manasseh, and they lived in the area of Bashan all the way to Baal Hermon, Senir, and Mount Hermon.

24These were the family leaders: Epher, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel. They were all strong, brave, and famous men, and leaders in their families. 25But they sinned against the God that their ancestors had worshiped. They began worshiping the gods of the people in that land, and those were the people God was destroying. 26So the God of Israel made Pul king of Assyria want to go to war. (Pul was also called Tiglath-Pileser.) He captured the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh, and he took them away to Halah, Habor, Hara, and near the Gozan River. They have lived there from that time until this day.

## *Levi's Children*

6 Levi's sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 2Kohath's sons were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

3Amram's children were Aaron, Moses, and Miriam.

Aaron's sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 4Eleazar was the father of Phinehas. Phinehas was the father of Abishua. 5Abishua was the father of Bukki. Bukki was the father of Uzzi. 6Uzzi was the father of Zerahiah. Zerahiah was the father of Meraioth. 7Meraioth was the father of Amariah. Amariah was the father of Ahitub. 8Ahitub was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Ahimaaz. 9Ahimaaz was the father of Azariah. Azariah was the father of Johanan. 10Johanan was the father of Azariah. (Azariah was a priest in the Temple Solomon built in Jerusalem.) 11Azariah was the father of Amariah. Amariah was the father of Ahitub. 12Ahitub was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Shallum. 13Shallum was the father of Hilkiah. Hilkiah was the father of Azariah. 14Azariah was the father of Seraiah, and Seraiah was the father of Jehozadak.

15Jehozadak was forced to leave his home when the LORD sent Judah and Jerusalem into captivity under the control of Nebuchadnezzar.

16 Levi's sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.
17 The names of Gershon's sons were Libni and Shimei.
18 Kohath's sons were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.
19 Merari's sons were Mahli and Mushi.

This is a list of the family groups of Levi, listed by the name of the father of each group.

20 Gershon's son was Libni. Libni's son was Jehath. Jehath's son was Zimmah. 21 Zimmah's son was Joah. Joah's son was Iddo. Iddo's son was Zerah. And Zerah's son was Jeatherai.

22 Kohath's son was Amminadab. Amminadab's son was Korah. Korah's son was Assir. 23 Assir's son was Elkanah. Elkanah's son was Ebiasaph. Ebiasaph's son was Assir. 24 Assir's son was Tahath. Tahath's son was Uriel. Uriel's son was Uzziah, and Uzziah's son was Shaul.

25 Elkanah's sons were Amasai and Ahimoth. 26 Ahimoth's son was Elkanah. Elkanah's son was Zophai. Zophai's son was Nahath. 27 Nahath's son was Eliab. Eliab's son was Jeroham. Jeroham's son was Elkanah, and Elkanah's son was Samuel.

28 Samuel's sons were Joel, the first son, and Abijah, the second son.

29 Merari's son was Mahli. Mahli's son was Libni. Libni's son was Shimei. Shimei's son was Uzzah. 30 Uzzah's son was Shimea. Shimea's son was Haggiah, and Haggiah's son was Asaiah.

## *The Temple Musicians*

31 David chose some people to be in charge of the music in the house of the LORD. They began their work after the Ark of the Agreement was put there. 32 They served by making music at the Holy Tent (also called the Meeting Tent), and they served until Solomon built the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. They followed the rules for their work.

33 These are the musicians and their sons:

From Kohath's family there was Heman the singer. Heman was Joel's son. Joel was Samuel's son. 34 Samuel was Elkanah's son. Elkanah was Jeroham's son. Jeroham was Eliel's son. Eliel was Toah's son. 35 Toah was Zuph's son. Zuph was Elkanah's son. Elkanah was Mahath's son. Mahath was Amasai's son. 36 Amasai was Elkanah's son. Elkanah was Joel's son. Joel was Azariah's son. Azariah was Zephaniah's son. 37 Zephaniah was Tahath's son. Tahath was Assir's son. Assir was Ebiasaph's son. Ebiasaph was Korah's son. 38 Korah was Izhar's son. Izhar was Kohath's son. Kohath was Levi's son. Levi was Israel's son.

39 There was Heman's helper Asaph, whose group stood by Heman's right side. Asaph was Berekiah's son. Berekiah was Shimea's son. 40 Shimea was Michael's son. Michael was

Baaseiah's son. Baaseiah was Malkijah's son. [41]Malkijah was Ethni's son. Ethni was Zerah's son. Zerah was Adaiah's son. [42]Adaiah was Ethan's son. Ethan was Zimmah's son. Zimmah was Shimei's son. [43]Shimei was Jahath's son. Jahath was Gershon's son, and Gershon was Levi's son.

[44]Merari's family were the helpers of Heman and Asaph, and they stood by Heman's left side. In this group was Ethan son of Kishi. Kishi was Abdi's son. Abdi was Malluch's son. [45]Malluch was Hashabiah's son. Hashabiah was Amaziah's son. Amaziah was Hilkiah's son. [46]Hilkiah was Amzi's son. Amzi was Bani's son. Bani was Shemer's son. [47]Shemer was Mahli's son. Mahli was Mushi's son. Mushi was Merari's son, and Merari was Levi's son.

[48]The other Levites served by doing their own special work in the Holy Tent, the house of God. [49]Aaron and his descendants offered the sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering and burned the incense on the altar of incense. They offered the sacrifices that removed the Israelites' sins so they could belong to God. They did all the work in the Most Holy Place and followed all the laws that Moses, God's servant, had commanded.

[50]These were Aaron's sons: Eleazar was Aaron's son. Phinehas was Eleazar's son. Abishua was Phinehas' son. [51]Bukki was Abishua's son. Uzzi was Bukki's son. Zerahiah was Uzzi's son. [52]Meraioth was Zerahiah's son. Amariah was Meraioth's son. Ahitub was Amariah's son. [53]Zadok was Ahitub's son, and Ahimaaz was Zadok's son.

## *Land for the Levites*

[54]These are the places where Aaron's descendants lived. His descendants from the Kohath family group received the first share of the land.

[55]They were given the city of Hebron in Judah and the pastures around it, [56]but the fields farther from the city and the villages near Hebron were given to Caleb son of Jephunneh. [57]So the descendants of Aaron were given Hebron, one of the cities of safety. They also received the towns and pastures of Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, [58]Hilen, Debir, [59]Ashan, Juttah, and Beth Shemesh. [60]They also received these towns and pastures from the tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon, Geba, Alemeth, and Anathoth.

The Kohath family groups received a total of thirteen towns.

[61]The rest of the Kohath family group was given ten towns from the family groups of West Manasseh. The towns were chosen by throwing lots.

[62]The Gershon family group received thirteen towns from the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the part of Manasseh living in Bashan.

63 The Merari family group received twelve towns from the
tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. Those towns were chosen
by throwing lots.
64 So the Israelites gave these towns and their pastures to the
Levites. 65 The towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and
Benjamin, which were named, were chosen by throwing lots.
66 Some of the Kohath family groups received towns and
pastures from the tribe of Ephraim. 67 They received Shechem,
one of the cities of safety,[n] with its pastures in the mountains of
Ephraim. They also received the towns and pastures of Gezer,
68 Jokmeam, Beth Horon, 69 Aijalon, and Gath Rimmon.
70 The rest of the people in the Kohath family group received
the towns of Aner and Bileam and their pastures from West
Manasseh.
71 From East Manasseh, the Gershon family received the
towns and pastures of Golan in Bashan and Ashtaroth.
72–73 From the tribe of Issachar, the Gershon family received
the towns and pastures of Kedesh, Daberath, Ramoth, and
Anem.
74–75 From the tribe of Asher, the Gershon family received the
towns and pastures of Mashal, Abdon, Hukok, and Rehob.
76 From the tribe of Naphtali, the Gershon family received the
towns and pastures of Kedesh in Galilee, Hammon, and
Kiriathaim.
77 The rest of the Levites, the people from the Merari family,
received from the tribe of Zebulun the towns and pastures of
Jokneam, Kartah, Rimmono, and Tabor.
78–79 From the tribe of Reuben, the Merari family received the
towns and pastures of Bezer in the desert, Jahzah, Kedemoth,
and Mephaath. (The tribe of Reuben lived east of the Jordan
River, across from Jericho.)
80–81 From the tribe of Gad, the Merari family received the
towns and pastures of Ramoth in Gilead, Mahanaim, Heshbon,
and Jazer.

## Psalm 77:1–3

### *Remembering God's Help*

**For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of Asaph.**

77 I cry out to God;
I call to God, and he will hear me.

2 I look for the Lord on the day of trouble.
All night long I reach out my hands,
but I cannot be comforted.

3 When I remember God, I become upset;
when I think, I become afraid. *Selah*

## Proverbs 19:10–12

10 A fool should not live in luxury.
A slave should not rule over princes.

11 The wise are patient;
they will be honored if they ignore insults.

12 An angry king is like a roaring lion,
but his kindness is like the dew on the grass.

## Acts 5:1–16

### *Ananias and Sapphira Die*

5 But a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold some land. 2 He kept back part of the money for himself; his wife knew about this and agreed to it. But he brought the rest of the money and gave it to the apostles. 3 Peter said, "Ananias, why did you let Satan rule your thoughts to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep for yourself part of the money you received for the land? 4 Before you sold the land, it belonged to you. And even after you sold it, you could have used the money any way you wanted. Why did you think of doing this? You lied to God, not to us!" 5–6 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. Some young men came in, wrapped up his body, carried it out, and buried it. And everyone who heard about this was filled with fear.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, but she did not know what had happened. 8 Peter said to her, "Tell me, was the

money you got for your field this much?”

Sapphira answered, “Yes, that was the price.”

9Peter said to her, “Why did you and your husband agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” 10At that moment Sapphira fell down by his feet and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11The whole church and all the others who heard about these things were filled with fear.

## *The Apostles Heal Many*

12The apostles did many signs and miracles among the people. And they would all meet together on Solomon’s Porch. 13None of the others dared to join them, but all the people respected them. 14More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to the group of believers. 15The people placed their sick on beds and mats in the streets, hoping that when Peter passed by at least his shadow might fall on them. 16Crowds came from all the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those who were bothered by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

# June 22

# Needed: One Great Savior

*"Through him, all people could change their hearts and lives and have their sins forgiven."*

Acts 5:31

The supreme force in salvation is God's grace. Not our works. Not our talents. Not our feelings. Not our strength. Salvation is God's sudden, calming presence during the stormy seas of our lives. We hear his voice; we take the step.

We, like Paul, are aware of two things: We are great sinners and we need a great savior.

We, like Peter, are aware of two facts: We are going down and God is standing up. So we ... leave behind the *Titanic* of self-righteousness and stand on the solid path of God's grace.

And, surprisingly, we are able to walk on water. Death is disarmed. Failures are forgivable. Life has real purpose. And God is not only within sight, he is within reach.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## 1 Chronicles 7:1—9:1a

### *Issachar's Children*

7 Issachar had four sons: Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron.

2 Tola's sons were Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam, and Samuel, and they were leaders of their families. In the family history of Tola's descendants, twenty-two thousand six hundred men were listed as fighting men during the time David was king.

3 Uzzi's son was Izrahiah.

Izrahiah's sons were Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah. All five of them were leaders. 4 Their family history shows they had thirty-six thousand men ready to serve in the army, because they had many wives and children.

5The records of the family groups of Issachar show there were eighty-seven thousand fighting men.

## *Benjamin's Children*

6Benjamin had three sons: Bela, Beker, and Jediael.
7Bela had five sons: Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth, and Iri, and they were leaders of their families. Their family history shows they had twenty-two thousand thirty-four fighting men.
8Beker's sons were Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. They all were Beker's sons. 9Their family history listed the family leaders and twenty thousand two hundred fighting men.
10Jediael's son was Bilhan.
Bilhan's sons were Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Kenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish, and Ahishahar. 11All these sons of Jediael were leaders of their families. They had seventeen thousand two hundred fighting men ready to serve in the army.
12The Shuppites and Huppites were descendants of Ir, and the Hushites were descendants of Aher.

## *Naphtali's Children*

13Naphtali's sons were Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. They were Bilhah's grandsons.

## *Manasseh's Children*

14These are Manasseh's descendants. Manasseh had an Aramean slave woman, who was the mother of Asriel and Makir. Makir was Gilead's father. 15Makir took a wife from the Huppites and Shuppites. His sister was named Maacah. His second son was named Zelophehad, and he had only daughters. 16Makir's wife Maacah had a son whom she named Peresh. Peresh's brother was named Sheresh. Sheresh's sons were Ulam and Rakem.
17Ulam's son was Bedan.
These were the sons of Gilead, who was the son of Makir. Makir was Manasseh's son. 18Makir's sister Hammoleketh gave birth to Ishhod, Abiezer, and Mahlah.
19The sons of Shemida were Ahian, Shechem, Likhi, and Aniam.

## *Ephraim's Children*

20These are the names of Ephraim's descendants. Ephraim's son was Shuthelah. Shuthelah's son was Bered. Bered's son was

Tahath. Tahath's son was Eleadah. Eleadah's son was Tahath. 21Tahath's son was Zabad. Zabad's son was Shuthelah.

Ezer and Elead went to Gath to steal cows and sheep and were killed by some men who grew up in that city. 22Their father Ephraim cried for them many days, and his family came to comfort him. 23Then he had sexual relations with his wife again. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son whom Ephraim named Beriah[n] because of the trouble that had happened to his family. 24Ephraim's daughter was Sheerah. She built Lower Beth Horon, Upper Beth Horon, and Uzzen Sheerah.

25Rephah was Ephraim's son. Resheph was Rephah's son. Telah was Resheph's son. Tahan was Telah's son. 26Ladan was Tahan's son. Ammihud was Ladan's son. Elishama was Ammihud's son. 27Nun was Elishama's son, and Joshua was the son of Nun.

28Ephraim's descendants lived in these lands and towns: Bethel and the villages near it, Naaran on the east, Gezer and the villages near it on the west, and Shechem and the villages near it. These villages went all the way to Ayyah and its villages. 29Along the borders of Manasseh's land were the towns of Beth Shan, Taanach, Megiddo, and Dor, and the villages near them. The descendants of Joseph son of Israel lived in these towns.

## *Asher's Children*

30Asher's sons were Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah. Their sister was Serah.

31Beriah's sons were Heber and Malkiel. Malkiel was Birzaith's father.

32Heber was the father of Japhlet, Shomer, Hotham, and their sister Shua.

33Japhlet's sons were Pasach, Bimhal, and Ashvath. They were Japhlet's children.

34Japhlet's brother was Shomer. Shomer's sons were Rohgah, Hubbah, and Aram.

35Shomer's brother was Hotham. Hotham's sons were Zophah, Imna, Shelesh, and Amal.

36Zophah's sons were Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah, 37Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran, and Beera.

38Jether's sons were Jephunneh, Pispah, and Ara.

39Ulla's sons were Arah, Hanniel, and Rizia.

40All these men were descendants of Asher and leaders of their families. They were powerful warriors and outstanding leaders. Their family history lists that they had twenty-six thousand soldiers ready to serve in the army.

## *The Family History of King Saul*

8 Benjamin was the father of Bela, his first son. Ashbel was his
second son, Aharah was his third, 2Nohah was his fourth, and
Rapha was his fifth son.
3Bela's sons were Addar, Gera, Abihud, 4Abishua, Naaman,
Ahoah, 5Gera, Shephuphan, and Huram.
6These were the descendants of Ehud and leaders of their
families in Geba. They were forced to move to Manahath.
7Ehud's descendants were Naaman, Ahijah, and Gera. Gera
forced them to leave. He was the father of Uzza and Ahihud.
8–11Shaharaim and his wife Hushim had sons named Abitub
and Elpaal. In Moab, Shaharaim divorced his wives Hushim and
Baara. Shaharaim and his wife Hodesh had these sons: Jobab,
Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, Jeuz, Sakia, and Mirmah. They were
leaders of their families.
12–13Elpaal's sons were Eber, Misham, Shemed, Beriah, and
Shema. Shemed built the towns of Ono and Lod and the villages
around them. Beriah and Shema were leaders of the families
living in Aijalon, and they forced out the people who lived in
Gath.
14Beriah's sons were Ahio, Shashak, Jeremoth, 15Zebadiah,
Arad, Eder, 16Michael, Ishpah, and Joha.
17Elpaal's sons were Zebadiah, Meshullam, Hizki, Heber,
18Ishmerai, Izliah, and Jobab.
19Shimei's sons were Jakim, Zicri, Zabdi, 20Elienai, Zillethai,
Eliel, 21Adaiah, Beraiah, and Shimrath.
22Shashak's sons were Ishpan, Eber, Eliel, 23Abdon, Zicri,
Hanan, 24Hananiah, Elam, Anthothijah, 25Iphdeiah, and Penuel.
26Jeroham's sons were Shamsherai, Shehariah, Athaliah,
27Jaareshiah, Elijah, and Zicri.
28The family histories show that all these men were leaders
of their families and lived in Jerusalem.
29Jeiel lived in the town of Gibeon, where he was the leader.
His wife was named Maacah. 30Jeiel's first son was Abdon. His
other sons were Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, 31Gedor, Ahio,
Zeker, 32and Mikloth. Mikloth was the father of Shimeah. These
sons also lived near their relatives in Jerusalem.
33Ner was the father of Kish. Kish was the father of Saul, and
Saul was the father of Jonathan, Malki-Shua, Abinadab, and
Esh-Baal.
34Jonathan's son was Merib-Baal, who was the father of
Micah.
35Micah's sons were Pithon, Melech, Tarea, and Ahaz. 36Ahaz
was the father of Jehoaddah. Jehoaddah was the father of
Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri. Zimri was the father of Moza.
37Moza was the father of Binea. Raphah was Binea's son.

Eleasah was Raphah's son, and Azel was Eleasah's son.
38 Azel had six sons: Azrikam, Bokeru, Ishmael, Sheariah,
Obadiah, and Hanan. All these were Azel's sons.
39 Azel's brother was Eshek. Eshek's first son was Ulam, his
second was Jeush, and Eliphelet was his third. 40 Ulam's sons
were mighty warriors and good archers. They had many sons
and grandsons—one hundred fifty of them in all.
All these men were Benjamin's descendants.
9 The names of all the people of Israel were listed in their family
histories, and those family histories were put in the book of the
kings of Israel.

## Psalm 77:4–10

4 You keep my eyes from closing.
I am too upset to say anything.

5 I keep thinking about the old days,
the years of long ago.

6 At night I remember my songs.
I think and I ask myself:

7 "Will the Lord reject us forever?
Will he never be kind to us again?

8 Is his love gone forever?
Has he stopped speaking for all time?

9 Has God forgotten mercy?
Is he too angry to pity us?" *Selah*

10 Then I say, "This is what makes me sad:
For years the power of God Most High was with us."

## Proverbs 19:13–14

[13]A foolish child brings disaster to a father,
and a quarreling wife is like dripping water.

[14]Houses and wealth are inherited from parents,
but a wise wife is a gift from the LORD.

## Acts 5:17–42

### *Leaders Try to Stop the Apostles*

[17]The high priest and all his friends (a group called the Sadducees) became very jealous. [18]They took the apostles and put them in jail. [19]But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and led the apostles outside. The angel said, [20]"Go stand in the Temple and tell the people everything about this new life." [21]When the apostles heard this, they obeyed and went into the Temple early in the morning and continued teaching.

When the high priest and his friends arrived, they called a meeting of the leaders and all the important elders. They sent some men to the jail to bring the apostles to them. [22]But, upon arriving, the officers could not find the apostles. So they went back and reported to the leaders. [23]They said, "The jail was closed and locked, and the guards were standing at the doors. But when we opened the doors, the jail was empty!" [24]Hearing this, the captain of the Temple guards and the leading priests were confused and wondered what was happening.

[25]Then someone came and told them, "Listen! The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple teaching the people." [26]Then the captain and his men went out and brought the apostles back. But the soldiers did not use force, because they were afraid the people would stone them to death.

[27]The soldiers brought the apostles to the meeting and made them stand before the leaders. The high priest questioned them, [28]saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in that name. But look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are trying to make us responsible for this man's death."

[29]Peter and the other apostles answered, "We must obey

God, not human authority! 30You killed Jesus by hanging him on
a cross. But God, the God of our ancestors, raised Jesus up from
the dead! 31Jesus is the One whom God raised to be on his right
side, as Leader and Savior. Through him, all people could
change their hearts and lives and have their sins forgiven. 32We
saw all these things happen. The Holy Spirit, whom God has
given to all who obey him, also proves these things are true."

33When the leaders heard this, they became angry and
wanted to kill them. 34But a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up
in the meeting. He was a teacher of the law, and all the people
respected him. He ordered the apostles to leave the meeting for
a little while. 35Then he said, "People of Israel, be careful what
you are planning to do to these men. 36Remember when
Theudas appeared? He said he was a great man, and about four
hundred men joined him. But he was killed, and all his followers
were scattered; they were able to do nothing. 37Later, a man
named Judas came from Galilee at the time of the registration.[n]
He also led a group of followers and was killed, and all his
followers were scattered. 38And so now I tell you: Stay away
from these men, and leave them alone. If their plan comes from
human authority, it will fail. 39But if it is from God, you will not
be able to stop them. You might even be fighting against God
himself!"

The leaders agreed with what Gamaliel said. 40They called
the apostles in, beat them, and told them not to speak in the
name of Jesus again. Then they let them go free. 41The apostles
left the meeting full of joy because they were given the honor of
suffering disgrace for Jesus. 42Every day in the Temple and in
people's homes they continued teaching the people and telling
the Good News—that Jesus is the Christ.

# June 23

## Praise to God

*God, your ways are holy. No god is as great as our God.*

Psalm 77:13

You are a great God. Your character is holy. Your truth is absolute.

Your strength is unending.
Your discipline is fair …
Your provisions are abundant for our needs.
Your light is adequate for our path.
Your grace is sufficient for our sins …
You are never early, never late …
You sent your Son in the fullness of time and will return at the consummation of time.
Your plan is perfect.
Bewildering. Puzzling. Troubling.
But perfect.

from *"He Reminded Us of You"*

*(A prayer for a friend)*

## 1 Chronicles 9:1b—10:14

### *The People in Jerusalem*

The people of Judah were captured and forced to go to Babylon, because they were not faithful to God. [2]The first people to come back and live in their own lands and towns were some Israelites, priests, Levites, and Temple servants.

[3]People from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh lived in Jerusalem. This is a list of those people.

[4]There was Uthai son of Ammihud. (Ammihud was Omri's son. Omri was Imri's son. Imri was Bani's son. Bani was a descendant of Perez, and Perez was Judah's son.)

[5]Of the Shilonite people there were Asaiah and his sons.

Asaiah was the oldest son in his family.

6Of the Zerahite people there were Jeuel and other relatives of Zerah. There were six hundred ninety of them in all.

7From the tribe of Benjamin there was Sallu son of Meshullam. (Meshullam was Hodaviah's son, and Hodaviah was Hassenuah's son.) 8There was also Ibneiah son of Jeroham and Elah son of Uzzi. (Uzzi was Micri's son.) And there was Meshullam son of Shephatiah. (Shephatiah was Reuel's son, and Reuel was Ibnijah's son.) 9The family history of Benjamin lists nine hundred fifty-six people living in Jerusalem, and all these were leaders of their families.

10Of the priests there were Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jakin, and 11Azariah son of Hilkiah. (Hilkiah was Meshullam's son. Meshullam was Zadok's son. Zadok was Meraioth's son. Meraioth was Ahitub's son. Ahitub was the officer responsible for the Temple of God.) 12Also there was Adaiah son of Jeroham. (Jeroham was Pashhur's son, and Pashhur was Malkijah's son.) And there was Maasai son of Adiel. (Adiel was Jahzerah's son. Jahzerah was Meshullam's son. Meshullam was Meshillemith's son, and Meshillemith was Immer's son.) 13There were one thousand seven

hundred sixty priests. They were leaders of their families, and they were responsible for serving in the Temple of God.

14Of the Levites there was Shemaiah son of Hasshub. (Hasshub was Azrikam's son, and Azrikam was Hashabiah's son. Hashabiah was from the family of Merari.) 15There were also Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal, and Mattaniah son of Mica. (Mica was Zicri's son, and Zicri was Asaph's son.) 16There was also Obadiah son of Shemaiah. (Shemaiah was Galal's son, and Galal was Jeduthun's son.) And there was Berekiah son of Asa. (Asa was the son of Elkanah, who lived in the villages of the Netophathites.)

17Of the gatekeepers there were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman, and their relatives. Shallum was their leader. 18These gatekeepers from the tribe of Levi still stand next to the King's Gate on the east side of the city. 19Shallum was Kore's son. Kore was Ebiasaph's son, and Ebiasaph was Korah's son. Shallum and his relatives from the family of Korah were gatekeepers and were responsible for guarding the gates of the Temple. Their ancestors had also been responsible for guarding the entrance to the Temple of the LORD. 20In the past Phinehas, Eleazar's son, was in charge of the gatekeepers, and the LORD was with Phinehas. 21Zechariah son of Meshelemiah was the gatekeeper at the entrance to the Temple.

22In all, two hundred twelve men were chosen to guard the gates, and their names were written in their family histories in their villages. David and Samuel the seer chose these men because they were dependable. 23The gatekeepers and their

descendants had to guard the gates of the Temple of the LORD. (The Temple took the place of the Holy Tent.) 24There were gatekeepers on all four sides of the Temple: east, west, north, and south. 25The gatekeepers' relatives who lived in the villages had to come and help them at times. Each time they came they helped the gatekeepers for seven days. 26Because they were dependable, four gatekeepers were made the leaders of all the gatekeepers. They were Levites, and they were responsible for the rooms and treasures in the Temple of God. 27They stayed up all night guarding the Temple of God, and they opened it every morning.

28Some of the gatekeepers were responsible for the utensils used in the Temple services. They counted these utensils when people took them out and when they brought them back. 29Other gatekeepers were chosen to take care of the furniture and utensils in the Holy Place. They also took care of the flour, wine, oil, incense, and spices, 30but some of the priests took care of mixing the spices. 31There was a Levite named Mattithiah who was dependable and had the job of baking the bread used for the offerings. He was the first son of Shallum, who was from the family of Korah. 32Some of the gatekeepers from the Kohath family had the job of preparing the special bread that was put on the table every Sabbath day.

33Some of the Levites were musicians in the Temple. The leaders of these families stayed in the rooms of the Temple. Since they were on duty day and night, they did not do other work in the Temple.

34These are the leaders of the Levite families. Their names were listed in their family histories, and they lived in Jerusalem.

## *The Family History of King Saul*

35Jeiel lived in the town of Gibeon, where he was the leader. His wife was named Maacah. 36Jeiel's first son was Abdon. His other sons were Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, 37Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah, and Mikloth. 38Mikloth was Shimeam's father. Jeiel's family lived near their relatives in Jerusalem.

39Ner was Kish's father. Kish was Saul's father. Saul was the father of Jonathan, Malki-Shua, Abinadab, and Esh-Baal.

40Jonathan's son was Merib-Baal, who was the father of Micah.

41Micah's sons were Pithon, Melech, Tahrea, and Ahaz. 42Ahaz was Jadah's father. Jadah was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri. Zimri was Moza's father. 43Moza was Binea's father. Rephaiah was Binea's son. Eleasah was Rephaiah's son, and Azel was Eleasah's son.

44Azel had six sons: Azrikam, Bokeru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan. They were Azel's sons.

## *The Death of King Saul*

10 The Philistines fought against Israel, and the Israelites ran
away from them. Many Israelites were killed on Mount Gilboa.
2The Philistines fought hard against Saul and his sons, killing
his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua. 3The fighting was
heavy around Saul, and the archers shot him with their arrows
and wounded him.

4Then Saul said to the officer who carried his armor, "Pull
out your sword and stab me. If you don't, these Philistines who
are not circumcised will come and hurt me." But Saul's officer
refused, because he was afraid. So Saul took his own sword and
threw himself on it. 5When the officer saw that Saul was dead,
he threw himself on his own sword and died. 6So Saul and three
of his sons died; all his family died together.

7When the Israelites living in the valley saw that their army
had run away and that Saul and his sons were dead, they left
their towns and ran away. Then the Philistines came and settled
in them.

8The next day when the Philistines came to strip the dead
soldiers, they found Saul and his sons dead on Mount Gilboa.
9The Philistines stripped Saul's body and took his head and his
armor. Then they sent messengers through all their country to
tell the news to their idols and to their people. 10The Philistines
put Saul's armor in the temple of their idols and hung his head
in the temple of Dagon.

11All the people in Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines
had done to Saul. 12So the brave men of Jabesh went and got
the bodies of Saul and his sons and brought them to Jabesh.
They buried their bones under the large tree in Jabesh. Then
the people of Jabesh fasted for seven days.

13Saul died because he was not faithful to the LORD and did
not obey the LORD. He even went to a medium and asked her for
advice 14instead of asking the LORD. This is why the LORD put
Saul to death and gave the kingdom to Jesse's son David.

## Psalm 77:11–15

11I remember what the LORD did;
I remember the miracles you did long ago.

12I think about all the things you did

and consider your deeds.

13 God, your ways are holy.
No god is as great as our God.

14 You are the God who does miracles;
you have shown people your power.

15 By your power you have saved your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

## Proverbs 19:15–16

15 Lazy people sleep a lot,
and idle people will go hungry.

16 Those who obey the commands protect themselves,
but those who are careless will die.

## Acts 6:1–15

### *Seven Leaders Are Chosen*

6 The number of followers was growing. But during this same time, the Greek-speaking followers had an argument with the other followers. The Greek-speaking widows were not getting their share of the food that was given out every day. 2 The twelve apostles called the whole group of followers together and said, "It is not right for us to stop our work of teaching God's word in order to serve tables. 3 So, brothers and sisters, choose seven of your own men who are good, full of the Spirit and full of wisdom. We will put them in charge of this work. 4 Then we can continue to pray and to teach the word of God."

5 The whole group liked the idea, so they chose these seven men: Stephen (a man with great faith and full of the Holy Spirit), Philip,[n] Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and

Nicolas (a man from Antioch who had become a follower of the Jewish religion). 6Then they put these men before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands[n] on them.

7The word of God was continuing to spread. The group of followers in Jerusalem increased, and a great number of the Jewish priests believed and obeyed.

## *Stephen Is Accused*

8Stephen was richly blessed by God who gave him the power to do great miracles and signs among the people. 9But some people were against him. They belonged to the synagogue of Free Men[n] (as it was called), which included people from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. They all came and argued with Stephen.

10But the Spirit was helping him to speak with wisdom, and his words were so strong that they could not argue with him. 11So they secretly urged some men to say, “We heard Stephen speak against Moses and against God.”

12This upset the people, the elders, and the teachers of the law. They came and grabbed Stephen and brought him to a meeting of the leaders. 13They brought in some people to tell lies about Stephen, saying, “This man is always speaking against this holy place and the law of Moses. 14We heard him say that Jesus from Nazareth will destroy this place and that Jesus will change the customs Moses gave us.” 15All the people in the meeting were watching Stephen closely and saw that his face looked like the face of an angel.

# June 24

## It’s a Jungle Out There!

*You led your people like a flock by using Moses and Aaron.*

Psalm 77:20

“My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2). For many people, life is—well, life is a jungle. Not a jungle of trees and beasts … Our jungles are comprised of the thicker thickets of failing health, broken hearts, and empty wallets … We don’t hear the screeching of birds or the roaring of lions, but we do hear the complaints of neighbors and the demands of bosses …

Whether you are a lamb lost on a craggy ledge or a city slicker alone in a deep jungle, everything changes when your rescuer appears.

Your loneliness diminishes, because you have fellowship. Your despair decreases, because you have vision. Your confusion begins to lift, because you have direction.

You haven’t left the jungle. The trees still eclipse the sky, and the thorns still cut the skin … It hasn’t changed, but you have. You have changed because you have hope. And you have hope because you have met someone who can lead you out.

from *Traveling Light*

### 1 Chronicles 11:1—12:40

#### *David Becomes King*

11 Then the people of Israel came to David at the town of Hebron and said, “Look, we are your own family. 2Even when Saul was king, you were the one who led Israel in battle. The LORD your God said to you, ‘You will be the shepherd for my people Israel. You will be their leader.’”

3So all the elders of Israel came to King David at Hebron. He made an agreement with them in Hebron in the presence of the

LORD. Then they poured oil on David to make him king over Israel. The LORD had promised through Samuel that this would happen.

## *David Captures Jerusalem*

4David and all the Israelites went to the city of Jerusalem. At that time Jerusalem was called Jebus, and the people living there were named Jebusites. 5They said to David, "You can't get inside our city." But David did take the city of Jerusalem with its strong walls, and it became the City of David.

6David had said, "The person who leads the attack against the Jebusites will become the commander over all my army." Joab son of Zeruiah led the attack, so he became the commander of the army.

7Then David made his home in the strong, walled city, which is why it was named the City of David. 8David rebuilt the city, beginning where the land was filled in and going to the wall that was around the city. Joab repaired the other parts of the city. 9David became stronger and stronger, and the LORD All-Powerful was with him.

## *David's Mighty Warriors*

10This is a list of the leaders over David's warriors who helped make David's kingdom strong. All the people of Israel also supported David's kingdom. These heroes and all the people of Israel made David king, just as the LORD had promised.

11This is a list of David's warriors:

Jashobeam was from the Hacmonite people. He was the head of the Three,[n] David's most powerful soldiers. He used his spear to fight three hundred men at one time, and he killed them all.

12Next was Eleazar, one of the Three. Eleazar was Dodai's son from the Ahohite people. 13Eleazar was with David at Pas Dammim when the Philistines came there to fight. There was a field of barley at that place. The Israelites ran away from the Philistines, 14but they stopped in the middle of that field and fought for it and killed the Philistines. The LORD gave them a great victory.

15Once, three of the Thirty, David's chief soldiers, came down to him at the rock by the cave near Adullam. At the same time the Philistine army had camped in the Valley of Rephaim.

16At that time David was in a stronghold, and some of the Philistines were in Bethlehem. 17David had a strong desire for some water. He said, "Oh, I wish someone would get me water from the well near the city gate of Bethlehem!" 18So the Three broke through the Philistine army and took water from the well near the city gate in Bethlehem. Then they brought it to David,

but he refused to drink it. He poured it out before the LORD,
19 saying, “May God keep me from drinking this water! It would
be like drinking the blood of the men who risked their lives to
bring it to me!” So David refused to drink it.

These were the brave things that the three warriors did.

20 Abishai brother of Joab was the captain of the Three.
Abishai fought three hundred soldiers with his spear and killed
them. He became as famous as the Three 21 and was more
honored than the Three. He became their commander even
though he was not one of them.

22 Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a brave fighter from Kabzeel
who did mighty things. He killed two of the best warriors from
Moab. He also went down into a pit and killed a lion on a snowy
day. 23 Benaiah killed an Egyptian who was about seven and one-
half feet tall and had a spear as large as a weaver’s rod.
Benaiah had a club, but he grabbed the spear from the
Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear. 24 These
were the things Benaiah son of Jehoiada did. He was as famous
as the Three. 25 He received more honor than the Thirty, but he
did not become a member of the Three. David made him leader
of his bodyguards.

## *The Thirty Chief Soldiers*

26 These were also mighty warriors:

Asahel brother of Joab;
Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem;

27 Shammoth the Harorite;

Helez the Pelonite;

28 Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa;

Abiezer the Anathothite;

29 Sibbecai the Hushathite;

Ilai the Ahohite;

[30]Maharai the Netophathite;

Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite;

[31]Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin;

Benaiah the Pirathonite;

[32]Hurai from the ravines of Gaash;

Abiel the Arbathite;

[33]Azmaveth the Baharumite;

Eliahba the Shaalbonite;

[34]the sons of Hashem the Gizonite;

Jonathan son of Shagee the Hararite;

[35]Ahiam son of Sacar the Hararite;

Eliphal son of Ur;

[36]Hepher the Mekerathite;

Ahijah the Pelonite;

[37]Hezro the Carmelite;

Naarai son of Ezbai;

[38]Joel brother of Nathan;

Mibhar son of Hagri;

[39]Zelek the Ammonite;

Naharai the Berothite, the officer who carried the armor for Joab son of Zeruiah;

[40]Ira the Ithrite;

Gareb the Ithrite;

[41]Uriah the Hittite;

Zabad son of Ahlai;

[42]Adina son of Shiza the Reubenite, who was the leader of the Reubenites, and his thirty soldiers;
[43]Hanan son of Maacah;

Joshaphat the Mithnite;

[44]Uzzia the Ashterathite;

Shama and Jeiel sons of Hotham the Aroerite;

[45]Jediael son of Shimri;

Joha, Jediael’s brother, the Tizite;

46 Eliel the Mahavite;

Jeribai and Joshaviah, Elnaam's sons;
Ithmah the Moabite;

47 Eliel, Obed, and Jaasiel the Mezobaites.

## *Warriors Join David*

12 These were the men who came to David at Ziklag when David was hiding from Saul son of Kish. They were among the warriors who helped David in battle. 2 They came with bows for weapons and could use either their right or left hands to shoot arrows or to sling rocks. They were Saul's relatives from the tribe of Benjamin. 3 Ahiezer was their leader, and there was Joash. (Ahiezer and Joash were sons of Shemaah, who was from the town of Gibeah.) There were also Jeziel and Pelet, the sons of Azmaveth. There were Beracah and Jehu from the town of Anathoth. 4 And there was Ishmaiah from the town of Gibeon; he was one of the Thirty. In fact, he was the leader of the Thirty. There were Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, and Jozabad from Gederah. 5 There were Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, and Shemariah. There was Shephatiah from Haruph. 6 There were Elkanah, Isshiah, Azarel, Joezer, and Jashobeam from the family group of Korah. 7 And there were Joelah and Zebadiah, the sons of Jeroham, from the town of Gedor.

8 Part of the people of Gad joined David at his stronghold in the desert. They were brave warriors trained for war and skilled with shields and spears. They were as fierce as lions and as fast as gazelles over the hills.

9 Ezer was the leader of Gad's army, and Obadiah was second in command. Eliab was third, 10 Mishmannah was fourth, Jeremiah was fifth, 11 Attai was sixth, Eliel was seventh, 12 Johanan was eighth, Elzabad was ninth, 13 Jeremiah was tenth, and Macbannai was eleventh in command.

14 They were the commanders of the army from Gad. The least of these leaders was in charge of a hundred soldiers, and the greatest was in charge of a thousand. 15 They crossed the Jordan River and chased away the people living in the valleys, to the east and to the west. This happened in the first month of the year when the Jordan floods the valley.

16 Other people from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah also came to David at his stronghold. 17 David went out to meet them and said to them, "If you have come peacefully to help me, I welcome you. Join me. But if you have come to turn me over to my enemies, even though I have done nothing wrong, the God

of our ancestors will see this and punish you.”

18Then the Spirit entered Amasai, the leader of the Thirty,
and he said:

“We belong to you, David.
We are with you, son of Jesse.

Success, success to you.
Success to those who help you,
because your God helps you.”

So David welcomed these men and made them leaders of his army.

19Some of the men from Manasseh also joined David when he went with the Philistines to fight Saul. But David and his men did not really help the Philistines. After talking about it, the Philistine leaders decided to send David away. They said, “If David goes back to his master Saul, we will be killed.” 20These are the men from Manasseh who joined David when he went to Ziklag: Adnah, Jozabad, Jediael, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, and Zillethai. Each of them was a leader of a thousand men from Manasseh. 21All these men of Manasseh were brave soldiers, and they helped David fight against groups of men who went around the country robbing people. These soldiers became commanders in David’s army. 22Every day more men joined David, and his army became large, like the army of God.

## *Others Join David at Hebron*

23These are the numbers of the soldiers ready for battle who joined David at Hebron. They came to help turn the kingdom of Saul over to David, just as the LORD had said.

24There were sixty-eight hundred men with their weapons from Judah. They carried shields and spears.

25There were seventy-one hundred men from Simeon. They were warriors ready for war.

26There were forty-six hundred men from Levi. 27Jehoiada, a leader from Aaron’s family, was in that group. There were thirty-seven hundred with him. 28Zadok was also in that group. He was a strong young warrior, and with him came twenty-two leaders from his family.

29There were three thousand men from Benjamin, who were Saul’s relatives. Most of them had remained loyal to Saul’s family until then.

30There were twenty thousand eight hundred men from Ephraim. They were brave warriors and were famous men in

their own family groups.
31 There were eighteen thousand men from West Manasseh.
Each one was especially chosen to make David king.
32 There were two hundred leaders from Issachar. They knew
what Israel should do, and they knew the right time to do it.
Their relatives were with them and under their command.
33 There were fifty thousand men from Zebulun. They were
trained soldiers and knew how to use every kind of weapon of
war. They followed David completely.
34 There were one thousand officers from Naphtali. They had
thirty-seven thousand soldiers with them who carried shields
and spears.
35 There were twenty-eight thousand six hundred men from
Dan, who were ready for war.
36 There were forty thousand trained soldiers from Asher,
who were ready for war.
37 There were one hundred twenty thousand soldiers from the
east side of the Jordan River from the people of Reuben, Gad,
and East Manasseh. They had every kind of weapon.
38 All these fighting men were ready to go to war. They came
to Hebron fully agreed to make David king of all Israel. All the
other Israelites also agreed to make David king. 39 They spent
three days there with David, eating and drinking, because their
relatives had prepared food for them. 40 Also, their neighbors
came from as far away as Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali,
bringing food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen. They
brought much flour, fig cakes, raisins, wine, oil, cows, and
sheep, because the people of Israel were very happy.

## Psalm 77:16–20

16 God, the waters saw you;
they saw you and became afraid;
the deep waters shook with fear.

17 The clouds poured down their rain.
The sky thundered.
Your lightning flashed back and forth like arrows.

18 Your thunder sounded in the whirlwind.
Lightning lit up the world.
The earth trembled and shook.

19 You made a way through the sea
and paths through the deep waters,
but your footprints were not seen.

20 You led your people like a flock
by using Moses and Aaron.

## Proverbs 19:17–19

17 Being kind to the poor is like lending to the LORD;
he will reward you for what you have done.

18 Correct your children while there is still hope;
do not let them destroy themselves.

19 People with quick tempers will have to pay for it.
If you help them out once, you will have to do it again.

## Acts 7:1–22

### *Stephen's Speech*

7 The high priest said to Stephen, "Are these things true?"

2 Stephen answered, "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to Abraham, our ancestor, in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran. 3 God said to Abraham, 'Leave your country and your relatives, and go to the land I will show you.'[n] 4 So Abraham left the country of Chaldea and went to live in Haran. After Abraham's father died, God sent him to this place where you now live. 5 God did not give Abraham any of this land, not even a foot of it. But God promised that he would give this land to him and his descendants, even before Abraham had a child. 6 This is what God said to him: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a land they don't own. The people there will make them slaves and will mistreat them for four hundred years. 7 But I will punish the nation where they are slaves. Then your descendants will leave that land and will

worship me in this place.'[n] 8God made an agreement with Abraham, the sign of which was circumcision. And so when Abraham had his son Isaac, Abraham circumcised him when he was eight days old. Isaac also circumcised his son Jacob, and Jacob did the same for his sons, the twelve ancestors[n] of our people.

9"Jacob's sons became jealous of Joseph and sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him 10and saved him from all his troubles. The king of Egypt liked Joseph and respected him because of the wisdom God gave him. The king made him governor of Egypt and put him in charge of all the people in his palace.

11"Then all the land of Egypt and Canaan became so dry that nothing would grow, and the people suffered very much. Jacob's sons, our ancestors, could not find anything to eat. 12But when Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent his sons there. This was their first trip to Egypt. 13When they went there a second time, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and the king learned about Joseph's family. 14Then Joseph sent messengers to invite Jacob, his father, to come to Egypt along with all his relatives (seventy-five persons altogether). 15So Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and his sons died. 16Later their bodies were moved to Shechem and put in a grave there. (It was the same grave Abraham had bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.)

17"The promise God made to Abraham was soon to come true, and the number of people in Egypt grew large. 18Then a new king, who did not know who Joseph was, began to rule Egypt. 19This king tricked our people and was cruel to our ancestors, forcing them to leave their babies outside to die. 20At this time Moses was born, and he was very beautiful. For three months Moses was cared for in his father's house. 21When they put Moses outside, the king's daughter adopted him and raised him as if he were her own son. 22The Egyptians taught Moses everything they knew, and he was a powerful man in what he said and did.

# June 25

## Sometimes God Says No

*People can make all kinds of plans, but only the* LORD*'s plan will happen.*

Proverbs 19:21

Can you imagine the outcome if a parent honored each request of each child during a trip? We'd inch our bloated bellies from one ice-cream store to the next ... Can you imagine the chaos if God indulged each of ours? ...

"God did not *choose* us [emphasis mine] to suffer his anger but to have salvation through our Lord Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Note God's destiny for your life. Salvation.

God's overarching desire is that you reach that destiny. His itinerary includes stops that encourage your journey. He frowns on stops that deter you. When his sovereign plan and your earthly plan collide, a decision must be made. Who's in charge of this journey?

If God must choose between your earthly satisfaction and your heavenly salvation, which do you hope he chooses?

Me too.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## 1 Chronicles 13:1—14:17

### *Bringing Back the Ark*

13 David talked with all the officers of his army, the commanders
of a hundred men and the commanders of a thousand men.
2Then David called the people of Israel together and said, "If
you think it is a good idea, and if it is what the LORD our God
wants, let's send a message. Let's tell our fellow Israelites in all
the areas of Israel and the priests and Levites living with them
in their towns and pastures to come and join us. 3Let's bring the

Ark of our God back to us. We did not use it to ask God for help while Saul was king.” 4All the people agreed with David, because they all thought it was the right thing to do.

5So David gathered all the Israelites, from the Shihor River in Egypt to Lebo Hamath, to bring the Ark of God back from the town of Kiriath Jearim. 6David and all the Israelites with him went to Baalah of Judah, which is Kiriath Jearim, to get the Ark of God the LORD. God’s throne is between the golden, winged creatures on the Ark, and the Ark is called by his name.

7The people carried the Ark of God from Abinadab’s house on a new cart, and Uzzah and Ahio guided it. 8David and all the Israelites were celebrating in the presence of God. With all their strength they were singing and playing lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets.

9When David’s men came to the threshing floor of Kidon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark. 10The LORD was angry with Uzzah and killed him, because he had touched the Ark. So Uzzah died there in the presence of God.

11David was angry because the LORD had punished Uzzah in his anger. Now that place is called The Punishment of Uzzah.

12David was afraid of God that day and asked, “How can I bring the Ark of God home to me?” 13So David did not take the Ark with him to Jerusalem. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom who was from Gath. 14The Ark of God stayed with Obed-Edom’s family in his house for three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-Edom’s family and everything he owned.

## *David’s Kingdom Grows*

14 Hiram king of the city of Tyre sent messengers to David. He also sent cedar logs, bricklayers, and carpenters to build a palace for David. 2Then David knew that the LORD really had made him king of Israel and that he had made his kingdom great. The LORD did this because he loved his people Israel.

3David married more women in Jerusalem and had more sons and daughters. 4These are the names of David’s children born in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, 5Ibhar, Elishua, Elpelet, 6Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, 7Elishama, Beeliada, and Eliphelet.

## *David Defeats the Philistines*

8When the Philistines heard that David had been made king of all Israel, they went to look for him. But David heard about it and went out to fight them. 9The Philistines had attacked and robbed the people in the Valley of Rephaim. 10David asked God,

“Should I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?”

The LORD answered him, “Go, I will hand them over to you.”

11So David and his men went up to the town of Baal Perazim and defeated the Philistines. David said, “Like a flood of water, God has broken through my enemies by using me.” So that place was named Baal Perazim.[n] 12The Philistines had left their idols there, so David ordered his men to burn them.

13Soon the Philistines attacked the people in the valley again. 14David prayed to God again, and God answered him, saying, “Don’t attack the Philistines from the front. Instead, go around them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. 15When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then attack. I, God, will have gone out before you to defeat the Philistine army.” 16David did as God commanded, and he and his men defeated the Philistine army all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

17So David became famous in all the countries, and the LORD made all nations afraid of him.

## Psalm 78:1–8

### *God Saved Israel from Egypt*

**A maskil of Asaph.**

78 My people, listen to my teaching;
listen to what I say.

2I will speak using stories;
I will tell secret things from long ago.

3We have heard them and known them
by what our ancestors have told us.

4We will not keep them from our children;
we will tell those who come later
about the praises of the LORD.

We will tell about his power
and the miracles he has done.

5 The LORD made an agreement with Jacob
and gave the teachings to Israel,

which he commanded our ancestors
to teach to their children.

6 Then their children would know them,
even their children not yet born.
And they would tell their children.

7 So they would all trust God
and would not forget what he had done
but would obey his commands.

8 They would not be like their ancestors
who were stubborn and disobedient.

Their hearts were not loyal to God,
and they were not true to him.

## Proverbs 19:20–21

20 Listen to advice and accept correction,
and in the end you will be wise.

21 People can make all kinds of plans,
but only the LORD's plan will happen.

## Acts 7:23–43

23 "When Moses was about forty years old, he thought it

would be good to visit his own people, the people of Israel.
24 Moses saw an Egyptian mistreating one of his people, so he
defended the Israelite and punished the Egyptian by killing him.
25 Moses thought his own people would understand that God
was using him to save them, but they did not. 26 The next day
when Moses saw two men of Israel fighting, he tried to make
peace between them. He said, 'Men, you are brothers. Why are
you hurting each other?' 27 The man who was hurting the other
pushed Moses away and said, 'Who made you our ruler and
judge? 28 Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian
yesterday?'[n] 29 When Moses heard him say this, he left Egypt
and went to live in the land of Midian where he was a stranger.
While Moses lived in Midian, he had two sons.

30 "Forty years later an angel appeared to Moses in the
flames of a burning bush as he was in the desert near Mount
Sinai. 31 When Moses saw this, he was amazed and went near to
look closer. Moses heard the Lord's voice say, 32 'I am the God of
your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'[n] Moses
began to shake with fear and was afraid to look. 33 The Lord said
to him, 'Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy
ground. 34 I have seen the troubles my people have suffered in
Egypt. I have heard their cries and have come down to save
them. And now, Moses, I am sending you back to Egypt.'[n]

35 "This Moses was the same man the two men of Israel
rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge?'[n] Moses is
the same man God sent to be a ruler and savior, with the help of
the angel that Moses saw in the burning bush. 36 So Moses led
the people out of Egypt. He worked miracles and signs in Egypt,
at the Red Sea, and then in the desert for forty years. 37 This is
the same Moses that said to the people of Israel, 'God will give
you a prophet like me, who is one of your own people.'[n] 38 This is
the Moses who was with the gathering of the Israelites in the
desert. He was with the angel that spoke to him at Mount Sinai,
and he was with our ancestors. He received commands from
God that give life, and he gave those commands to us.

39 "But our ancestors did not want to obey Moses. They
rejected him and wanted to go back to Egypt. 40 They said to
Aaron, 'Make us gods who will lead us. Moses led us out of
Egypt, but we don't know what has happened to him.'[n] 41 So the
people made an idol that looked like a calf. Then they brought
sacrifices to it and were proud of what they had made with their
own hands. 42 But God turned against them and did not try to
stop them from worshiping the sun, moon, and stars. This is
what is written in the book of the prophets: God says,

'People of Israel, you did not bring me sacrifices and
offerings

while you traveled in the desert for forty years.

43 You have carried with you
the tent to worship Molech
and the idols of the star god Rephan that you made to worship.

So I will send you away beyond Babylon.’

Amos 5:25–27

# June 26

## Life Is Not Fair

*He fell on his knees and cried in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."*

Acts 7:60

"Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Galatians 5:14). As long as you hate your enemy, a jail door is closed and a prisoner is taken. But when you try to understand and release your foe from your hatred, then the prisoner is released and that prisoner is you.

Perhaps you don't like that idea. Perhaps the thought of forgiveness is unrealistic. Perhaps the idea of trying to understand the Judases in our world is simply too gracious.

My response to you then is a question. What do you suggest? Will harboring the anger solve the problem? Will getting even remove the hurt? Does hatred do any good? Again, I'm not minimizing your hurt or justifying their actions. But I am saying that justice won't come this side of eternity. And demanding that your enemy get his or her share of pain will, in the process, be most painful to you.

May I gently but firmly remind you of something you know but may have forgotten?

Life is not fair. That's not pessimism; it's fact.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## 1 Chronicles 15:1—16:43

### *The Ark Is Brought to Jerusalem*

15 David built houses for himself in Jerusalem. Then he
prepared a place for the Ark of God, and he set up a tent for it.
2 David said, "Only the Levites may carry the Ark of God. The
LORD chose them to carry the Ark of the LORD and to serve him
forever."

[3]David called all the people of Israel to come to Jerusalem.
He wanted to bring the Ark of the LORD to the place he had
made for it. [4]David called together the descendants of Aaron
and the Levites. [5]There were one hundred twenty people from
Kohath's family group, with Uriel as their leader. [6]There were
two hundred twenty people from Merari's family group, with
Asaiah as their leader. [7]There were one hundred thirty people
from Gershon's family group, with Joel as their leader. [8]There
were two hundred people from Elizaphan's family group, with
Shemaiah as their leader. [9]There were eighty people from
Hebron's family group, with Eliel as their leader. [10]And there
were one hundred twelve people from Uzziel's family group,
with Amminadab as their leader.

[11]Then David asked the priests Zadok and Abiathar and
these Levites to come to him: Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah,
Eliel, and Amminadab. [12]David said to them, "You are the
leaders of the families of Levi. You and the other Levites must
give yourselves for service to the LORD. Bring up the Ark of the
LORD, the God of Israel, to the place I have made for it. [13]The
last time we did not ask the LORD how to carry it. You Levites
didn't carry it, so the LORD our God punished us."

[14]Then the priests and Levites prepared themselves for
service to the LORD so they could carry the Ark of the LORD, the
God of Israel. [15]The Levites used special poles to carry the Ark
of God on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded, just as the
LORD had said they should.

[16]David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their
brothers as singers to play their lyres, harps, and cymbals and
to sing happy songs.

[17]So the Levites appointed Heman and his relatives Asaph
and Ethan. Heman was Joel's son. Asaph was Berekiah's son.
And Ethan, from the Merari family group, was Kushaiah's son.
[18]There was also a second group of Levites: Zechariah, Jaaziel,
Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah,
Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, and Jeiel. They
were the Levite guards.

[19]The singers Heman, Asaph, and Ethan played bronze
cymbals. [20]Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab,
Maaseiah, and Benaiah played the lyres. [21]Mattithiah,
Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah played the
harps. [22]The Levite leader Kenaniah was in charge of the
singing, because he was very good at it.

[23]Berekiah and Elkanah were two of the guards for the Ark
of the Agreement. [24]The priests Shebaniah, Joshaphat,
Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer had the job
of blowing trumpets in front of the Ark of God. Obed-Edom and
Jehiah were also guards for the Ark.

[25]David, the leaders of Israel, and the commanders of a

thousand soldiers went to get the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD. They all went to bring the Ark from Obed-Edom's house with great joy. 26Because God helped the Levites who carried the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven male sheep. 27All the Levites who carried the Ark, and Kenaniah, the man in charge of the singing, and all the singers wore robes of fine linen. David also wore a robe of fine linen and a holy vest of fine linen. 28So all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD. They shouted, blew horns and trumpets, and played cymbals, lyres, and harps.

29As the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD entered Jerusalem, Saul's daughter Michal watched from a window. When she saw King David dancing and celebrating, she hated him.

16 They brought the Ark of God and put it inside the tent that David had set up for it. Then they offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to God. 2When David had finished giving the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD. 3He gave a loaf of bread, some dates, and raisins to every Israelite man and woman.

4Then David appointed some of the Levites to serve before the Ark of the LORD. They had the job of leading the worship and giving thanks and praising the LORD, the God of Israel. 5Asaph, who played the cymbals, was the leader. Zechariah was second to him. The other Levites were Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom, and Jeiel. They played the lyres and harps. 6Benaiah and Jahaziel were priests who blew the trumpets regularly before the Ark of the Agreement with God. 7That day David first gave Asaph and his relatives the job of singing praises to the LORD.

## *David's Song of Thanks*

8Give thanks to the LORD and pray to him.
Tell the nations what he has done.

9Sing to him; sing praises to him.
Tell about all his miracles.

10Be glad that you are his;
let those who seek the LORD be happy.

11 Depend on the LORD and his strength;
always go to him for help.

12 Remember the miracles he has done,
his wonders, and his decisions.

13 You are the descendants of his servant, Israel;
you are the children of Jacob, his chosen people.

14 He is the LORD our God.
His laws are for all the world.

15 He will keep his agreement forever;
he will keep his promises always.

16 He will keep the agreement he made with Abraham
and the promise he made to Isaac.

17 He made it a law for the people of Jacob;
he made it an agreement with Israel to last forever.

18 He said, “I will give the land of Canaan to you,
to belong to you.”

19 Then God’s people were few in number,
and they were strangers in the land.

20 They went from one nation to another,
from one kingdom to another.

21 But he did not let anyone hurt them;
he warned kings not to harm them.

22 He said, “Don’t touch my chosen people,
and don’t harm my prophets.”

[23]Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Every day tell how he saves us.

[24]Tell the nations about his glory;
tell all peoples the miracles he does.

[25]The LORD is great; he should be praised.
He should be respected more than all the gods.

[26]All the gods of the nations are only idols,
but the LORD made the skies.

[27]He has glory and majesty;
he has power and joy in his Temple.

[28]Praise the LORD, all nations on earth.
Praise the LORD's glory and power;
[29] praise the glory of the LORD's name.

Bring an offering and come to him.
Worship the LORD because he is holy.

[30]Tremble before him, everyone on earth.
The earth is set, and it cannot be moved.

[31]Let the skies rejoice and the earth be glad.
Let people everywhere say, "The LORD is king!"

[32]Let the sea and everything in it shout;
let the fields and everything in them rejoice.

[33]Then the trees of the forest will sing
for joy before the LORD.
They will sing because he is coming to judge the world.

[34]Thank the LORD because he is good.

His love continues forever.

35 Say to him, “Save us, God our Savior,
and bring us back and save us from other nations.

Then we will thank you
and will gladly praise you.”

36 Praise the LORD, the God of Israel.
He always was and always will be.

All the people said “Amen” and praised the LORD.

37 Then David left Asaph and the other Levites there in front of the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD. They were to serve there every day. 38 David also left Obed-Edom and sixty-eight other Levites to serve with them. Hosah and Obed-Edom son of Jeduthun were guards.

39 David left Zadok the priest and the other priests who served with him in front of the Tent of the LORD at the place of worship in Gibeon. 40 Every morning and evening they offered burnt offerings on the altar of burnt offerings, following the rules written in the Teachings of the LORD, which he had given Israel. 41 With them were Heman and Jeduthun and other Levites. They were chosen by name to sing praises to the LORD because his love continues forever. 42 Heman and Jeduthun also had the job of playing the trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments when songs were sung to God. Jeduthun’s sons guarded the gates.

43 Then all the people left. Each person went home, and David also went home to bless the people in his home.

## Psalm 78:9–16

9 The men of Ephraim had bows for weapons,
but they ran away on the day of battle.

10 They didn’t keep their agreement with God
and refused to live by his teachings.

[11]They forgot what he had done
and the miracles he had shown them.

[12]He did miracles while their ancestors watched,
in the fields of Zoan in Egypt.

[13]He divided the Red Sea and led them through.
He made the water stand up like a wall.

[14]He led them with a cloud by day
and by the light of a fire by night.

[15]He split the rocks in the desert
and gave them more than enough water, as if from the deep ocean.

[16]He brought streams out of the rock
and caused water to flow down like rivers.

## Proverbs 19:22–24

[22]People want others to be loyal,
so it is better to be poor than to be a liar.

[23]Those who respect the LORD will live
and be satisfied, unbothered by trouble.

[24]Though the lazy person puts his hand in the dish,
he won't lift the food to his mouth.

## Acts 7:44—8:1a

[44]"The Holy Tent where God spoke to our ancestors was with them in the desert. God told Moses how to make this Tent, and

he made it like the plan God showed him. 45Later, Joshua led
our ancestors to capture the lands of the other nations. Our
people went in, and God forced the other people out. When our
people went into this new land, they took with them this same
Tent they had received from their ancestors. They kept it until
the time of David, 46who pleased God and asked God to let him
build a house for him, the God of Jacob.[n] 47But Solomon was the
one who built the Temple.

48"But the Most High does not live in houses that people
build with their hands. As the prophet says:

49'Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.

So do you think you can build a house for me? says the Lord.
Do I need a place to rest?

50Remember, my hand made all these things!'"

Isaiah 66:1–2

51Stephen continued speaking: "You stubborn people! You
have not given your hearts to God, nor will you listen to him!
You are always against what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you,
just as your ancestors were. 52Your ancestors tried to hurt every
prophet who ever lived. Those prophets said long ago that the
One who is good would come, but your ancestors killed them.
And now you have turned against and killed the One who is
good. 53You received the law of Moses, which God gave you
through his angels, but you haven't obeyed it."

## *Stephen Is Killed*

54When the leaders heard this, they became furious. They
were so mad they were grinding their teeth at Stephen. 55But
Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and
saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right side.
56He said, "Look! I see heaven open and the Son of Man
standing at God's right side."

57Then they shouted loudly and covered their ears and all
ran at Stephen. 58They took him out of the city and began to
throw stones at him to kill him. And those who told lies against
Stephen left their coats with a young man named Saul. 59While
they were throwing stones, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus,
receive my spirit." 60He fell on his knees and cried in a loud
voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." After Stephen

said this, he died.
[8] Saul agreed that the killing of Stephen was good.

# June 27

## Timely Help

*He rained manna down on them to eat; he gave them grain from heaven.*

Psalm 78:24

God's help is timely. He helps us the same way a father gives plane tickets to his family. When I travel with my kids, I carry all our tickets in my satchel. When the moment comes to board the plane, I stand between the attendant and the child. As each daughter passes, I place a ticket in her hand. She, in turn, gives the ticket to the attendant. Each one receives the ticket in the nick of time.

What I do for my daughters God does for you. He places himself between you and the need. And at the right time, he gives you the ticket. Wasn't this the promise he gave his disciples? "When you are arrested and judged, don't worry ahead of time about what you should say. Say whatever is *given you to say at that time,* because it will not really be you speaking; it will be the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11, emphasis mine).

God leads us. He will do the right thing at the right time.

from *Traveling Light*

### 1 Chronicles 17:1—18:17

#### *God's Promise to David*

17 When David moved into his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Look, I am living in a palace made of cedar, but the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD sits in a tent."

2Nathan said to David, "Do what you want to do, because God is with you."

3But that night God spoke his word to Nathan, saying, 4"Go and tell David my servant, 'This is what the LORD says: You are

not the person to build a house for me to live in. 5From the time
I brought Israel out of Egypt until now I have not lived in a
house. I have moved from one tent site to another and from one
place to another. 6As I have moved with the Israelites to
different places, I have never said to the leaders, whom I
commanded to take care of my people, "Why haven't you built
me a house of cedar?"'

7"Now, tell my servant David: 'This is what the LORD All-
Powerful says: I took you from the pasture and from tending the
sheep and made you king of my people Israel. 8I have been with
you everywhere you have gone. I have defeated your enemies
for you. I will make you as famous as any of the great people on
the earth. 9I will choose a place for my people Israel, and I will
plant them so they can live in their own homes. They will not be
bothered anymore. Wicked people will no longer hurt them as
they have in the past 10when I chose judges for my people
Israel. I will defeat all your enemies.

"'I tell you that the LORD will make your descendants kings of
Israel after you. 11When you die and join your ancestors, I will
make one of your sons the new king, and I will set up his
kingdom. 12He will build a house for me, and I will let his
kingdom rule always. 13I will be his father, and he will be my
son. I took away my love from Saul, who ruled before you, but I
will never stop loving your son. 14I will put him in charge of my
house and kingdom forever. His family will rule forever.'"

15Nathan told David everything God had said in this vision.

## *David Prays to God*

16Then King David went in and sat in front of the LORD. David
said, "LORD God, who am I? What is my family? Why did you
bring me to this point? 17But that was not enough for you, God.
You have also made promises about my future family. LORD God,
you have treated me like a very important person.

18"What more can I say to you for honoring me, your
servant? You know me so well. 19LORD, you have done this
wonderful thing for my sake and because you wanted to. You
have made known all these great things.

20"There is no one like you, LORD. There is no God except you.
We have heard all this ourselves! 21There is no nation like your
people Israel. They are the only people on earth that God chose
to be his own. You made your name well known by the great and
wonderful things you did for them. You went ahead of them and
forced other nations out of the land. You freed your people from
slavery in Egypt. 22You made the people of Israel your very own
people forever, and, LORD, you are their God.

23"LORD, keep the promise forever that you made about my
family and me, your servant. Do what you have said. 24Then you

will be honored always, and people will say, 'The LORD All-Powerful, the God over Israel, is Israel's God!' And the family of your servant David will continue before you.

25"My God, you have told me that you would make my family great. So I, your servant, am brave enough to pray to you. 26LORD, you are God, and you have promised these good things to me, your servant. 27You have chosen to bless my family. Let it continue before you always. LORD, you have blessed my family, so it will always be blessed."

## *David Defeats Nations*

18 Later, David defeated the Philistines, conquered them, and took the city of Gath and the small towns around it.

2He also defeated the people of Moab. So the people of Moab became servants of David and gave him the payment he demanded.

3David also defeated Hadadezer king of Zobah all the way to the town of Hamath as he tried to spread his kingdom to the Euphrates River. 4David captured one thousand of his chariots, seven thousand men who rode in chariots, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He crippled all but a hundred of the chariot horses.

5Arameans from Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, but David killed twenty-two thousand of them. 6Then David put groups of soldiers in Damascus in Aram. The Arameans became David's servants and gave him the payments he demanded. So the LORD gave David victory everywhere he went.

7David took the shields of gold that had belonged to Hadadezer's officers and brought them to Jerusalem. 8David also took many things made of bronze from Tebah and Cun, which had been cities under Hadadezer's control. Later, Solomon used this bronze to make things for the Temple: the large bronze bowl, which was called the Sea, the pillars, and other bronze utensils.

9Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the army of Hadadezer king of Zobah. 10So Toi sent his son Hadoram to greet and congratulate King David for defeating Hadadezer. (Hadadezer had been at war with Toi.) Hadoram brought items made of gold, silver, and bronze. 11King David gave them to the LORD, along with the silver and gold he had taken from these nations: Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and Amalek.

12Abishai son of Zeruiah killed eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. 13David put groups of soldiers in Edom, and all the Edomites became his servants. The LORD gave David victory everywhere he went.

## *David's Important Officers*

14 David was king over all of Israel, and he did what was fair
and right for all his people. 15 Joab son of Zeruiah was
commander over the army. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the
recorder. 16 Zadok son of Ahitub and Abiathar son of Ahimelech
were priests. Shavsha was the royal secretary. 17 Benaiah son of
Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites.[n] And David's
sons were important officers who served at his side.

## Psalm 78:17–25

17 But the people continued to sin against him;
in the desert they turned against God Most High.

18 They decided to test God
by asking for the food they wanted.

19 Then they spoke against God,
saying, "Can God prepare food in the desert?

20 When he hit the rock, water poured out
and rivers flowed down.

But can he give us bread also?
Will he provide his people with meat?"

21 When the LORD heard them, he was very angry.
His anger was like fire to the people of Jacob;
his anger grew against the people of Israel.

22 They had not believed God
and had not trusted him to save them.

23 But he gave a command to the clouds above
and opened the doors of heaven.

[24]He rained manna down on them to eat;
he gave them grain from heaven.

[25]So they ate the bread of angels.
He sent them all the food they could eat.

## Proverbs 19:25–26

[25]Whip those who make fun of wisdom, and perhaps foolish people will gain some wisdom.
Correct those with understanding, and they will gain knowledge.

[26]A child who robs his father and sends away his mother
brings shame and disgrace on himself.

## Acts 8:1b–25

### *Troubles for the Believers*

On that day the church of Jerusalem began to be persecuted, and all the believers, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.
[2]And some religious people buried Stephen and cried loudly for him. [3]Saul was also trying to destroy the church, going from house to house, dragging out men and women and putting them in jail. [4]And wherever they were scattered, they told people the Good News.

### *Philip Preaches in Samaria*

[5]Philip went to the city of Samaria and preached about the Christ. [6]When the people there heard Philip and saw the miracles he was doing, they all listened carefully to what he said. [7]Many of these people had evil spirits in them, but Philip made the evil spirits leave. The spirits made a loud noise when they came out. Philip also healed many weak and crippled people there. [8]So the people in that city were very happy.

[9]But there was a man named Simon in that city. Before Philip
came there, Simon had practiced magic and amazed all the
people of Samaria. He bragged and called himself a great man.
[10]All the people—the least important and the most important—
paid attention to Simon, saying, “This man has the power of
God, called ‘the Great Power’!” [11]Simon had amazed them with
his magic so long that the people became his followers. [12]But
when Philip told them the Good News about the kingdom of God
and the power of Jesus Christ, men and women believed Philip
and were baptized. [13]Simon himself believed, and after he was
baptized, he stayed very close to Philip. When he saw the
miracles and the powerful things Philip did, Simon was amazed.

[14]When the apostles who were still in Jerusalem heard that
the people of Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent
Peter and John to them. [15]When Peter and John arrived, they
prayed that the Samaritan believers might receive the Holy
Spirit. [16]These people had been baptized in the name of the
Lord Jesus, but the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of
them. [17]Then, when the two apostles began laying their hands
on the people, they received the Holy Spirit.

[18]Simon saw that the Spirit was given to people when the
apostles laid their hands on them. So he offered the apostles
money, [19]saying, “Give me also this power so that anyone on
whom I lay my hands will receive the Holy Spirit.”

[20]Peter said to him, “You and your money should both be
destroyed, because you thought you could buy God’s gift with
money. [21]You cannot share with us in this work since your heart
is not right before God. [22]Change your heart! Turn away from
this evil thing you have done, and pray to the Lord. Maybe he
will forgive you for thinking this. [23]I see that you are full of
bitter jealousy and ruled by sin.”

[24]Simon answered, “Both of you pray for me to the Lord so
the things you have said will not happen to me.”

[25]After Peter and John told the people what they had seen
Jesus do and after they had spoken the message of the Lord,
they went back to Jerusalem. On the way, they went through
many Samaritan towns and preached the Good News to the
people.

# June 28

# God Is Righteous

*"The LORD will do what he thinks is right."*

1 Chronicles 19:13

Righteousness is who God is. God's righteousness endures forever (2 Corinthians 9:9) and "reaches to the skies" (Psalm 71:19). God is righteous. His decrees are righteous (Psalm 119:138). His judgment is righteous (Romans 2:5). His requirements are righteous (Romans 8:4). His acts are righteous (Daniel 9:16). Daniel declared, "Our God is right in everything he does" (Daniel 9:14).

God is never wrong. He has never rendered a wrong decision, experienced the wrong attitude, taken the wrong path, said the wrong thing, or acted the wrong way. He is never too late or too early, too loud or too soft, too fast or too slow. He has always been and always will be right. He is righteous.

from *Traveling Light*

## 1 Chronicles 19:1—20:8

### *War with the Ammonites and Arameans*

19 When Nahash king of the Ammonites died, his son became
king after him. 2David said, "Nahash was loyal to me, so I will
be loyal to his son Hanun." So David sent messengers to
comfort Hanun about his father's death.

David's officers went to the land of the Ammonites to
comfort Hanun. 3But the Ammonite leaders said to Hanun, "Do
you think David wants to honor your father by sending men to
comfort you? No! David sent them to study the land and capture
it and spy it out." 4So Hanun arrested David's officers. To
shame them he shaved their beards and cut off their clothes at
the hips. Then he sent them away.

5When the people told David what had happened to his

officers, he sent messengers to meet them, because they were very ashamed. King David said, “Stay in Jericho until your beards have grown back. Then come home.”

6The Ammonites knew that they had insulted David. So Hanun and the Ammonites sent about seventy-four thousand pounds of silver to hire chariots and chariot drivers from Northwest Mesopotamia, Aram Maacah, and Zobah. 7The Ammonites hired thirty-two thousand chariots and the king of Maacah and his army. So they came and set up camp near the town of Medeba. The Ammonites themselves came out of their towns and got ready for battle.

8When David heard about this, he sent Joab with the whole army. 9The Ammonites came out and prepared for battle at the city gate. The kings who had come to help were out in the field by themselves.

10Joab saw that there were enemies both in front of him and behind him. So he chose some of the best soldiers of Israel and sent them out to fight the Arameans. 11Joab put the rest of the army under the command of Abishai, his brother. Then they went out to fight the Ammonites. 12Joab said to Abishai, “If the Arameans are too strong for me, you must help me. Or, if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will help you. 13Be strong. We must fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what he thinks is right.”

14Then Joab and the army with him went to attack the Arameans, and the Arameans ran away. 15When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans were running away, they also ran away from Joab’s brother Abishai and went back to their city. So Joab went back to Jerusalem.

16When the Arameans saw that Israel had defeated them, they sent messengers to bring other Arameans from east of the Euphrates River. Their leader was Shophach, the commander of Hadadezer’s army.

17When David heard about this, he gathered all the Israelites, and they crossed over the Jordan River. He prepared them for battle, facing the Arameans. The Arameans fought with him, 18but they ran away from the Israelites. David killed seven thousand Aramean chariot drivers and forty thousand Aramean foot soldiers. He also killed Shophach, the commander of the Aramean army.

19When those who served Hadadezer saw that the Israelites had defeated them, they made peace with David and served him. So the Arameans refused to help the Ammonites again.

## *Joab Destroys the Ammonites*

20 In the spring, the time of year when kings normally went out to battle, Joab led out the army of Israel. But David stayed in

Jerusalem. The army of Israel destroyed the land of Ammon and went to the city of Rabbah and attacked it. 2David took the crown off the head of their king,[n] and had it placed on his own head. That gold crown weighed about seventy-five pounds, and it had valuable gems in it. And David took many valuable things from the city. 3He also brought out the people of the city and forced them to work with saws, iron picks, and axes. David did this to all the Ammonite cities. Then David and all his army returned to Jerusalem.

### *Philistine Giants Are Killed*

4Later, at Gezer, war broke out with the Philistines. Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Sippai, who was one of the descendants of the Rephaites. So those Philistines were defeated.

5Later, there was another battle with the Philistines. Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath, who was from the town of Gath. His spear was as large as a weaver's rod.

6At Gath another battle took place. A huge man was there; he had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four fingers and toes in all. This man also was one of the sons of Rapha. 7When he spoke against Israel, Jonathan son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him.

8These descendants of Rapha from Gath were killed by David and his men.

## Psalm 78:26–33

26He sent the east wind from heaven
and led the south wind by his power.

27He rained meat on them like dust.
The birds were as many as the sand of the sea.

28He made the birds fall inside the camp,
all around the tents.

29So the people ate and became very full.
God had given them what they wanted.

30 While they were still eating,
and while the food was still in their mouths,

31 God became angry with them.
He killed some of the healthiest of them;
he struck down the best young men of Israel.

32 But they kept on sinning;
they did not believe even with the miracles.

33 So he ended their days without meaning
and their years in terror.

## Proverbs 19:27–29

27 Don't stop listening to correction, my child,
or you will forget what you have already learned.

28 An evil witness makes fun of fairness,
and wicked people love what is evil.

29 People who make fun of wisdom will be punished,
and the backs of foolish people will be beaten.

## Acts 8:26–40

### *Philip Teaches an Ethiopian*

26 An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get ready and go
south to the road that leads down to Gaza from Jerusalem—the
desert road." 27 So Philip got ready and went. On the road he
saw a man from Ethiopia, a eunuch. He was an important
officer in the service of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians;
he was responsible for taking care of all her money. He had
gone to Jerusalem to worship. 28 Now, as he was on his way

home, he was sitting in his chariot reading from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet. 29The Spirit said to Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

30So when Philip ran toward the chariot, he heard the man reading from Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

31He answered, “How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?” Then he invited Philip to climb in and sit with him. 32The portion of Scripture he was reading was this:

“He was like a sheep being led to be killed.
He was quiet, as a lamb is quiet while its wool is being cut;

he never opened his mouth.
33 He was shamed and was treated unfairly.

He died without children to continue his family.
His life on earth has ended.”

Isaiah 53:7–8

34The officer said to Philip, “Please tell me, who is the prophet talking about—himself or someone else?” 35Philip began to speak, and starting with this same Scripture, he told the man the Good News about Jesus.

36While they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The officer said, “Look, here is water. What is stopping me from being baptized?” [37Philip answered, “If you believe with all your heart, you can.” The officer said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”][n] 38Then the officer commanded the chariot to stop. Both Philip and the officer went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 39When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away; the officer never saw him again. And the officer continued on his way home, full of joy. 40But Philip appeared in a city called Azotus and preached the Good News in all the towns on the way from Azotus to Caesarea.

# June 29

## Submerged in Mercy

*Still God was merciful. He forgave their sins and did not destroy them.*

Psalm 78:38

DO you really think you haven't done things that hurt Christ? Have you ever been dishonest with his money? That's cheating. Ever gone to church to be seen rather than to see him? Hypocrite.

Ever broken a promise you've made to God?

Don't you deserve to be punished? And yet, here you are. Reading this book. Breathing. Still witnessing sunsets and hearing babies gurgle. Still watching the seasons change. There are no lashes on your back or hooks in your nose or shackles on your feet. Apparently God hasn't kept a list of your wrongs.

Listen. You have not been sprinkled with forgiveness. You have not been spattered with grace. You have not been dusted with kindness. You have been immersed in it. You are submerged in mercy. You are a minnow in the ocean of his mercy. Let it change you!

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### 1 Chronicles 21:1—22:19

#### *David Counts the Israelites*

21 Satan was against Israel, and he caused David to count the
people of Israel. 2So David said to Joab and the commanders of
the troops, "Go and count all the Israelites from Beersheba to
Dan.[n] Then tell me so I will know how many there are."

3But Joab said, "May the LORD give the nation a hundred
times more people. My master the king, all the Israelites are
your servants. Why do you want to do this, my master? You will
make Israel guilty of sin."

4But the king commanded Joab, so Joab left and went
through all Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem. 5Joab gave
the list of the people to David. There were one million one
hundred thousand men in all of Israel who could use the sword,
and there were four hundred seventy thousand men in Judah
who could use the sword. 6But Joab did not count the tribes of
Levi and Benjamin, because he didn't like King David's order.
7David had done something God had said was wrong, so God
punished Israel.

8Then David said to God, "I have sinned greatly by what I
have done! Now, I beg you to forgive me, your servant, because
I have been very foolish."

9The LORD said to Gad, who was David's seer, 10"Go and tell
David, 'This is what the LORD says: I offer you three choices.
Choose one of them and I will do it.'"

11So Gad went to David and said to him, "This is what the
LORD says: 'Choose for yourself 12three years of hunger. Or
choose three months of running from your enemies as they
chase you with their swords. Or choose three days of
punishment from the LORD, in which a terrible disease will
spread through the country. The angel of the LORD will go
through Israel destroying the people.' Now, David, decide which
of these things I should tell the LORD who sent me."

13David said to Gad, "I am in great trouble. Let the LORD
punish me, because the LORD is very merciful. Don't let my
punishment come from human beings."

14So the LORD sent a terrible disease on Israel, and seventy
thousand people died. 15God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem,
but when the angel started to destroy it, the LORD saw it and felt
very sorry about the terrible things that had happened. So he
said to the angel who was destroying, "That is enough! Put
down your arm!" The angel of the LORD was then standing at the
threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

16David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD in the sky,
holding his sword drawn and pointed at Jerusalem. Then David
and the elders bowed facedown on the ground. They were
wearing rough cloth to show their grief. 17David said to God, "I
am the one who sinned and did wrong. I gave the order for the
people to be counted. These people only followed me like sheep.
They did nothing wrong. LORD my God, please punish me and my
family, but stop the terrible disease that is killing your people."

18Then the angel of the LORD told Gad to tell David that he
should build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of
Araunah the Jebusite. 19So David did what Gad told him to do,
in the name of the LORD.

20Araunah was separating the wheat from the straw. When
he turned around, he saw the angel. Araunah's four sons who
were with him hid. 21David came to Araunah, and when
Araunah saw him, he left the threshing floor and bowed

facedown on the ground before David.
22 David said to him, “Sell me your threshing floor so I can
build an altar to the LORD here. Then the terrible disease will
stop. Sell it to me for the full price.”
23 Araunah said to David, “Take this threshing floor. My
master the king, do anything you want. Look, I will also give you
oxen for the whole burnt offerings, the threshing boards for the
wood, and wheat for the grain offering. I give everything to
you.”
24 But King David answered Araunah, “No, I will pay the full
price for the land. I won’t take anything that is yours and give it
to the LORD. I won’t offer a burnt offering that costs me
nothing.”
25 So David paid Araunah about fifteen pounds of gold for the
place. 26 David built an altar to the LORD there and offered whole
burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. David prayed to the
LORD, and he answered him by sending down fire from heaven
on the altar of burnt offering. 27 Then the LORD commanded the
angel to put his sword back into its holder.
28 When David saw that the LORD had answered him on the
threshing floor of Araunah, he offered sacrifices there. 29 The
Holy Tent that Moses made while the Israelites were in the
desert and the altar of burnt offerings were in Gibeon at the
place of worship. 30 But David could not go to the Holy Tent to
speak with God, because he was afraid of the angel of the LORD
and his sword.
22 David said, “The Temple of the LORD God and the altar for
Israel’s burnt offerings will be built here.”

## *David Makes Plans for the Temple*

2 So David ordered all foreigners living in Israel to gather
together. From that group David chose stonecutters to cut
stones to be used in building the Temple of God. 3 David
supplied a large amount of iron to be used for making nails and
hinges for the gate doors. He also supplied more bronze than
could be weighed, 4 and he supplied more cedar logs than could
be counted. Much of the cedar had been brought to David by
the people from Sidon and Tyre.
5 David said, “We should build a great Temple for the LORD,
which will be famous everywhere for its greatness and beauty.
But my son Solomon is young. He hasn’t yet learned what he
needs to know, so I will prepare for the building of it.” So David
got many of the materials ready before he died.
6 Then David called for his son Solomon and told him to build
the Temple for the LORD, the God of Israel. 7 David said to him,
“My son, I wanted to build a temple for worshiping the LORD my
God. 8 But the LORD spoke his word to me, ‘David, you have killed

many people. You have fought many wars. You cannot build a temple for worship to me, because you have killed many people.
9But, you will have a son, a man of peace and rest. I will give him rest from all his enemies around him. His name will be Solomon,[n] and I will give Israel peace and quiet while he is king. 10Solomon will build a temple for worship to me. He will be my son, and I will be his father. I will make his kingdom strong; someone from his family will rule Israel forever.'"

11David said, "Now, my son, may the LORD be with you. May you build a temple for the LORD your God, as he said you would. 12He will make you the king of Israel. May the LORD give you wisdom and understanding so you will be able to obey the teachings of the LORD your God. 13Be careful to obey the rules and laws the LORD gave Moses for Israel. If you obey them, you will have success. Be strong and brave. Don't be afraid or discouraged.

14"Solomon, I have worked hard getting many of the materials for building the Temple of the LORD. I have supplied about seven and one-half million pounds of gold, about seventy-five million pounds of silver, so much bronze and iron it cannot be weighed, and wood and stone. You may add to them. 15You have many workmen—stonecutters, bricklayers, carpenters, and people skilled in every kind of work. 16They are skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, and iron. You have more craftsmen than can be counted. Now begin the work, and may the LORD be with you."

17Then David ordered all the leaders of Israel to help his son Solomon. 18David said to them, "The LORD your God is with you. He has given you rest from our enemies. He has handed over to me the people living around us. The LORD and his people are in control of this land. 19Now give yourselves completely to obeying the LORD your God. Build the holy place of the LORD God; build the Temple for worship to the LORD. Then bring the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD and the holy items that belong to God into the Temple."

## Psalm 78:34–39

34Anytime he killed them, they would look to him for help;
they would come back to God and follow him.

35They would remember that God was their Rock,
that God Most High had saved them.

[36]But their words were false,
and their tongues lied to him.

[37]Their hearts were not really loyal to God;
they did not keep his agreement.

[38]Still God was merciful.
He forgave their sins
and did not destroy them.

Many times he held back his anger
and did not stir up all his anger.

[39]He remembered that they were only human,
like a wind that blows and does not come back.

## Proverbs 20:1–2

[20] Wine and beer make people loud and uncontrolled;
it is not wise to get drunk on them.

[2]An angry king is like a roaring lion.
Making him angry may cost you your life.

## Acts 9:1–19a

### *Saul Is Converted*

[9] In Jerusalem Saul was still threatening the followers of the Lord by saying he would kill them. So he went to the high priest [2]and asked him to write letters to the synagogues in the city of Damascus. Then if Saul found any followers of Christ's Way, men or women, he would arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem.

[3]So Saul headed toward Damascus. As he came near the city,

a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. [4]Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me?”

[5]Saul said, “Who are you, Lord?”

The voice answered, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. [6]Get up now and go into the city. Someone there will tell you what you must do.”

[7]The people traveling with Saul stood there but said nothing. They heard the voice, but they saw no one. [8]Saul got up from the ground and opened his eyes, but he could not see. So those with Saul took his hand and led him into Damascus. [9]For three days Saul could not see and did not eat or drink.

[10]There was a follower of Jesus in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision, “Ananias!”

Ananias answered, “Here I am, Lord.”

[11]The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to Straight Street. Find the house of Judas,[n] and ask for a man named Saul from the city of Tarsus. He is there now, praying. [12]Saul has seen a vision in which a man named Ananias comes to him and lays his hands on him. Then he is able to see again.”

[13]But Ananias answered, “Lord, many people have told me about this man and the terrible things he did to your holy people in Jerusalem. [14]Now he has come here to Damascus, and the leading priests have given him the power to arrest everyone who worships you.”

[15]But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! I have chosen Saul for an important work. He must tell about me to those who are not Jews, to kings, and to the people of Israel. [16]I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

[17]So Ananias went to the house of Judas. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus sent me. He is the one you saw on the road on your way here. He sent me so that you can see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” [18]Immediately, something that looked like fish scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he was able to see again! Then Saul got up and was baptized. [19]After he ate some food, his strength returned.

# June 30

## The Answer to Arguments

*Foolish people are always fighting, but avoiding quarrels will bring you honor.*

Proverbs 20:3

"Bear with each other, and forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you, forgive that person because the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). Unity doesn't begin in examining others but in examining self. Unity begins not in demanding that others change, but in admitting that we aren't so perfect ourselves …

The answer to arguments? Acceptance. The first step to unity? Acceptance. Not agreement, acceptance. Not unanimity, acceptance. Not negotiation, arbitration, or elaboration. Those might come later but only after the first step, acceptance.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### 1 Chronicles 23:1—25:31

#### *The Levites*

23 After David had lived long and was old, he made his son
Solomon the new king of Israel. 2David gathered all the leaders
of Israel, along with the priests and Levites. 3He counted the
Levites who were thirty years old and older. In all, there were
thirty-eight thousand Levites. 4David said, "Of these, twenty-
four thousand Levites will direct the work of the Temple of the
LORD, six thousand Levites will be officers and judges, 5four
thousand Levites will be gatekeepers, and four thousand Levites
will praise the LORD with musical instruments I made for giving
praise."

6David separated the Levites into three groups that were led
by Levi's three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

## *The People of Gershon*

7From the people of Gershon, there were Ladan and Shimei.
8Ladan had three sons. His first son was Jehiel, and his other sons were Zetham and Joel.
9Shimei's sons were Shelomoth, Haziel, and Haran. These three sons were leaders of Ladan's families. 10Shimei had four sons: Jahath, Ziza, Jeush, and Beriah. 11Jahath was the first son, and Ziza was the second son. But Jeush and Beriah did not have many children, so they were counted as if they were one family.

## *The People of Kohath*

12Kohath had four sons: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.
13Amram's sons were Aaron and Moses. Aaron and his descendants were chosen to be special forever. They were chosen to prepare the holy things for the LORD's service, to offer sacrifices before the LORD, and to serve him as priests. They were to give blessings in his name forever.
14Moses was the man of God, and his sons were counted as part of the tribe of Levi. 15Moses' sons were Gershom and Eliezer. 16Gershom's first son was Shubael. 17Eliezer's first son was Rehabiah. Eliezer had no other sons, but Rehabiah had many sons.
18Izhar's first son was Shelomith.
19Hebron's first son was Jeriah, his second was Amariah, his third was Jahaziel, and his fourth was Jekameam.
20Uzziel's first son was Micah and his second was Isshiah.

## *The People of Merari*

21Merari's sons were Mahli and Mushi. Mahli's sons were Eleazar and Kish. 22Eleazar died without sons; he had only daughters. Eleazar's daughters married their cousins, the sons of Kish. 23Mushi's three sons were Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth.

## *The Levites' Work*

24These were Levi's descendants listed by their families. They were the leaders of families. Each person who was twenty years old or older was listed. They served in the LORD's Temple.
25David had said, "The LORD, the God of Israel, has given rest to his people. He has come to live in Jerusalem forever. 26So the Levites don't need to carry the Holy Tent or any of the things used in its services anymore." 27David's last instructions were to count the Levites who were twenty years old and older.

[28]The Levites had the job of helping Aaron's descendants in the service of the Temple of the LORD. They cared for the Temple courtyard and side rooms, and they made all the holy things pure. Their job was to serve in the Temple of God. [29]They were responsible for putting the holy bread on the table, for the flour in the grain offerings, for the bread made without yeast, for the baking and mixing, and for the measuring. [30]The Levites also stood every morning and gave thanks and praise to the LORD. They also did this every evening. [31]The Levites offered all the burnt offerings to the LORD on the special days of rest, at the New Moon festivals, and at all appointed feasts. They served before the LORD every day. They were to follow the rules for how many Levites should serve each time. [32]So the Levites took care of the Meeting Tent and the Holy Place. And they helped their relatives, Aaron's descendants, with the services at the Temple of the LORD.

## *The Groups of the Priests*

[24] These were the groups of Aaron's sons: Aaron's sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. [2]But Nadab and Abihu died before their father did, and they had no sons. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as the priests. [3]David, with the help of Zadok, a descendant of Eleazar, and Ahimelech, a descendant of Ithamar, separated their family groups into two different groups. Each group had certain duties. [4]There were more leaders from Eleazar's family than from Ithamar's—sixteen leaders from Eleazar's family and eight leaders from Ithamar's family. [5]Men were chosen from Eleazar's and Ithamar's families by throwing lots. Some men from each family were chosen to be in charge of the Holy Place, and some were chosen to serve as priests.

[6]Shemaiah son of Nethanel, from the tribe of Levi, was the secretary. He recorded the names of those descendants in front of King David, the officers, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech son of Abiathar, and the leaders of the families of the priests and Levites. The work was divided by lots among the families of Eleazar and Ithamar. The following men with their groups were chosen.

[7]The first one chosen was Jehoiarib. The second was Jedaiah. [8]The third was Harim. The fourth was Seorim. [9]The fifth was Malkijah. The sixth was Mijamin. [10]The seventh was Hakkoz. The eighth was Abijah. [11]The ninth was Jeshua. The tenth was Shecaniah. [12]The eleventh was Eliashib. The twelfth was Jakim. [13]The thirteenth was Huppah. The fourteenth was Jeshebeab. [14]The fifteenth was Bilgah. The sixteenth was Immer. [15]The seventeenth was Hezir. The eighteenth was Happizzez. [16]The nineteenth was Pethahiah. The twentieth was Jehezkel. [17]The twenty-first was Jakin. The twenty-second was Gamul. [18]The

twenty-third was Delaiah. The twenty-fourth was Maaziah.
19These were the groups chosen to serve in the Temple of the LORD. They obeyed the rules given them by Aaron, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded him.

## *The Other Levites*

20These are the names of the rest of Levi's descendants:
Shubael was a descendant of Amram, and Jehdeiah was a descendant of Shubael.
21Isshiah was the first son of Rehabiah.
22From the Izhar family group, there was Shelomoth, and Jahath was a descendant of Shelomoth.
23Hebron's first son was Jeriah, Amariah was his second, Jahaziel was his third, and Jekameam was his fourth.
24Uzziel's son was Micah. Micah's son was Shamir. 25Micah's brother was Isshiah, and Isshiah's son was Zechariah.
26Merari's descendants were Mahli and Mushi. Merari's son was Jaaziah. 27Jaaziah son of Merari had sons named Shoham, Zaccur, and Ibri. 28Mahli's son was Eleazar, but Eleazar did not have any sons.
29Kish's son was Jerahmeel.
30Mushi's sons were Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth.
These are the Levites, listed by their families. 31They were chosen for special jobs by throwing lots in front of King David, Zadok, Ahimelech, the leaders of the families of the priests, and the Levites. They did this just as their relatives, the priests, Aaron's descendants, had done. The families of the oldest brother and the youngest brother were treated the same.

## *The Music Groups*

25 David and the commanders of the army chose some of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to preach and play harps, lyres, and cymbals. Here is a list of the men who served in this way:
2Asaph's sons who served were Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asarelah. King David chose Asaph to preach, and Asaph directed his sons.
3Jeduthun's sons who served were Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah. There were six of them, and Jeduthun directed them. He preached and used a harp to give thanks and praise to the LORD.
4Heman's sons who served were Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shubael, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth. 5All these were sons of Heman, David's seer. God promised to make Heman strong, so Heman had many sons. God gave him

fourteen sons and three daughters. [6]Heman directed all his sons in making music for the Temple of the LORD with cymbals, lyres, and harps; that was their way of serving in the Temple of God. King David was in charge of Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. [7]These men and their relatives were trained and skilled in making music for the LORD. There were two hundred eighty-eight of them. [8]Everyone threw lots to choose the time his family was to serve at the Temple. The young and the old, the teacher and the student, had to throw lots.

[9]First, the lot fell to Joseph, from the family of Asaph.

Second, twelve men were chosen from Gedaliah, his sons and relatives.

[10]Third, twelve men were chosen from Zaccur, his sons and relatives.

[11]Fourth, twelve men were chosen from Izri, his sons and relatives.

[12]Fifth, twelve men were chosen from Nethaniah, his sons and relatives.

[13]Sixth, twelve men were chosen from Bukkiah, his sons and relatives.

[14]Seventh, twelve men were chosen from Jesarelah, his sons and relatives.

[15]Eighth, twelve men were chosen from Jeshaiah, his sons and relatives.

[16]Ninth, twelve men were chosen from Mattaniah, his sons and relatives.

[17]Tenth, twelve men were chosen from Shimei, his sons and relatives.

[18]Eleventh, twelve men were chosen from Azarel, his sons and relatives.

[19]Twelfth, twelve men were chosen from Hashabiah, his sons and relatives.

[20]Thirteenth, twelve men were chosen from Shubael, his sons and relatives.

[21]Fourteenth, twelve men were chosen from Mattithiah, his sons and relatives.

[22]Fifteenth, twelve men were chosen from Jerimoth, his sons and relatives.

[23]Sixteenth, twelve men were chosen from Hananiah, his sons and relatives.

[24]Seventeenth, twelve men were chosen from Joshbekashah, his sons and relatives.

[25]Eighteenth, twelve men were chosen from Hanani, his sons and relatives.

[26]Nineteenth, twelve men were chosen from Mallothi, his sons and relatives.

[27]Twentieth, twelve men were chosen from Eliathah, his sons and relatives.

[28]Twenty-first, twelve men were chosen from Hothir, his sons and relatives.
[29]Twenty-second, twelve men were chosen from Giddalti, his sons and relatives.
[30]Twenty-third, twelve men were chosen from Mahazioth, his sons and relatives.
[31]Twenty-fourth, twelve men were chosen from Romamti-Ezer, his sons and relatives.

## Psalm 78:40–55

[40]They turned against God so often in the desert
and grieved him there.

[41]Again and again they tested God
and brought pain to the Holy One of Israel.

[42]They did not remember his power
or the time he saved them from the enemy.

[43]They forgot the signs he did in Egypt
and his wonders in the fields of Zoan.

[44]He turned their rivers to blood
so no one could drink the water.

[45]He sent flies that bit the people.
He sent frogs that destroyed them.

[46]He gave their crops to grasshoppers
and what they worked for to locusts.

[47]He destroyed their vines with hail
and their sycamore trees with sleet.

48 He killed their animals with hail
and their cattle with lightning.

49 He showed them his hot anger.
He sent his strong anger against them,
his destroying angels.

50 He found a way to show his anger.
He did not keep them from dying
but let them die by a terrible disease.

51 God killed all the firstborn sons in Egypt,
the oldest son of each family of Ham.[n]

52 But God led his people out like sheep
and he guided them like a flock through the desert.

53 He led them to safety so they had nothing to fear,
but their enemies drowned in the sea.

54 So God brought them to his holy land,
to the mountain country he took with his own power.

55 He forced out the other nations,
and he had his people inherit the land.
He let the tribes of Israel settle there in tents.

## Proverbs 20:3

3 Foolish people are always fighting,
but avoiding quarrels will bring you honor.

## Acts 9:19b–43

## *Saul Preaches in Damascus*

Saul stayed with the followers of Jesus in Damascus for a few
days. [20]Soon he began to preach about Jesus in the synagogues,
saying, “Jesus is the Son of God.”
[21]All the people who heard him were amazed. They said,
“This is the man who was in Jerusalem trying to destroy those
who trust in this name! He came here to arrest the followers of
Jesus and take them back to the leading priests.”
[22]But Saul grew more powerful. His proofs that Jesus is the
Christ were so strong that his own people in Damascus could
not argue with him.
[23]After many days, they made plans to kill Saul. [24]They were
watching the city gates day and night, but Saul learned about
their plan. [25]One night some followers of Saul helped him leave
the city by lowering him in a basket through an opening in the
city wall.

## *Saul Preaches in Jerusalem*

[26]When Saul went to Jerusalem, he tried to join the group of
followers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe
he was really a follower. [27]But Barnabas accepted Saul and took
him to the apostles. Barnabas explained to them that Saul had
seen the Lord on the road and the Lord had spoken to Saul.
Then he told them how boldly Saul had preached in the name of
Jesus in Damascus.
[28]And so Saul stayed with the followers, going everywhere in
Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. [29]He
would often talk and argue with the Jewish people who spoke
Greek, but they were trying to kill him. [30]When the followers
learned about this, they took Saul to Caesarea and from there
sent him to Tarsus.
[31]The church everywhere in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had
a time of peace and became stronger. Respecting the Lord by
the way they lived, and being encouraged by the Holy Spirit, the
group of believers continued to grow.

## *Peter Heals Aeneas*

[32]As Peter was traveling through all the area, he visited
God’s people who lived in Lydda. [33]There he met a man named
Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had not been able to leave his
bed for the past eight years. [34]Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus
Christ heals you. Stand up and make your bed.” Aeneas stood
up immediately. [35]All the people living in Lydda and on the Plain
of Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

## *Peter Heals Tabitha*

[36]In the city of Joppa there was a follower named Tabitha
(whose Greek name was Dorcas). She was always doing good
deeds and kind acts. [37]While Peter was in Lydda, Tabitha
became sick and died. Her body was washed and put in a room
upstairs. [38]Since Lydda is near Joppa and the followers in Joppa
heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two messengers to
Peter. They begged him, “Hurry, please come to us!” [39]So Peter
got ready and went with them. When he arrived, they took him
to the upstairs room where all the widows stood around Peter,
crying. They showed him the shirts and coats Tabitha had made
when she was still alive. [40]Peter sent everyone out of the room
and kneeled and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said,
“Tabitha, stand up.” She opened her eyes, and when she saw
Peter, she sat up. [41]He gave her his hand and helped her up.
Then he called the saints and the widows into the room and
showed them that Tabitha was alive. [42]People everywhere in
Joppa learned about this, and many believed in the Lord.
[43]Peter stayed in Joppa for many days with a man named Simon
who was a tanner.

# July 1

## God Is Angry at Evil

*They made God angry by building places to worship gods.*

Psalm 78:58

"so put all evil things out of your life… . These things make God angry" (Colossians 3:5–6). Many don't understand God's anger because they confuse the wrath of God with the wrath of man. The two have little in common. Human anger is typically self-driven and prone to explosions of temper and violent deeds. We get ticked off because we've been overlooked, neglected, or cheated. This is the anger of man. It is not, however, the anger of God.

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

from *In the Grip of Grace*

## 1 Chronicles 26:1—27:34

26 These are the groups of the gatekeepers. From the family of
Korah, there was Meshelemiah son of Kore, who was from
Asaph's family. 2Meshelemiah had sons. Zechariah was his first
son, Jediael was second, Zebadiah was third, Jathniel was
fourth, 3Elam was fifth, Jehohanan was sixth, and Eliehoenai
was seventh.
4Obed-Edom had sons. Shemaiah was his first son, Jehozabad
was second, Joah was third, Sacar was fourth, Nethanel was
fifth, 5Ammiel was sixth, Issachar was seventh, and Peullethai
was eighth. God blessed Obed-Edom with children.
6Obed-Edom's son Shemaiah also had sons. They were
leaders in their father's family because they were capable men.
7Shemaiah's sons were Othni, Rephael, Obed, Elzabad, Elihu,
and Semakiah. Elihu, and Semakiah were skilled workers. 8All
these were Obed-Edom's descendants. They and their sons and

relatives were capable men and strong workers. Obed-Edom had sixty-two descendants in all.

[9]Meshelemiah had sons and relatives who were skilled workers. In all, there were eighteen.

[10]From the Merari family, Hosah had sons. Shimri was chosen to be in charge. Although he was not the oldest son, his father chose him to be in charge. [11]Hilkiah was his second son, Tabaliah was third, and Zechariah was fourth. In all, Hosah had thirteen sons and relatives.

[12]These were the leaders of the groups of gatekeepers, and they served in the Temple of the LORD. Their relatives also worked in the Temple. [13]By throwing lots, each family chose a gate to guard. Young and old threw lots.

[14]Meshelemiah was chosen by lot to guard the East Gate. Then lots were thrown for Meshelemiah's son Zechariah. He was a wise counselor and was chosen for the North Gate. [15]Obed-Edom was chosen for the South Gate, and Obed-Edom's sons were chosen to guard the storehouse. [16]Shuppim and Hosah were chosen for the West Gate and the Shalleketh Gate on the upper road.

Guards stood side by side with guards. [17]Six Levites stood guard every day at the East Gate; four Levites stood guard every day at the North Gate; four Levites stood guard every day at the South Gate; and two Levites at a time guarded the storehouse. [18]There were two guards at the western court and four guards on the road to the court.

[19]These were the groups of the gatekeepers from the families of Korah and Merari.

## *Other Leaders*

[20]Other Levites were responsible for guarding the treasuries of the Temple of God and for the places where the holy items were kept.

[21]Ladan was Gershon's son and the ancestor of several family groups. Jehiel was a leader of one of the family groups. [22]His sons were Zetham and Joel his brother, and they were responsible for the treasuries of the Temple of the LORD.

[23]Other leaders were chosen from the family groups of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. [24]Shubael, the descendant of Gershom, who was Moses' son, was the leader responsible for the treasuries. [25]These were Shubael's relatives from Eliezer: Eliezer's son Rehabiah, Rehabiah's son Jeshaiah, Jeshaiah's son Joram, Joram's son Zicri, and Zicri's son Shelomith. [26]Shelomith and his relatives were responsible for everything that had been collected for the Temple by King David, by the heads of families, by the commanders of a thousand men and of a hundred men, and by other army commanders. [27]They also gave some of the

things they had taken in wars to be used in repairing the Temple of the LORD. 28Shelomith and his relatives took care of all the holy items. Some had been given by Samuel the seer, Saul son of Kish, Abner son of Ner, and Joab son of Zeruiah.

29Kenaniah was from the Izhar family. He and his sons worked outside the Temple as officers and judges in different places in Israel.

30Hashabiah was from the Hebron family. He and his relatives were responsible for the LORD's work and the king's business in Israel west of the Jordan River. There were seventeen hundred skilled men in Hashabiah's group. 31The history of the Hebron family shows that Jeriah was their leader. In David's fortieth year as king, the records were searched, and some capable men of the Hebron family were found living at Jazer in Gilead. 32Jeriah had twenty-seven hundred relatives who were skilled men and leaders of families. King David gave them the responsibility of directing the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh in God's work and the king's business.

## *Army Divisions*

27 This is the list of the Israelites who served the king in the army. Each division was on duty one month each year. There were leaders of families, commanders of a hundred men, commanders of a thousand men, and other officers. Each division had twenty-four thousand men.

2Jashobeam son of Zabdiel was in charge of the first division for the first month. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division. 3Jashobeam, one of the descendants of Perez, was leader of all the army officers for the first month.

4Dodai, from the Ahohites, was in charge of the division for the second month. Mikloth was a leader in the division. There were twenty-four thousand men in Dodai's division.

5The third commander, for the third month, was Benaiah son of Jehoiada the priest. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division. 6He was the Benaiah who was one of the Thirty[n] soldiers. Benaiah was a brave warrior who led those men. Benaiah's son Ammizabad was in charge of Benaiah's division.

7The fourth commander, for the fourth month, was Asahel, the brother of Joab. Later, Asahel's son Zebadiah took his place as commander. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

8The fifth commander, for the fifth month, was Shamhuth, from Izrah's family. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

9The sixth commander, for the sixth month, was Ira son of Ikkesh from the town of Tekoa. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

10 The seventh commander, for the seventh month, was
Helez. He was from the Pelonites and a descendant of Ephraim.
There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.
11 The eighth commander, for the eighth month, was
Sibbecai. He was from Hushah and was from Zerah's family.
There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.
12 The ninth commander, for the ninth month, was Abiezer.
He was from Anathoth in Benjamin. There were twenty-four
thousand men in his division.
13 The tenth commander, for the tenth month, was Maharai.
He was from Netophah and was from Zerah's family. There
were twenty-four thousand men in his division.
14 The eleventh commander, for the eleventh month, was
Benaiah. He was from Pirathon in Ephraim. There were twenty-
four thousand men in his division.
15 The twelfth commander, for the twelfth month, was Heldai.
He was from Netophah and was from Othniel's family. There
were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

## *Leaders of the Tribes*

16 These were the leaders of the tribes of Israel. Eliezer son
of Zicri was over the tribe of Reuben. Shephatiah son of Maacah
was over the tribe of Simeon. 17 Hashabiah son of Kemuel was
over the tribe of Levi. Zadok was over the people of Aaron.
18 Elihu, one of David's brothers, was over the tribe of Judah.
Omri son of Michael was over the tribe of Issachar. 19 Ishmaiah
son of Obadiah was over the tribe of Zebulun. Jerimoth son of
Azriel was over the tribe of Naphtali. 20 Hoshea son of Azaziah
was over the tribe of Ephraim. Joel son of Pedaiah was over
West Manasseh. 21 Iddo son of Zechariah was over East
Manasseh. Jaasiel son of Abner was over the tribe of Benjamin.
22 Azarel son of Jeroham was over the tribe of Dan.
These were the leaders of the tribes of Israel.
23 The LORD had promised to make the Israelites as many as
the stars in the sky. So David only counted the men who were
twenty years old and older. 24 Joab son of Zeruiah began to
count the people, but he did not finish. God became angry with
Israel for counting the people, so the number of the people was
not put in the history book about King David's rule.

## *The King's Directors*

25 Azmaveth son of Adiel was in charge of the royal
storehouses.
Jonathan son of Uzziah was in charge of the storehouses in
the country, towns, villages, and towers.
26 Ezri son of Kelub was in charge of the field workers who

farmed the land.
27 Shimei, from the town of Ramah, was in charge of the vineyards.
Zabdi, from Shapham, was in charge of storing the wine that came from the vineyards.
28 Baal-Hanan, from Geder, was in charge of the olive trees and sycamore trees in the western hills.
Joash was in charge of storing the olive oil.
29 Shitrai, from Sharon, was in charge of the herds that fed in the Plain of Sharon.
Shaphat son of Adlai was in charge of the herds in the valleys.
30 Obil, an Ishmaelite, was in charge of the camels.
Jehdeiah, from Meronoth, was in charge of the donkeys.
31 Jaziz, from the Hagrites, was in charge of the flocks.
All these men were the officers who took care of King David's property.
32 Jonathan was David's uncle, and he advised David. Jonathan was a wise man and a teacher of the law. Jehiel son of Hacmoni took care of the king's sons. 33 Ahithophel advised the king. Hushai, from the Arkite people, was the king's friend. 34 Jehoiada and Abiathar later took Ahithophel's place in advising the king. Jehoiada was Benaiah's son. Joab was the commander of the king's army.

## Psalm 78:56–64

56 But they tested God
and turned against God Most High;
they did not keep his rules.

57 They turned away and were disloyal just like their ancestors.
They were like a crooked bow that does not shoot straight.

58 They made God angry by building places to worship gods;
they made him jealous with their idols.

59 When God heard them, he became very angry
and rejected the people of Israel completely.

60 He left his dwelling at Shiloh,
the Tent where he lived among the people.

61 He let the Ark, his power, be captured;
he let the Ark, his glory, be taken by enemies.

62 He let his people be killed;
he was very angry with his children.

63 The young men died by fire,
and the young women had no one to marry.

64 Their priests fell by the sword,
but their widows were not allowed to cry.

## Proverbs 20:4–5

4 Lazy farmers don't plow when they should;
they expect a harvest, but there is none.

5 People's thoughts can be like a deep well,
but someone with understanding can find the wisdom there.

## Acts 10:1–23a

### *Peter Teaches Cornelius*

10 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, an officer in the Italian group of the Roman army. 2 Cornelius was a religious man. He and all the other people who lived in his house worshiped the true God. He gave much of his money to the poor and prayed to God often. 3 One afternoon about three o'clock, Cornelius clearly saw a vision. An angel of God came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

4 Cornelius stared at the angel. He became afraid and said,
“What do you want, Lord?”
The angel said, “God has heard your prayers. He has seen
that you give to the poor, and he remembers you. 5 Send some
men now to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is also
called Peter. 6 He is staying with a man, also named Simon, who
is a tanner and has a house beside the sea.” 7 When the angel
who spoke to Cornelius left, Cornelius called two of his servants
and a soldier, a religious man who worked for him. 8 Cornelius
explained everything to them and sent them to Joppa.
9 About noon the next day as they came near Joppa, Peter was
going up to the roof[n] to pray. 10 He was hungry and wanted to
eat, but while the food was being prepared, he had a vision.
11 He saw heaven opened and something coming down that
looked like a big sheet being lowered to earth by its four
corners. 12 In it were all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds.
13 Then a voice said to Peter, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”
14 But Peter said, “No, Lord! I have never eaten food that is
unholy or unclean.”
15 But the voice said to him again, “God has made these
things clean, so don’t call them ‘unholy’!” 16 This happened
three times, and at once the sheet was taken back to heaven.
17 While Peter was wondering what this vision meant, the
men Cornelius sent had found Simon’s house and were standing
at the gate. 18 They asked, “Is Simon Peter staying here?”
19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit
said to him, “Listen, three men are looking for you. 20 Get up
and go downstairs. Go with them without doubting, because I
have sent them to you.”
21 So Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you
are looking for. Why did you come here?”
22 They said, “A holy angel spoke to Cornelius, an army officer
and a good man; he worships God. All the people respect him.
The angel told Cornelius to ask you to come to his house so that
he can hear what you have to say.” 23 So Peter asked the men to
come in and spend the night.

# July 2

# The Brief Journey of Life

*"Our time on earth is like a shadow."*

1 Chronicles 29:15

He who "lives forever" has placed himself at the head of a band of pilgrims who mutter, "Lord, how long will this go on?" (Psalm 89:46). "How long must I endure this sickness?"

"How long must I endure this spouse?"

"How long must I endure this paycheck?"

Do you really want God to answer? He could, you know. He could answer in terms of the here and now with time increments we know. "Two more years on the illness." "The rest of your life in the marriage." "Ten more years for the bills."

But he seldom does that. He usually opts to measure the *here and now* against the *there and then.* And when you compare *this* life to *that* life, this life ain't long.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## 1 Chronicles 28:1—29:30

### *David's Plans for the Temple*

28 David commanded all the leaders of Israel to come to
Jerusalem. There were the leaders of the tribes, commanders of
the divisions serving the king, commanders of a thousand men
and of a hundred men, leaders who took care of the property
and animals that belonged to the king and his sons, men over
the palace, the powerful men, and all the brave warriors.

2 King David stood up and said, "Listen to me, my relatives
and my people. I wanted to build a place to keep the Ark of the
Agreement with the LORD. I wanted it to be God's footstool. So I
made plans to build a temple. 3 But God said to me, 'You must
not build a temple for worshiping me, because you are a soldier
and have killed many people.'

4“But the LORD, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole
family to be king of Israel forever. He chose the tribe of Judah to
lead, and from the people of Judah, he chose my father’s family.
From that family God was pleased to make me king of Israel.
5The LORD has given me many sons, and from those sons he has
chosen Solomon to be the new king of Israel. Israel is the LORD’s
kingdom. 6The LORD said to me, ‘Your son Solomon will build my
Temple and its courtyards. I have chosen Solomon to be my son,
and I will be his father. 7He is obeying my laws and commands
now. If he continues to obey them, I will make his kingdom
strong forever.’”

8David said, “Now, in front of all Israel, the assembly of the
LORD, and in the hearing of God, I tell you these things: Be
careful to obey all the commands of the LORD your God. Then
you will keep this good land and pass it on to your descendants
forever.

9“And you, my son Solomon, accept the God of your father.
Serve him completely and willingly, because the LORD knows
what is in everyone’s mind. He understands everything you
think. If you go to him for help, you will get an answer. But if
you turn away from him, he will leave you forever. 10Solomon,
you must understand this. The LORD has chosen you to build the
Temple as his holy place. Be strong and finish the job.”

11Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for building the
Temple and the courtyard around the Temple. They included its
buildings, its storerooms, its upper rooms, its inside rooms, and
the place where the people’s sins were removed. 12David gave
him plans for everything he had in mind: the courtyards around
the LORD’s Temple and all the rooms around it, the Temple
treasuries, and the treasuries of the holy items used in the
Temple. 13David gave Solomon directions for the groups of the
priests and Levites. David told him about all the work of serving
in the Temple of the LORD and about the items to be used in the
Temple service 14that were made of gold or silver. David told
Solomon how much gold or silver should be used to make each
thing. 15David told him how much gold to use for each gold
lampstand and its lamps and how much silver to use for each
silver lampstand and its lamps. The different lampstands were
to be used where needed. 16David told how much gold should
be used for each table that held the holy bread and how much
silver should be used for the silver tables. 17He told how much
pure gold should be used to make the forks, bowls, and pitchers
and how much gold should be used to make each gold dish. He
told how much silver should be used to make each silver dish
18and how much pure gold should be used for the altar of
incense. He also gave Solomon the plans for the chariot of the
golden creatures that spread their wings over the Ark of the
Agreement with the LORD.

19David said, “All these plans were written with the LORD

guiding me. He helped me understand everything in the plans."
20 David also said to his son Solomon, "Be strong and brave,
and do the work. Don't be afraid or discouraged, because the
LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or leave you
until all the work for the Temple of the LORD is finished. 21 The
groups of the priests and Levites are ready for all the work on
the Temple of God. Every skilled worker is ready to help you
with all the work. The leaders and all the people will obey every
command you give."

## *Gifts for Building the Temple*

29 King David said to all the Israelites who were gathered, "God
chose my son Solomon, who is young and hasn't yet learned
what he needs to know, but the work is important. This palace is
not for people; it is for the LORD God. 2 I have done my best to
prepare for building the Temple of God. I have given gold for
the things made of gold and silver for the things made of silver.
I have given bronze for the things made of bronze and iron for
the things made of iron. I have given wood for the things made
of wood and onyx for the settings. I have given turquoise gems
of many different colors, valuable stones, and white marble. I
have given much of all these things. 3 I have already given this
for the Temple, but now I am also giving my own treasures of
gold and silver, because I really want the Temple of my God to
be built. 4 I have given about two hundred twenty thousand
pounds of pure gold from Ophir and about five hundred twenty
thousand pounds of pure silver. They will be used to cover the
walls of the buildings 5 and for all the gold and silver work.
Skilled men may use the gold and silver to make things for the
Temple. Now, who is ready to give himself to the service of the
LORD today?"
6 The family leaders and the leaders of the tribes of Israel,
the commanders of a thousand men and of a hundred men, and
the leaders responsible for the king's work gave their valuable
things. 7 They donated about three hundred eighty thousand
pounds of gold, about seven hundred fifty thousand pounds of
silver, about one million three hundred fifty thousand pounds of
bronze, and about seven million five hundred thousand pounds
of iron to the Temple of God. 8 People who had valuable gems
gave them to the treasury of the Temple of the LORD, and Jehiel,
from the Gershon family, took care of the valuable gems. 9 The
leaders gave willingly and completely to the LORD. The people
rejoiced to see their leaders give so gladly, and King David was
also very happy.

## *David's Prayer*

10 David praised the LORD in front of all the people who were
gathered. He said:

"We praise you, LORD,
God of our father Israel.
We praise you forever and ever.

11 LORD, you are great and powerful.
You have glory, victory, and honor.
Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you.

The kingdom belongs to you, LORD;
you are the ruler over everything.

12 Riches and honor come from you.
You rule everything.

You have the power and strength
to make anyone great and strong.

13 Now, our God, we thank you
and praise your glorious name.

14 "These things did not really come from me and my people.
Everything comes from you;
we have given you back what you gave us.

15 We are like foreigners and strangers,
as our ancestors were.

Our time on earth is like a shadow.
There is no hope.

16 LORD our God, we have gathered all this
to build your Temple for worship to you.

But everything has come from you;
everything belongs to you.

17I know, my God, that you test people's hearts.
You are happy when people do what is right.

I was happy to give all these things,
and I gave with an honest heart.

Your people gathered here are happy to give to you,
and I rejoice to see their giving.

18LORD, you are the God of our ancestors,
the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Make your people want to serve you always,
and make them want to obey you.

19Give my son Solomon a desire to serve you.
Help him always obey your commands, laws, and rules.

Help him build the Temple
for which I have prepared."

20Then David said to all the people who were gathered, "Praise the LORD your God." So they all praised the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and they bowed to the ground to give honor to the LORD and the king.

## *Solomon Becomes King*

21The next day the people sacrificed to the LORD. They offered burnt offerings to him of a thousand bulls, a thousand male sheep, and a thousand male lambs. They also brought drink offerings. Many sacrifices were made for all the people of Israel. 22That day the people ate and drank with much joy, and the LORD was with them.

And they made David's son Solomon king for the second time. They poured olive oil on Solomon to appoint him king in the presence of the LORD. And they poured oil on Zadok to appoint him as priest. 23Then Solomon sat on the LORD's throne

as king and took his father David's place. Solomon was very successful, and all the people of Israel obeyed him. [24]All the leaders and soldiers and King David's sons accepted Solomon as king and promised to obey him. [25]The LORD made Solomon great before all the Israelites and gave Solomon much honor. No king of Israel before Solomon had such honor.

### *David's Death*

[26]David son of Jesse was king over all Israel. [27]He had ruled over Israel forty years—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. [28]David died when he was old. He had lived a good, long life and had received many riches and honors. His son Solomon became king after him.

[29]Everything David did as king, from beginning to end, is recorded in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet, and the records of Gad the seer. [30]Those writings tell what David did as king of Israel. They tell about his power and what happened to him and to Israel and to all the kingdoms around them.

## Psalm 78:65–72

[65]Then the LORD got up as if he had been asleep;
he awoke like a man who had been drunk with wine.

[66]He struck down his enemies
and disgraced them forever.

[67]But God rejected the family of Joseph;
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim.

[68]Instead, he chose the tribe of Judah
and Mount Zion, which he loves.

[69]And he built his Temple high like the mountains.
Like the earth, he built it to last forever.

[70]He chose David to be his servant
and took him from the sheep pens.

[71]He brought him from tending the sheep
so he could lead the flock, the people of Jacob,
his own people, the people of Israel.

[72]And David led them with an innocent heart
and guided them with skillful hands.

## Proverbs 20:6–7

[6]Many people claim to be loyal,
but it is hard to find a trustworthy person.

[7]The good people who live honest lives
will be a blessing to their children.

## Acts 10:23b–48

The next day Peter got ready and went with them, and some of the followers from Joppa joined him. [24]On the following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. [25]When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. [26]But Peter helped him up, saying, “Stand up. I too am only a human.” [27]As he talked with Cornelius, Peter went inside where he saw many people gathered. [28]He said, “You people understand that it is against our law for Jewish people to associate with or visit anyone who is not Jewish. But God has shown me that I should not call any person ‘unholy’ or ‘unclean.’ [29]That is why I did not argue when I was asked to come here. Now, please tell me why you sent for me.”

[30]Cornelius said, “Four days ago, I was praying in my house at this same time—three o’clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, there was a man standing before me wearing shining clothes. [31]He said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and has seen that you give to the poor and remembers you. [32]So send some

men to Joppa and ask Simon Peter to come. Peter is staying in the house of a man, also named Simon, who is a tanner and has a house beside the sea.’ 33So I sent for you immediately, and it was very good of you to come. Now we are all here before God to hear everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

34Peter began to speak: “I really understand now that to God every person is the same. 35In every country God accepts anyone who worships him and does what is right. 36You know the message that God has sent to the people of Israel is the Good News that peace has come through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lord of all people! 37You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after John[n] preached to the people about baptism. 38You know about Jesus from Nazareth, that God gave him the Holy Spirit and power. You know how Jesus went everywhere doing good and healing those who were ruled by the devil, because God was with him. 39We saw what Jesus did in Judea and in Jerusalem, but the Jews in Jerusalem killed him by hanging him on a cross. 40Yet, on the third day, God raised Jesus to life and caused him to be seen, 41not by all the people, but only by the witnesses God had already chosen. And we are those witnesses who ate and drank with him after he was raised from the dead. 42He told us to preach to the people and to tell them that he is the one whom God chose to be the judge of the living and the dead. 43All the prophets say it is true that all who believe in Jesus will be forgiven of their sins through Jesus’ name.”

44While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening. 45The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been given even to the nations. 46These believers heard them speaking in different languages[n] and praising God. Then Peter said, 47“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we did!” 48So Peter ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

# July 3

# God Knows the Answers

*“I will give you wisdom and knowledge.”*

2 Chronicles 1:12

Thomas came with doubts. Did Christ turn him away? Moses had his reservations. Did God tell him to go home? Job had his struggles. Did God avoid him?

Paul had his hard times. Did God abandon him?

No. God never turns away the sincere heart. Tough questions don’t stump God. He invites our probing.

Mark it down. God never turns away the honest seeker. Go to God with your questions. You may not find all the answers, but in finding God, you know the One who does.

from *Walking with the Savior*

## 2 Chronicles 1:1—2:18

### *Solomon Asks for Wisdom*

1 Solomon, David’s son, became a powerful king, because the LORD his God was with him and made him very great.

2Solomon spoke to all the people of Israel—the commanders of a hundred men and of a thousand men, the judges, every leader in all Israel, and the leaders of the families. 3Then Solomon and all the people with him went to the place of worship at the town of Gibeon. God’s Meeting Tent, which Moses the LORD’s servant had made in the desert, was there. 4David had brought the Ark of God from Kiriath Jearim to Jerusalem, where he had made a place for it and had set up a tent for it. 5The bronze altar that Bezalel son of Uri, who was the son of Hur, had made was in Gibeon in front of the Holy Tent. So Solomon and the people worshiped there. 6Solomon went up to the bronze altar in the presence of the LORD at the Meeting Tent and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.

7 That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, “Ask
for whatever you want me to give you.”
8 Solomon answered, “You have been very kind to my father
David, and you have made me king in his place. 9 Now, LORD God,
may your promise to my father David come true. You have made
me king of a people who are as many as the dust of the earth.
10 Now give me wisdom and knowledge so I can lead these
people in the right way, because no one can rule them without
your help.”
11 God said to Solomon, “You have not asked for wealth or
riches or honor, or for the death of your enemies, or for a long
life. But since you have asked for wisdom and knowledge to
lead my people, over whom I have made you king, 12 I will give
you wisdom and knowledge. I will also give you more wealth,
riches, and honor than any king who has lived before you or any
who will live after you.”
13 Then Solomon left the place of worship, the Meeting Tent,
at Gibeon and went back to Jerusalem. There King Solomon
ruled over Israel.

## *Solomon’s Wealth*

14 Solomon had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve
thousand horses. He kept some in special cities for the chariots,
and others he kept with him in Jerusalem. 15 In Jerusalem
Solomon made silver and gold as plentiful as stones and cedar
trees as plentiful as the fig trees on the western hills. 16 He
imported horses from Egypt and Kue; his traders bought them
in Kue. 17 They imported chariots from Egypt for about fifteen
pounds of silver apiece, and horses cost nearly four pounds of
silver apiece. Then they sold the horses and chariots to all the
kings of the Hittites and the Arameans.

## *Solomon Prepares for the Temple*

2 Solomon decided to build a temple as a place to worship the
LORD and also a palace for himself. 2 He chose seventy thousand
men to carry loads, eighty thousand men to cut stone in the hill
country, and thirty-six hundred men to direct the workers.
3 Solomon sent this message to Hiram king of the city of Tyre:
“Help me as you helped my father David by sending him cedar
logs so he could build himself a palace to live in. 4 I will build a
temple for worshiping the LORD my God, and I will give this
temple to him. There we will burn sweet-smelling spices in his
presence. We will continually set out the holy bread in God’s
presence. And we will burn sacrifices every morning and
evening, on Sabbath days and New Moons, and on the other
feast days commanded by the LORD our God. This is a rule for

Israel to obey forever.

5 “The temple I build will be great, because our God is
greater than all gods. 6 But no one can really build a house for
our God. Not even the highest of heavens can hold him. How
then can I build a temple for him except as a place to burn
sacrifices to him?

7 “Now send me a man skilled in working with gold, silver,
bronze, and iron, and with purple, red, and blue thread. He
must also know how to make engravings. He will work with my
skilled craftsmen in Judah and Jerusalem, whom my father
David chose.

8 “Also send me cedar, pine, and juniper logs from Lebanon. I
know your servants are experienced at cutting down the trees
in Lebanon, and my servants will help them. 9 Send me a lot of
wood, because the temple I am going to build will be large and
wonderful. 10 I will give your servants who cut the wood one
hundred twenty-five thousand bushels of wheat, one hundred
twenty-five thousand bushels of barley, one hundred fifteen
thousand gallons of wine, and one hundred fifteen thousand
gallons of oil.”

11 Then Hiram king of Tyre answered Solomon with this
letter: “Solomon, because the LORD loves his people, he chose
you to be their king.” 12 Hiram also said: “Praise the LORD, the
God of Israel, who made heaven and earth! He has given King
David a wise son, one with wisdom and understanding, who will
build a temple for the LORD and a palace for himself.

13 “I will send you a skilled and wise man named Huram-Abi.
14 His mother was from the people of Dan, and his father was
from Tyre. Huram-Abi is skilled in working with gold, silver,
bronze, iron, stone, and wood, and with purple, blue, and red
thread, and expensive linen. He is skilled in making engravings
and can make any design you show him. He will help your
craftsmen and the craftsmen of your father David.

15 “Now send my servants the wheat, barley, oil, and wine you
promised. 16 We will cut as much wood from Lebanon as you
need and will bring it on rafts by sea to Joppa. Then you may
carry it to Jerusalem.”

17 Solomon counted all the foreigners living in Israel. (This
was after the time his father David had counted the people.)
There were one hundred fifty-three thousand six hundred
foreigners in the country. 18 Solomon chose seventy thousand of
them to carry loads, eighty thousand of them to cut stone in the
mountains, and thirty-six hundred of them to direct the workers
and to keep the people working.

## Psalm 79:1–4

## *The Nation Cries for Jerusalem*

**A psalm of Asaph.**

79 God, nations have come against your chosen people.
They have ruined your holy Temple.
They have turned Jerusalem into ruins.

2They have given the bodies of your servants as food to the wild birds.

They have given the bodies of those who worship you to the wild animals.

3They have spilled blood like water all around Jerusalem.
No one was left to bury the dead.

4We are a joke to the other nations;
they laugh and make fun of us.

## Proverbs 20:8–9

8When a king sits on his throne to judge,
he knows evil when he sees it.

9No one can say, “I am innocent;
I have never done anything wrong.”

## Acts 11:1–30

## *Peter Returns to Jerusalem*

11 The apostles and the believers in Judea heard that some who were not Jewish had accepted God's teaching too. 2But when Peter came to Jerusalem, some people argued with him. 3They said, "You went into the homes of people who are not circumcised and ate with them!"

4So Peter explained the whole story to them. 5He said, "I was in the city of Joppa, and while I was praying, I had a vision. I saw something that looked like a big sheet being lowered from heaven by its four corners. It came very close to me. 6I looked inside it and saw animals, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds. 7I heard a voice say to me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 8But I said, 'No, Lord! I have never eaten anything that is unholy or unclean.' 9But the voice from heaven spoke again, 'God has made these things clean, so don't call them unholy.' 10This happened three times. Then the whole thing was taken back to heaven. 11Right then three men who were sent to me from Caesarea came to the house where I was staying. 12The Spirit told me to go with them without doubting. These six believers here also went with me, and we entered the house of Cornelius. 13He told us about the angel he saw standing in his house. The angel said to him, 'Send some men to Joppa and invite Simon Peter to come. 14By the words he will say to you, you and all your family will be saved.' 15When I began my speech, the Holy Spirit came on them just as he came on us at the beginning. 16Then I remembered the words of the Lord. He said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17Since God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I stop the work of God?"

18When the believers heard this, they stopped arguing. They praised God and said, "So God is allowing even other nations to turn to him and live."

## *The Good News Comes to Antioch*

19Many of the believers were scattered when they were persecuted after Stephen was killed. Some of them went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch telling the message to others, but only to Jews. 20Some of these believers were people from Cyprus and Cyrene. When they came to Antioch, they spoke also to Greeks,[n] telling them the Good News about the Lord Jesus. 21The Lord was helping the believers, and a large group of people believed and turned to the Lord.

22The church in Jerusalem heard about all of this, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23–24Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith. When he reached Antioch and saw how God had blessed the people, he was glad. He

encouraged all the believers in Antioch always to obey the Lord with all their hearts, and many people became followers of the Lord.

25Then Barnabas went to the city of Tarsus to look for Saul,
26and when he found Saul, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year Saul and Barnabas met with the church and taught many people there. In Antioch the followers were called Christians for the first time.

27About that time some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28One of them, named Agabus, stood up and spoke with the help of the Holy Spirit. He said, “A very hard time is coming to the whole world. There will be no food to eat.” (This happened when Claudius ruled.) 29The followers all decided to help the believers who lived in Judea, as much as each one could. 30They gathered the money and gave it to Barnabas and Saul, who brought it to the elders in Judea.

# July 4

## A Plea for Mercy

*Show your mercy to us soon, because we are helpless!*

Psalm 79:8

"[God] does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives" (2 Peter 3:9). What of those who die with no faith? My husband never prayed. My grandpa never worshiped. My mother never opened a Bible, much less her heart. What about the one who never believed?

How do we know he didn't?

Who among us is privy to a person's final thoughts? Who among us knows what transpires in those final moments? Are you sure no prayer was offered? Eternity can bend the proudest knees. Could a person stare into the yawning canyon of death without whispering a plea for mercy? And could our God, who is partial to the humble, resist it?

He couldn't on Calvary. The confession of the thief on the cross was both a first and final one. But Christ heard it. Christ received it. Maybe you never heard your loved one confess Christ, but who's to say Christ didn't?

from *Traveling Light*

## 2 Chronicles 3:1—5:1

### *Solomon Builds the Temple*

3 Then Solomon began to build the Temple of the LORD in
Jerusalem on Mount Moriah. This was where the LORD had
appeared to David, Solomon's father. Solomon built the Temple
on the place David had prepared on the threshing floor of
Araunah the Jebusite. 2Solomon began building in the second
month of the fourth year he ruled Israel.

3Solomon used these measurements for building the Temple
of God. It was ninety feet long and thirty feet wide, using the

old measurement. [4]The porch in front of the main room of the Temple was thirty feet long and thirty feet high.

He covered the inside of the porch with pure gold. [5]He put panels of pine on the walls of the main room and covered them with pure gold. Then he put designs of palm trees and chains in the gold. [6]He decorated the Temple with gems and gold from Parvaim.[n] [7]He put gold on the Temple's ceiling beams, doorposts, walls, and doors, and he carved creatures with wings on the walls.

[8]Then he made the Most Holy Place. It was thirty feet long and thirty feet wide, as wide as the Temple. He covered its walls with about forty-six thousand pounds of pure gold. [9]The gold nails weighed over a pound. He also covered the upper rooms with gold.

[10]He made two creatures with wings for the Most Holy Place and covered them with gold. [11]The wings of the gold creatures were thirty feet across. One wing of one creature was seven and one-half feet long and touched the Temple wall. The creature's other wing was also seven and one-half feet long, and it touched a wing of the second creature. [12]One wing of the second creature touched the other side of the room and was also seven and one-half feet long. The second creature's other wing touched the first creature's wing, and it was also seven and one-half feet long. [13]Together, the creatures' wings were thirty feet across. The creatures stood on their feet, facing the main room.

[14]He made the curtain of blue, purple, and red thread, and expensive linen, and he put designs of creatures with wings in it.

[15]He made two pillars to stand in front of the Temple. They were about fifty-two feet tall, and the capital of each pillar was over seven feet tall. [16]He made a net of chains and put them on the tops of the pillars. He made a hundred pomegranates and put them on the chains. [17]Then he put the pillars up in front of the Temple. One pillar stood on the south side, the other on the north. He named the south pillar He Establishes and the north pillar In Him Is Strength.

## *Things for the Temple*

4 [4] He made a bronze altar thirty feet long, thirty feet wide, and fifteen feet tall. [2]Then he made from bronze a large round bowl, which was called the Sea. It was forty-five feet around, fifteen feet across, and seven and one-half feet deep. [3]There were carvings of bulls under the rim of the bowl—ten bulls every eighteen inches. They were in two rows and were made in one piece with the bowl.

[4]The bowl rested on the backs of twelve bronze bulls that faced outward from the center of the bowl. Three bulls faced

north, three faced west, three faced south, and three faced east.
5The sides of the bowl were four inches thick, and it held about
seventeen thousand five hundred gallons. The rim of the bowl
was like the rim of a cup or like a lily blossom.
6He made ten smaller bowls and put five on the south side
and five on the north. They were for washing the animals for
the burnt offerings, but the large bowl was for the priests to
wash in.
7He made ten lampstands of gold, following the plans. He
put them in the Temple, five on the south side and five on the
north.
8He made ten tables and put them in the Temple, five on the
south side and five on the north. And he used gold to make a
hundred other bowls.
9He also made the priests' courtyard and the large
courtyard. He made the doors that opened to the courtyard and
covered them with bronze. 10Then he put the large bowl in the
southeast corner of the Temple.
11Huram also made bowls, shovels, and small bowls. So he
finished his work for King Solomon on the Temple of God:

12two pillars;

two large bowls for the capitals on top of the
pillars;

two nets to cover the two large bowls for the
capitals on top of the pillars;

13four hundred pomegranates for the two nets
(there were two rows of pomegranates
for each net covering the bowls for the
capitals on top of the pillars);

14the stands with a bowl on each stand;
15the large bowl with twelve bulls under it;
16the pots, shovels, forks, and all the things to go with them.
All the things that Huram-Abi made for King Solomon for the
Temple of the LORD were made of polished bronze. 17The king
had these things poured into clay molds that were made in the
plain of the Jordan River between Succoth and Zarethan.
18Solomon had so many things made that the total weight of all
the bronze was never known.
19Solomon also made all the things for God's Temple: the

golden altar; tables which held the bread that shows God's people are in his presence; 20the lampstands and their lamps of pure gold, to burn in front of the Most Holy Place as planned; 21the flowers, lamps, and tongs of pure gold; 22the pure gold wick trimmers, small bowls, pans, and dishes used to carry coals, the gold doors for the Temple, and the inside doors of the Most Holy Place and of the main room.
5 Finally all the work Solomon did for the Temple of the LORD was finished. He brought in everything his father David had set apart for the Temple—all the silver and gold and other articles. And he put everything in the treasuries of God's Temple.

## Psalm 79:5–11

5LORD, how long will this last?
Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy burn like a fire?

6Be angry with the nations that do not know you
and with the kingdoms that do not honor you.

7They have gobbled up the people of Jacob
and destroyed their land.

8Don't punish us for our past sins.
Show your mercy to us soon,
because we are helpless!

9God our Savior, help us
so people will praise you.

Save us and forgive our sins
so people will honor you.

10Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"

Tell the other nations in our presence
that you punish those who kill your servants.

11 Hear the moans of the prisoners.
Use your great power
to save those sentenced to die.

## Proverbs 20:10–12

10 The LORD hates both these things:
dishonest weights and dishonest measures.

11 Even children are known by their behavior;
their actions show if they are innocent and good.

12 The LORD has made both these things:
ears to hear and eyes to see.

## Acts 12:1–25

### *Herod Agrippa Hurts the Church*

12 During that same time King Herod began to mistreat some
who belonged to the church. 2 He ordered James, the brother of
John, to be killed by the sword. 3 Herod saw that some of the
people liked this, so he decided to arrest Peter, too. (This
happened during the time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.)
4 After Herod arrested Peter, he put him in jail and handed
him over to be guarded by sixteen soldiers. Herod planned to
bring Peter before the people for trial after the Passover Feast.
5 So Peter was kept in jail, but the church prayed earnestly to
God for him.

### *Peter Leaves the Jail*

6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was
sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. Other

soldiers were guarding the door of the jail. 7Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood there, and a light shined in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Hurry! Get up!” the angel said. And the chains fell off Peter’s hands. 8Then the angel told him, “Get dressed and put on your sandals.” And Peter did. Then the angel said, “Put on your coat and follow me.” 9So Peter followed him out, but he did not know if what the angel was doing was real; he thought he might be seeing a vision. 10They went past the first and second guards and came to the iron gate that separated them from the city. The gate opened by itself for them, and they went through it. When they had walked down one street, the angel suddenly left him.

11Then Peter realized what had happened. He thought, “Now I know that the Lord really sent his angel to me. He rescued me from Herod and from all the things the people thought would happen.”

12When he considered this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Many people were gathered there, praying. 13Peter knocked on the outside door, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer it. 14When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so happy she forgot to open the door. Instead, she ran inside and told the group, “Peter is at the door!”

15They said to her, “You are crazy!” But she kept on saying it was true, so they said, “It must be Peter’s angel.”

16Peter continued to knock, and when they opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. 17Peter made a sign with his hand to tell them to be quiet. He explained how the Lord led him out of the jail, and he said, “Tell James and the other believers what happened.” Then he left to go to another place.

18The next day the soldiers were very upset and wondered what had happened to Peter. 19Herod looked everywhere for him but could not find him. So he questioned the guards and ordered that they be killed.

## *The Death of Herod Agrippa*

Later Herod moved from Judea and went to the city of Caesarea, where he stayed. 20Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, but the people of those cities all came in a group to him. After convincing Blastus, the king’s personal servant, to be on their side, they asked Herod for peace, because their country got its food from his country.

21On a chosen day Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to the people. 22They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not a human!” 23Because Herod did not give the glory to God, an angel of the Lord immediately caused him to become sick, and he was eaten by worms and died.

24God’s message continued to spread and reach people.

[25]After Barnabas and Saul finished their task in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch, taking John Mark with them.

# July 5

# God Knows Us by Name

*We are your people, the sheep of your flock.*

Psalm 79:13

sheep aren't smart. They tend to wander into running creeks for water, then their wool grows heavy and they drown. They need a shepherd to lead them to "calm water" (Psalm 23:2). They have no natural defense—no claws, no horns, no fangs. They are helpless. Sheep need a shepherd with a "rod and shepherd's staff" (Psalm 23:4) to protect them. They have no sense of direction. They need someone to lead them "on paths that are right" (Psalm 23:3).

So do we. We, too, tend to be swept away by waters we should have avoided. We have no defense against the evil lion who prowls about seeking whom he might devour. We, too, get lost.

We need a shepherd. We need a shepherd to care for us and to guide us. And we have one. One who knows us by name.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

## 2 Chronicles 5:2—6:42

### *The Ark Is Brought into the Temple*

2 Solomon called for the elders of Israel, the heads of the
tribes, and the leaders of the families to come to him in
Jerusalem. He wanted them to bring the Ark of the Agreement
with the LORD from the older part of the city. 3 So all the
Israelites came together with the king during the festival in the
seventh month.
4 When all the elders of Israel arrived, the Levites lifted up
the Ark. 5 They carried the Ark of the Agreement, the Meeting
Tent, and the holy utensils in it; the priests and the Levites
brought them up. 6 King Solomon and all the Israelites gathered

before the Ark of the Agreement and sacrificed so many sheep and bulls no one could count them.

7Then the priests put the Ark of the Agreement with the LORD in its place inside the Most Holy Place in the Temple, under the wings of the golden creatures. 8The wings of these creatures were spread out over the place for the Ark, covering it and its carrying poles. 9The carrying poles were so long that anyone standing in the Holy Place in front of the Most Holy Place could see the ends of the poles. But no one could see them from outside the Holy Place. The poles are still there today. 10The only things inside the Ark were two stone tablets[n] that Moses had put in the Ark at Mount Sinai. That was where the LORD made his agreement with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

11Then all the priests left the Holy Place. (All the priests from each group had made themselves ready to serve the LORD.) 12All the Levite musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and all their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar. They were dressed in white linen and played cymbals, harps, and lyres. With them were one hundred twenty priests who blew trumpets. 13Those who blew the trumpets and those who sang together sounded like one person as they praised and thanked the LORD. They sang as others played their trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments. They praised the LORD with this song:

"He is good;
his love continues forever."

Then the Temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud. 14The priests could not continue their work because of the cloud, because the LORD's glory filled the Temple of God.

## *Solomon Speaks to the People*

6 Then Solomon said, "The LORD said he would live in the dark cloud. 2LORD, I have built a wonderful Temple for you—a place for you to live forever."

3While all the Israelites were standing there, King Solomon turned to them and blessed them. 4Then he said, "Praise the LORD, the God of Israel. He has done what he promised to my father David. The LORD said, 5'Since the time I brought my people out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel where a temple will be built for me. I did not choose a man to lead my people Israel. 6But now I have chosen Jerusalem as the place I am to be worshiped, and I have chosen David to lead my people Israel.'

7"My father David wanted to build a temple for the LORD, the

God of Israel. [8]But the LORD said to my father David, ‘It was good that you wanted to build a temple for me. [9]But you are not the one to build it. Your son, who comes from your own body, is the one who will build my temple.’

[10]“Now the LORD has kept his promise. I am the king now in place of David my father. Now I rule Israel as the LORD promised, and I have built the Temple for the LORD, the God of Israel. [11]There I have put the Ark, in which is the Agreement the LORD made with the Israelites.”

## *Solomon’s Prayer*

[12]Then Solomon stood facing the LORD’s altar, and all the Israelites were standing behind him. He spread out his hands. [13]He had made a bronze platform seven and one-half feet long, seven and one-half feet wide, and seven and one-half feet high, and he had placed it in the middle of the outer courtyard. Solomon stood on the platform. Then he kneeled in front of all the people of Israel gathered there, and he spread out his hands toward the sky. [14]He said, “LORD, God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven or on earth. You keep your agreement of love with your servants who truly follow you. [15]You have kept the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You spoke it with your own mouth and finished it with your hands today.

[16]“Now, LORD, God of Israel, keep the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You said, ‘If your sons are careful to obey my teachings as you have obeyed, there will always be someone from your family ruling Israel.’ [17]Now, LORD, God of Israel, please continue to keep that promise you made to your servant.

[18]“But, God, can you really live here on the earth with people? The sky and the highest place in heaven cannot contain you. Surely this house which I have built cannot contain you. [19]But please listen to my prayer and my request, because I am your servant. LORD my God, hear this prayer your servant prays to you. [20]Day and night please watch over this Temple where you have said you would be worshiped. Hear the prayer I pray facing this Temple. [21]Hear my prayers and the prayers of your people Israel when we pray facing this place. Hear from your home in heaven, and when you hear, forgive us.

[22]“If someone wrongs another person, he will be brought to the altar in this Temple. If he swears an oath that he is not guilty, [23]then hear in heaven. Judge the case, punish the guilty, but declare that the innocent person is not guilty.

[24]“When your people, the Israelites, sin against you, their enemies will defeat them. But if they come back to you and praise you and pray to you in this Temple, [25]then listen from heaven. Forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them

back to the land you gave to them and their ancestors.

26“When they sin against you, you will stop the rain from
falling on their land. Then they will pray, facing this place and
praising you; they will stop sinning when you make them suffer.
27When this happens, hear their prayer in heaven, and forgive
the sins of your servants, the Israelites. Teach them to do what
is right. Then please send rain to this land you have given
particularly to them.

28“At times the land will get so dry that no food will grow, or
a great sickness will spread among the people. Sometimes the
crops will be destroyed by locusts or grasshoppers. Your people
will be attacked in their cities by their enemies, or will become
sick. 29When any of these things happens, the people will
become truly sorry. If your people spread their hands in prayer
toward this Temple, 30then hear their prayers from your home
in heaven. Forgive and treat each person as he should be
treated because you know what is in a person’s heart. Only you
know what is in people’s hearts. 31Then the people will respect
and obey you as long as they live in this land you gave our
ancestors.

32“People who are not Israelites, foreigners from other lands,
will hear about your greatness and power. They will come from
far away to pray at this Temple. 33Then hear from your home in
heaven, and do whatever they ask you. Then people everywhere
will know you and respect you, just as your people Israel do.
Then everyone will know that I built this Temple as a place to
worship you.

34“When your people go out to fight their enemies along
some road on which you send them, your people will pray to
you, facing this city which you have chosen and the Temple I
have built for you. 35Then hear in heaven their prayers, and do
what is right.

36“Everyone sins, so your people will also sin against you.
You will become angry with them and will hand them over to
their enemies. Their enemies will capture them and take them
away to a country far or near. 37Your people will be sorry for
their sins when they are held as prisoners in another country.
They will be sorry and pray to you in the land where they are
held as prisoners, saying, ‘We have sinned. We have done wrong
and acted wickedly.’ 38They will truly turn back to you in the
land where they are captives. They will pray, facing this land
you gave their ancestors, this city you have chosen, and the
Temple I have built for you. 39Then hear their prayers from your
home in heaven and do what is right. Forgive your people who
have sinned against you.

40“Now, my God, look at us. Listen to the prayers we pray in
this place.

41 Now, rise, LORD God, and come to your resting place.
Come with the Ark of the Agreement that shows your strength.

Let your priests receive your salvation, LORD God,
and may your holy people be happy because of your goodness.

42 LORD God, do not reject your appointed one.
Remember your love for your servant David.”

## Psalm 79:12–13

12 Repay those around us seven times over
for their insults to you, Lord.

13 We are your people, the sheep of your flock.
We will thank you always;
forever and ever we will praise you.

## Proverbs 20:13–14

13 If you love to sleep, you will be poor.
If you stay awake, you will have plenty of food.

14 Buyers say, “This is bad. It’s no good.”
Then they go away and brag about what they bought.

## Acts 13:1–25

### *Barnabas and Saul Are Chosen*

13 In the church at Antioch there were these prophets and
teachers: Barnabas, Simeon (also called Niger), Lucius (from
the city of Cyrene), Manaen (who had grown up with Herod, the
ruler), and Saul. 2They were all worshiping the Lord and
fasting[n] for a certain time. During this time the Holy Spirit said
to them, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do a special
work for which I have chosen them.”
3So after they fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on[n]
Barnabas and Saul and sent them out.

## *Barnabas and Saul in Cyprus*

4Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went to the
city of Seleucia. From there they sailed to the island of Cyprus.
5When they came to Salamis, they preached the Good News of
God in the synagogues. John Mark was with them to help.
6They went across the whole island to Paphos where they
met a magician named Bar-Jesus. He was a false prophet 7who
always stayed close to Sergius Paulus, the governor and a smart
man. He asked Barnabas and Saul to come to him, because he
wanted to hear the message of God. 8But Elymas, the magician,
was against them. (Elymas is the name for Bar-Jesus in the
Greek language.) He tried to stop the governor from believing
in Jesus. 9But Saul, who was also called Paul, was filled with the
Holy Spirit. He looked straight at Elymas 10and said, “You son of
the devil! You are an enemy of everything that is right! You are
full of evil tricks and lies, always trying to change the Lord’s
truths into lies. 11Now the Lord will touch you, and you will be
blind. For a time you will not be able to see anything—not even
the light from the sun.”
Then everything became dark for Elymas, and he walked
around, trying to find someone to lead him by the hand. 12When
the governor saw this, he believed because he was amazed at
the teaching about the Lord.

## *Paul and Barnabas Leave Cyprus*

13Paul and those with him sailed from Paphos and came to
Perga, in Pamphylia. There John Mark left them to return to
Jerusalem. 14They continued their trip from Perga and went to
Antioch, a city in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they went into the
synagogue and sat down. 15After the law of Moses and the
writings of the prophets were read, the leaders of the
synagogue sent a message to Paul and Barnabas: “Brothers, if
you have any message that will encourage the people, please
speak.”
16Paul stood up, raised his hand, and said, “You Israelites

and you who worship God, please listen! 17The God of the
Israelites chose our ancestors. He made the people great during
the time they lived in Egypt, and he brought them out of that
country with great power. 18And he was patient with them[n] for
forty years in the desert. 19God destroyed seven nations in the
land of Canaan and gave the land to his people. 20All this
happened in about four hundred fifty years.

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel
the prophet. 21Then the people asked for a king, so God gave
them Saul son of Kish. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin and
was king for forty years. 22After God took him away, God made
David their king. God said about him: 'I have found in David son
of Jesse the kind of man I want. He will do all I want him to do.'
23So God has brought Jesus, one of David's descendants, to
Israel to be its Savior, as he promised. 24Before Jesus came,
John[n] preached to all the people of Israel about a baptism of
changed hearts and lives. 25When he was finishing his work, he
said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not the Christ. He is coming
later, and I am not worthy to untie his sandals.'

# July 6

## The Courtroom of the World

*"After this, for many days, those who had gone with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem saw him. They are now his witnesses to the people."*

Acts 13:31

we are witnesses. And like witnesses in a court, we are called to testify, to tell what we have seen and heard. And we are to speak truthfully. Our task is not to whitewash nor bloat the truth. Our task is to tell the truth. Period.

There is, however, one difference between the witness in court and the witness for Christ. The witness in court eventually steps down from the witness chair, but the witness for Christ never does. Since the claims of Christ are always on trial, court is perpetually in session, and we remain under oath.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## 2 Chronicles 7:1—8:18

### *The Temple Is Given to the Lord*

7 When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from the sky
and burned up the burnt offering and the sacrifices. The LORD's
glory filled the Temple. 2The priests could not enter the Temple
of the LORD, because the LORD's glory filled it. 3When all the
people of Israel saw the fire come down from heaven and the
LORD's glory on the Temple, they bowed down on the pavement
with their faces to the ground. They worshiped and thanked the
LORD, saying,

"He is good;
his love continues forever."

4Then King Solomon and all the people offered sacrifices to the LORD. 5King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand cattle and one hundred twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people gave the Temple to God. 6The priests stood ready to do their work. The Levites also stood with the instruments of the LORD's music that King David had made for praising the LORD. The priests and Levites were saying, "His love continues forever." The priests, who stood across from the Levites, blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

7Solomon made holy the middle part of the courtyard, which is in front of the Temple of the LORD. There he offered whole burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings. He offered them in the courtyard, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and fat.

8Solomon and all the Israelites celebrated the festival for seven days. There were many people, and they came from as far away as Lebo Hamath and the brook of Egypt. 9For seven days they celebrated giving the altar for the worship of God. Then they celebrated the festival for seven days. On the eighth day they had a meeting. 10On the twenty-third day of the seventh month Solomon sent the people home, full of joy. They were happy because the LORD had been so good to David, Solomon, and his people Israel.

## *The Lord Appears to Solomon*

11Solomon finished the Temple of the LORD and his royal palace. He had success in doing everything he planned in the Temple of the LORD and his own palace. 12Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself to be a Temple for sacrifices.

13"I may stop the sky from sending rain. I may command the locusts to destroy the land. I may send sicknesses to my people. 14Then if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, if they will pray and seek me and stop their evil ways, I will hear them from heaven. I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land. 15Now I will see them, and I will listen to the prayers prayed in this place. 16I have chosen this Temple and made it holy. So I will be worshiped there forever. Yes, I will always watch over it and love it.

17"But you must serve me as your father David did. You must obey all I have commanded and keep my laws and rules. 18If you do, I will make your kingdom strong. This is the agreement I made with your father David, saying, 'Someone from your family will always rule in Israel.'

19"But you must follow me and obey the laws and commands

I have given you. You must not serve or worship other gods. 20If you do, I will take the Israelites out of my land, the land I have given them, and I will leave this Temple that I have made holy. All the nations will make fun of it and speak evil about it. 21This Temple is honored now, but then, everyone who passes by will be shocked. They will ask, 'Why did the LORD do this terrible thing to this land and this Temple?' 22People will answer, 'This happened because they left the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God who brought them out of Egypt. They decided to follow other gods and worshiped and served them, so he brought all this disaster on them.'"

## *Solomon's Other Achievements*

8 By the end of twenty years, Solomon had built the Temple of the LORD and the royal palace. 2Solomon rebuilt the towns that Hiram had given him, and Solomon sent Israelites to live in them. 3Then he went to Hamath Zobah and captured it. 4Solomon also built the town of Tadmor in the desert, and he built all the towns in Hamath as towns for storing grain and supplies. 5He rebuilt the towns of Upper Beth Horon and Lower Beth Horon, protecting them with strong walls, gates, and bars in the gates. 6He also rebuilt the town of Baalath. And he built all the other towns for storage and all the cities for his chariots and horses. He built all he wanted in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and everywhere he ruled.

7There were other people in the land who were not Israelites —the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 8They were descendants of the people that the Israelites had not destroyed. Solomon forced them to be slave workers, as is still true today. 9But Solomon did not make slaves of the Israelites. They were his soldiers, chief captains, commanders of his chariots, and his chariot drivers. 10These were his most important officers. There were two hundred fifty of them to direct the people.

11Solomon brought the daughter of the king of Egypt from the older part of Jerusalem to the palace he had built for her. Solomon said, "My wife must not live in King David's palace, because the places where the Ark of the Agreement has been are holy."

12Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar he had built for the LORD in front of the Temple porch. 13He offered sacrifices every day as Moses had commanded. They were offered on the Sabbath days, New Moons, and the three yearly feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Shelters. 14Solomon followed his father David's instructions and chose the groups of priests for their service and the Levites to lead the praise and to help the priests

do their daily work. And he chose the gatekeepers by their groups to serve at each gate, as David, the man of God, had commanded. 15They obeyed all of Solomon's commands to the priests and Levites, as well as his commands about the treasuries.

16All Solomon's work was done as he had said from the day the foundation of the Temple of the LORD was begun, until it was finished. So the Temple was finished.

17Then Solomon went to the towns of Ezion Geber and Elath near the Red Sea in the land of Edom. 18Hiram sent ships to Solomon that were commanded by his own men, who were skilled sailors. Hiram's men went with Solomon's men to Ophir and brought back about thirty-four thousand pounds of gold to King Solomon.

## Psalm 80:1–6

### *A Prayer to Bring Israel Back*

**For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies of the Agreement." A psalm of Asaph.**

80 Shepherd of Israel, listen to us.
You lead the people of Joseph like a flock.

You sit on your throne between the gold creatures with wings.
Show your greatness 2to the people of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh.

Use your strength,
and come to save us.

3God, take us back.
Show us your kindness so we can be saved.

4LORD God All-Powerful,
how long will you be angry
at the prayers of your people?

[5]You have fed your people with tears;
you have made them drink many tears.

[6]You made those around us fight over us,
and our enemies make fun of us.

## Proverbs 20:15

[15]There is gold and plenty of rubies,
but only a few people speak with knowledge.

## Acts 13:26–52

[26]"Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and others who worship God, listen! The news about this salvation has been sent to us. [27]Those who live in Jerusalem and their leaders did not realize that Jesus was the Savior. They did not understand the words that the prophets wrote, which are read every Sabbath day. But they made them come true when they said Jesus was guilty. [28]They could not find any real reason for Jesus to be put to death, but they asked Pilate to have him killed. [29]When they had done to him all that the Scriptures had said, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. [30]But God raised him up from the dead! [31]After this, for many days, those who had gone with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem saw him. They are now his witnesses to the people. [32]We tell you the Good News about the promise God made to our ancestors. [33]God has made this promise come true for us, his children, by raising Jesus from the dead. We read about this also in Psalm 2:

'You are my Son.
Today I have become your Father.'

Psalm 2:7

[34]God raised Jesus from the dead, and he will never go back to the grave and become dust. So God said:

'I will give you the holy and sure blessings

that I promised to David.’

Isaiah 55:3

35But in another place God says:

‘You will not let your Holy One rot.’

Psalm 16:10

36David did God’s will during his lifetime. Then he died and was buried beside his ancestors, and his body did rot in the grave. 37But the One God raised from the dead did not rot in the grave. 38–39Brothers, understand what we are telling you: You can have forgiveness of your sins through Jesus. The law of Moses could not free you from your sins. But through Jesus everyone who believes is free from all sins. 40Be careful! Don’t let what the prophets said happen to you:

41‘Listen, you people who doubt!
You can wonder, and then die.

I will do something in your lifetime
that you won’t believe even when you are told about it!’”

Habakkuk 1:5

42While Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people asked them to tell them more about these things on the next Sabbath. 43When the meeting was over, many people with those who had changed to worship God followed Paul and Barnabas from that place. Paul and Barnabas were persuading them to continue trusting in God’s grace.

44On the next Sabbath day, almost everyone in the city came to hear the word of the Lord. 45Seeing the crowd, the Jewish people became very jealous and said insulting things and argued against what Paul said. 46But Paul and Barnabas spoke very boldly, saying, “We must speak the message of God to you first. But you refuse to listen. You are judging yourselves not worthy of having eternal life! So we will now go to the people of other nations. 47This is what the Lord told us to do, saying:

‘I have made you a light for the nations;
you will show people all over the world the way to be saved.’”

Isaiah 49:6

48When those who were not Jewish heard Paul say this, they

were happy and gave honor to the message of the Lord. And the people who were chosen to have life forever believed the message.

49So the message of the Lord was spreading through the whole country. 50But the Jewish people stirred up some of the important religious women and the leaders of the city. They started trouble against Paul and Barnabas and forced them out of their area. 51So Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet[n] and went to Iconium. 52But the followers were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

# July 7

## The God You Need

*"He is the One who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them"*

Acts 14:15

You don't need what Dorothy found. Remember her discovery in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*? She and her trio followed the yellow-brick road only to discover that the wizard was a wimp! Nothing but smoke and mirrors and tin-drum thunder. Is that the kind of god you need?

You don't need to carry the burden of a lesser god ... a god on a shelf, a god in a box, or a god in a bottle. No, you need a God who can place 100 billion stars in our galaxy and 100 billion galaxies in the universe. You need a God who can shape two fists of flesh into 75 to 100 billion nerve cells, each with as many as 10,000 connections to other nerve cells, place it in a skull, and call it a brain.

And you need a God who, while so mind-numbingly mighty, can come in the soft of night and touch you with the tenderness of an April snow.

from *Traveling Light*

### 2 Chronicles 9:1—11:4

#### *The Queen of Sheba Visits*

9 When the queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's fame, she
came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions. She had a
large group of servants with her and camels carrying spices,
jewels, and much gold. When she came to Solomon, she talked
with him about all she had in mind, 2and Solomon answered all
her questions. Nothing was too hard for him to explain to her.
3The queen of Sheba saw that Solomon was very wise. She saw
the palace he had built, 4the food on his table, his many officers,

the palace servants and their good clothes, the servants who served Solomon his wine and their good clothes. She saw the whole burnt offerings he made in the Temple of the LORD. All these things amazed her.

5So she said to King Solomon, “What I heard in my own country about your achievements and wisdom is true. 6I did not believe it then, but now I have come and seen it with my own eyes. I was not told even half of your great wisdom! You are much greater than I had heard. 7Your people and officials are very lucky, because in always serving you, they are able to hear your wisdom. 8Praise the LORD your God who was pleased to make you king. He has put you on his throne to rule for the LORD your God, because your God loves the people of Israel and supports them forever. He has made you king over them to keep justice and to rule fairly.”

9Then she gave the king about nine thousand pounds of gold and many spices and jewels. No one had ever given such spices as the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

10Hiram’s men and Solomon’s men brought gold from Ophir, juniper wood, and jewels. 11King Solomon used the juniper wood to build steps for the Temple of the LORD and the palace and to make lyres and harps for the musicians. No one in Judah had ever seen such beautiful things as these.

12King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba everything she wanted and asked for, even more than she had brought to him. Then she and her servants returned to her own country.

## *Solomon’s Wealth*

13Every year King Solomon received about fifty thousand pounds of gold. 14Besides that, he also received gold from traders and merchants. All the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land also brought gold and silver.

15King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold, each of which contained about seven and one-half pounds of hammered gold. 16He also made three hundred smaller shields of hammered gold, each of which contained about four pounds of gold. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

17The king built a large throne of ivory and covered it with pure gold. 18The throne had six steps on it and a gold footstool. There were armrests on both sides of the chair, and each armrest had a lion beside it. 19Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one lion at each end of each step. Nothing like this had ever been made for any other kingdom. 20All of Solomon’s drinking cups, as well as the dishes in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon, were made of pure gold. In Solomon’s time people did not think silver was valuable.

21 King Solomon had many ships that he sent out to trade,
with Hiram's men as the crews. Every three years the ships
returned, bringing back gold, silver, ivory, apes, and baboons.
22 King Solomon had more riches and wisdom than all the
other kings on earth. 23 All the kings of the earth wanted to see
Solomon and listen to the wisdom God had given him. 24 Year
after year everyone who came brought gifts of silver and gold,
clothes, weapons, spices, horses, and mules.
25 Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots,
and he had twelve thousand horses. He kept some in special
cities for the chariots, and others he kept with him in Jerusalem.
26 Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates
River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of
Egypt. 27 In Jerusalem the king made silver as common as stones
and cedar trees as plentiful as the fig trees on the western hills.
28 Solomon imported horses from Egypt and all other countries.

## *Solomon's Death*

29 Everything else Solomon did, from the beginning to the
end, is written in the records of Nathan the prophet, and in the
prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the
seer, who wrote about Jeroboam, Nebat's son. 30 Solomon ruled
in Jerusalem over all Israel for forty years. 31 Then Solomon died
and was buried in Jerusalem, the city of David, his father. And
Solomon's son Rehoboam became king in his place.

## *Israel Turns Against Rehoboam*

10 Rehoboam went to Shechem, where all the Israelites had
gone to make him king. 2 Jeroboam son of Nebat was in Egypt,
where he had gone to escape from King Solomon. When
Jeroboam heard about Rehoboam being made king, he returned
from Egypt. 3 After the people sent for him, he and the people
went to Rehoboam and said to him, 4 "Your father forced us to
work very hard. Now, make it easier for us, and don't make us
work as he did. Then we will serve you."
5 Rehoboam answered, "Come back to me in three days." So
the people left.
6 King Rehoboam asked the elders who had advised Solomon
during his lifetime, "How do you think I should answer these
people?"
7 They answered, "Be kind to these people. If you please them
and give them a kind answer, they will serve you always."
8 But Rehoboam rejected this advice. Instead, he asked the
young men who had grown up with him and who served as his
advisers. 9 Rehoboam asked them, "What is your advice? How

should we answer these people who said, ‘Don’t make us work as hard as your father did’?”

10The young men who had grown up with him answered, “The people said to you, ‘Your father forced us to work very hard. Now make our work easier.’ You should tell them, ‘My little finger is bigger than my father’s legs. 11He forced you to work hard, but I will make you work even harder. My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with whips that have sharp points.’”

12Rehoboam had told the people, “Come back to me in three days.” So after three days Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam. 13King Rehoboam spoke cruel words to them, because he had rejected the advice of the elders. 14He followed the advice of the young men and said, “My father forced you to work hard, but I will make you work even harder. My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with whips that have sharp points.” 15So the king did not listen to the people. God caused this to happen so that the LORD could keep the promise he had made to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah, a prophet from Shiloh.

16When all the Israelites saw that the king refused to listen to them, they said to the king,

“We have no share in David!
    We have no part in the son of Jesse!

People of Israel, let’s go to our own homes!
    Let David’s son rule his own people.”

So all the Israelites went home. 17But Rehoboam still ruled over the Israelites who lived in the towns of Judah.

18Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor. When Rehoboam sent him to the people, they threw stones at him until he died. But King Rehoboam ran to his chariot and escaped to Jerusalem. 19Since then, Israel has been against the family of David.

11 When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he gathered one hundred eighty thousand of the best soldiers from Judah and Benjamin. He wanted to fight Israel to take back his kingdom. 2But the LORD spoke his word to Shemaiah, a man of God, saying, 3“Speak to Solomon’s son Rehoboam, the king of Judah, and to all the Israelites living in Judah and Benjamin. Say to them, 4‘The LORD says you must not go to war against your brothers. Every one of you should go home, because I made all these things happen.’” So they obeyed the LORD’s command and turned back and did not attack Jeroboam.

## Psalm 80:7–13

7 God All-Powerful, take us back.
Show us your kindness so we can be saved.

8 You brought us out of Egypt as if we were a vine.
You forced out other nations and planted us in the land.

9 You cleared the ground for us.
Like a vine, we took root and filled the land.

10 We covered the mountains with our shade.
We had limbs like the mighty cedar tree.

11 Our branches reached the Mediterranean Sea,
and our shoots went to the Euphrates River.

12 So why did you pull down our walls?
Now everyone who passes by steals from us.

13 Like wild pigs they walk over us;
like wild animals they feed on us.

## Proverbs 20:16–18

16 Take the coat of someone who promises to pay a stranger's debts,
and keep it until he pays what the stranger owes.

17 Stolen food may taste sweet at first,
but later it will feel like a mouth full of gravel.

18 Get advice if you want your plans to work.
If you go to war, get the advice of others.

# Acts 14:1–28

## *Paul and Barnabas in Iconium*

14 In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went as usual to the
synagogue. They spoke so well that a great many Jews and
Greeks believed. 2 But some people who did not believe excited
the others and turned them against the believers. 3 Paul and
Barnabas stayed in Iconium a long time and spoke bravely for
the Lord. He showed that their message about his grace was
true by giving them the power to work miracles and signs. 4 But
the city was divided. Some of the people agreed with the Jews,
and others believed the apostles.

5 Some who were not Jews, some Jews, and some of their
rulers wanted to mistreat Paul and Barnabas and to stone them
to death. 6 When Paul and Barnabas learned about this, they ran
away to Lystra and Derbe, cities in Lycaonia, and to the areas
around those cities. 7 They announced the Good News there, too.

## *Paul in Lystra and Derbe*

8 In Lystra there sat a man who had been born crippled; he
had never walked. 9 As this man was listening to Paul speak,
Paul looked straight at him and saw that he believed God could
heal him. 10 So he cried out, "Stand up on your feet!" The man
jumped up and began walking around. 11 When the crowds saw
what Paul did, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The
gods have become like humans and have come down to us!"
12 Then the people began to call Barnabas "Zeus"[n] and Paul
"Hermes,"[n] because he was the main speaker. 13 The priest in
the temple of Zeus, which was near the city, brought some bulls
and flowers to the city gates. He and the people wanted to offer
a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. 14 But when the apostles,
Barnabas and Paul, heard about it, they tore their clothes. They
ran in among the people, shouting, 15 "Friends, why are you
doing these things? We are only human beings like you. We are
bringing you the Good News and are telling you to turn away
from these worthless things and turn to the living God. He is
the One who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in
them. 16 In the past, God let all the nations do what they wanted.
17 Yet he proved he is real by showing kindness, by giving you

rain from heaven and crops at the right times, by giving you food and filling your hearts with joy.” 18Even with these words, they were barely able to keep the crowd from offering sacrifices to them.

19Then some evil people came from Antioch and Iconium and persuaded the people to turn against Paul. So they threw stones at him and dragged him out of town, thinking they had killed him. 20But the followers gathered around him, and he got up and went back into the town. The next day he and Barnabas left and went to the city of Derbe.

## *The Return to Antioch in Syria*

21Paul and Barnabas told the Good News in Derbe, and many became followers. Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22making the followers of Jesus stronger and helping them stay in the faith. They said, “We must suffer many things to enter God’s kingdom.” 23They chose elders for each church, by praying and fasting[n] for a certain time. These elders had trusted the Lord, so Paul and Barnabas put them in the Lord’s care.

24Then they went through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25When they had preached the message in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26And from there they sailed away to Antioch where the believers had put them into God’s care and had sent them out to do this work. Now they had finished.

27When they arrived in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas gathered the church together. They told the church all about what God had done with them and how God had made it possible for those who were not Jewish to believe. 28And they stayed there a long time with the followers.

# July 8

# From Heaven Itself

*"But we believe that we … will be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus."*

Acts 15:11

All the world religions can be placed in one of two camps: legalism or grace. Humankind does it or God does it. Salvation as a wage based on deeds done—or salvation as a gift based on Christ's death.

A legalist believes the supreme force behind salvation is you. If you look right, speak right, and belong to the right segment of the right group, you will be saved. The brunt of responsibility doesn't lie within God; it lies within you.

The result? The outside sparkles. The talk is good and the step is true. But look closely. Listen carefully. Something is missing. What is it? Joy. What's there? Fear. (That you won't do enough.) Arrogance. (That you have done enough.) Failure. (That you have made a mistake.) …

Spiritual life is not a human endeavor. It is rooted in and orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. Every spiritual achievement is created and energized by God.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## 2 Chronicles 11:5—12:16

### *Rehoboam Makes Judah Strong*

5 Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem and built strong cities in Judah
to defend it. 6 He built up the cities of Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa,
7 Beth Zur, Soco, Adullam, 8 Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, 9 Adoraim,
Lachish, Azekah, 10 Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron. These were
strong, walled cities in Judah and Benjamin. 11 When Rehoboam
made those cities strong, he put commanders and supplies of
food, oil, and wine in them. 12 Also, Rehoboam put shields and

spears in all the cities and made them very strong. Rehoboam kept the people of Judah and Benjamin under his control.

13The priests and the Levites from all over Israel joined Rehoboam. 14The Levites even left their pasturelands and property and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons refused to let them serve as priests to the LORD. 15Jeroboam chose his own priests for the places of worship and for the goat and calf idols he had made. 16There were people from all the tribes of Israel who wanted to obey the LORD, the God of Israel. So they went to Jerusalem with the Levites to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their ancestors. 17These people made the kingdom of Judah strong, and they supported Solomon's son Rehoboam for three years. During this time they lived the way David and Solomon had lived.

## *Rehoboam's Family*

18Rehoboam married Mahalath, the daughter of Jerimoth and Abihail. Jerimoth was David's son, and Abihail was the daughter of Eliab, Jesse's son. 19Mahalath gave Rehoboam these sons: Jeush, Shemariah, and Zaham. 20Then Rehoboam married Absalom's daughter Maacah, and she gave Rehoboam these children: Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith. 21Rehoboam loved Maacah more than his other wives and slave women. Rehoboam had eighteen wives and sixty slave women and was the father of twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.

22Rehoboam chose Abijah son of Maacah to be the leader of his own brothers, because he planned to make Abijah king. 23Rehoboam acted wisely. He spread his sons through all the areas of Judah and Benjamin, sending them to every strong, walled city. He gave plenty of supplies to his sons, and he also found wives for them.

## *Shishak Attacks Jerusalem*

12 After Rehoboam's kingdom was set up and he became strong, he and the people of Judah stopped obeying the teachings of the LORD. 2During the fifth year Rehoboam was king, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem, because Rehoboam and the people were unfaithful to the LORD. 3Shishak had twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen. He brought troops of Libyans, Sukkites, and Cushites from Egypt with him, so many they couldn't be counted. 4Shishak captured the strong, walled cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem.

5Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah who had gathered in Jerusalem because they were afraid of Shishak. Shemaiah said to them, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have left me, so now I will leave you to face

Shishak alone.’”

6Then the leaders of Judah and King Rehoboam were sorry
for what they had done. They said, “The LORD does what is
right.”

7When the LORD saw they were sorry for what they had done,
the LORD spoke his word to Shemaiah, saying, “The king and the
leaders are sorry. So I will not destroy them but will save them
soon. I will not use Shishak to punish Jerusalem in my anger.
8But the people of Jerusalem will become Shishak’s servants so
they may learn that serving me is different than serving the
kings of other nations.”

9Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and took the
treasures from the Temple of the LORD and the king’s palace. He
took everything, even the gold shields Solomon had made. 10So
King Rehoboam made bronze shields to take their place and
gave them to the commanders of the guards for the palace
gates. 11Whenever the king went to the Temple of the LORD, the
guards went with him, carrying the shields. Later, they would
put them back in the guardroom.

12When Rehoboam was sorry for what he had done, the LORD
held his anger back and did not fully destroy Rehoboam. There
was some good in Judah.

13King Rehoboam made himself a strong king in Jerusalem.
He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he was
king in Jerusalem for seventeen years. Jerusalem is the city that
the LORD chose from all the tribes of Israel in which he was to be
worshiped. Rehoboam’s mother was Naamah from the country
of Ammon. 14Rehoboam did evil because he did not want to
obey the LORD.

15The things Rehoboam did as king, from the beginning to
the end, are written in the records of Shemaiah the prophet and
Iddo the seer, in the family histories. There were wars between
Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the time they ruled. 16Rehoboam
died and was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Abijah became
king in his place.

## Psalm 80:14–19

14God All-Powerful, come back.
Look down from heaven and see.

Take care of us, your vine.
15 You planted this shoot with your own hands

and strengthened this child.

16 Now it is cut down and burned with fire;
you destroyed us by your angry looks.

17 With your hand,
strengthen the one you have chosen for yourself.

18 Then we will not turn away from you.
Give us life again, and we will call to you for help.

19 LORD God All-Powerful, take us back.
Show us your kindness so we can be saved.

## Proverbs 20:19–21

19 Gossips can't keep secrets,
so avoid people who talk too much.

20 Those who curse their father or mother
will be like a light going out in darkness.

21 Wealth inherited quickly in the beginning
will do you no good in the end.

## Acts 15:1–21

### *The Meeting at Jerusalem*

15 Then some people came to Antioch from Judea and began
teaching the non-Jewish believers: "You cannot be saved if you
are not circumcised as Moses taught us." 2 Paul and Barnabas
were against this teaching and argued with them about it. So

the church decided to send Paul, Barnabas, and some others to Jerusalem where they could talk more about this with the apostles and elders.

3The church helped them leave on the trip, and they went through the countries of Phoenicia and Samaria, telling all about how the other nations had turned to God. This made all the believers very happy. 4When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the apostles, the elders, and the church. Paul, Barnabas, and the others told about everything God had done with them. 5But some of the believers who belonged to the Pharisee group came forward and said, "The non-Jewish believers must be circumcised. They must be told to obey the law of Moses."

6The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this problem. 7After a long debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God chose me from among you to preach the Good News to the nations. They heard the Good News from me, and they believed. 8God, who knows the thoughts of everyone, accepted them. He showed this to us by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9To God, those people are not different from us. When they believed, he made their hearts pure. 10So now why are you testing God by putting a heavy load around the necks of the non-Jewish believers? It is a load that neither we nor our ancestors were able to carry. 11But we believe that we and they too will be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus."

12Then the whole group became quiet. They listened to Paul and Barnabas tell about all the miracles and signs that God did through them among the people. 13After they finished speaking, James said, "Brothers, listen to me. 14Simon has told us how God showed his love for those people. For the first time he is accepting from among them a people to be his own. 15The words of the prophets agree with this too:

16'After these things I will return.
The kingdom of David is like a fallen tent.

But I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will set it up.

17Then those people who are left alive may ask the Lord for help,
and the other nations that belong to me,

says the Lord,
who will make it happen.

18 And these things have been known for a long time.’

Amos 9:11–12

19 “So I think we should not bother the other people who are
turning to God. 20 Instead, we should write a letter to them
telling them these things: Stay away from food that has been
offered to idols (which makes it unclean), any kind of sexual sin,
eating animals that have been strangled, and blood. 21 They
should do these things, because for a long time in every city the
law of Moses has been taught. And it is still read in the
synagogue every Sabbath day.”

# July 9

# Judgment Is God's Job

*Wait for the LORD, and he will make things right.*

Proverbs 20:22

some of you are in the courtroom. The courtroom of complaint. Some of you are rehashing the same hurt every chance you get with anyone who will listen. For you, I have this question: Who made you God? I don't mean to be cocky, but why are you doing his work for him?

"I will punish those who do wrong," God declared. "I will repay" (Hebrews 10:30).

Judgment is God's job. To assume otherwise is to assume God can't do it.

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

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## 2 Chronicles 13:1—14:15

### *Abijah King of Judah*

13 Abijah became the king of Judah during the eighteenth year
Jeroboam was king of Israel. 2Abijah ruled in Jerusalem for
three years. His mother was Maacah daughter of Uriel from the
town of Gibeah.

And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3Abijah
led an army of four hundred thousand capable soldiers into
battle, and Jeroboam prepared to fight him with eight hundred
thousand capable soldiers.

4Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim in the mountains of
Ephraim and said, "Jeroboam and all Israel, listen to me! 5You
should know that the LORD, the God of Israel, gave David and his

sons the right to rule Israel forever by an agreement of salt.
6But Jeroboam son of Nebat, one of the officers of Solomon,
David's son, turned against his master. 7Then worthless, evil
men joined Jeroboam against Rehoboam, Solomon's son. He
was young and didn't know what to do, so he could not stop
them.

8"Now you people are making plans against the LORD's
kingdom, which belongs to David's sons. There are many of you,
and you have the gold calves Jeroboam made for you as gods.
9You have thrown out the Levites and the LORD's priests, Aaron's
sons. You have chosen your own priests as people in other
countries do. Anyone who comes with a young bull and seven
male sheep can become a priest of idols that are not gods.

10"But as for us, the LORD is our God; we have not left him.
The priests who serve the LORD are Aaron's sons, and the
Levites help them. 11They offer burnt offerings and sweet-
smelling incense to the LORD every morning and evening. They
put the bread on the special table in the Temple. And they light
the lamps on the gold lampstand every evening. We obey the
command of the LORD our God, but you have left him. 12God
himself is with us as our ruler. His priests blow the trumpet to
call us to war against you. Men of Israel, don't fight against the
LORD, the God of your ancestors, because you won't succeed."

13But Jeroboam had sent some troops to sneak behind
Judah's army. So while Jeroboam was in front of Judah's army,
Jeroboam's soldiers were behind them. 14When the soldiers of
Judah turned around, they saw Jeroboam's army attacking both
in front and back. So they cried out to the LORD, and the priests
blew the trumpets. 15Then the men of Judah gave a battle cry.
When they shouted, God caused Jeroboam and the army of
Israel to run away from Abijah and the army of Judah. 16When
the army of Israel ran away from the men of Judah, God handed
them over to Judah. 17Abijah's army struck Israel so that five
hundred thousand of Israel's best men were killed. 18So at that
time the people of Israel were defeated. And the people of
Judah won, because they depended on the LORD, the God of their
ancestors.

19Abijah's army chased Jeroboam's army and captured from
him the towns of Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron, and the small
villages near them. 20Jeroboam never became strong again
while Abijah was alive. The LORD struck Jeroboam, and he died.

21But Abijah became strong. He married fourteen women
and was the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters.
22Everything else Abijah did—what he said and what he did—is
recorded in the writings of the prophet Iddo.

14 Abijah died and was buried in Jerusalem. His son Asa became
king in his place, and there was peace in the country for ten
years during Asa's time.

## *Asa King of Judah*

2 Asa did what the LORD his God said was good and right. 3 He
removed the foreign altars and the places where gods were
worshiped. He smashed the stone pillars that honored other
gods, and he tore down the Asherah idols. 4 Asa commanded the
people of Judah to follow the LORD, the God of their ancestors,
and to obey his teachings and commandments. 5 He also
removed the places where gods were worshiped and the
incense altars from every town in Judah. So the kingdom had
peace while Asa was king. 6 Asa built strong, walled cities in
Judah during the time of peace. He had no war in these years,
because the LORD gave him peace.

7 Asa said to the people of Judah, "Let's build up these towns
and put walls around them. Let's make towers, gates, and bars
in the gates. This country is ours, because we have obeyed the
LORD our God. We have followed him, and he has given us peace
all around." So they built and had success.

8 Asa had an army of three hundred thousand men from
Judah and two hundred eighty thousand men from Benjamin.
The men from Judah carried large shields and spears. The men
from Benjamin carried small shields and bows and arrows. All of
them were brave fighting men.

9 Then Zerah from Cush came out to fight them with an
enormous army and three hundred chariots. They came as far
as the town of Mareshah. 10 So Asa went out to fight Zerah and
prepared for battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.

11 Asa called out to the LORD his God, saying, "LORD, only you
can help weak people against the strong. Help us, LORD our God,
because we depend on you. We fight against this enormous
army in your name. LORD, you are our God. Don't let anyone win
against you."

12 So the LORD defeated the Cushites when Asa's army from
Judah attacked them, and the Cushites ran away. 13 Asa's army
chased them as far as the town of Gerar. So many Cushites
were killed that the army could not fight again; they were
crushed by the LORD and his army. Asa and his army carried
many valuable things away from the enemy. 14 They destroyed
all the towns near Gerar, because the people living in these
towns were afraid of the LORD. Since these towns had many
valuable things, Asa's army took them away. 15 Asa's army also
attacked the camps where the shepherds lived and took many
sheep and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

## Psalm 81:1–5a

## *A Song for a Holiday*

**For the director of music. By the gittith. A psalm of Asaph.**

81 Sing for joy to God, our strength;
shout out loud to the God of Jacob.

2 Begin the music. Play the tambourines.
Play pleasant music on the harps and lyres.

3 Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon,
when the moon is full, when our feast begins.

4 This is the law for Israel;
it is the command of the God of Jacob.

5 He gave this rule to the people of Joseph
when they went out of the land of Egypt.

## Proverbs 20:22–23

22 Don’t say, “I’ll pay you back for the wrong you did.”
Wait for the LORD, and he will make things right.

23 The LORD hates dishonest weights,
and dishonest scales do not please him.

## Acts 15:22–41

## *Letter to Non-Jewish Believers*

22 The apostles, the elders, and the whole church decided to

send some of their men with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. They chose Judas Barsabbas and Silas, who were respected by the believers. 23They sent the following letter with them:

From the apostles and elders, your brothers.

To all the non-Jewish believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:

Greetings!

24We have heard that some of our group have come to you and said things that trouble and upset you. But we did not tell them to do this. 25We have all agreed to choose some messengers and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— 26people who have given their lives to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. 27So we are sending Judas and Silas, who will tell you the same things. 28It has pleased the Holy Spirit that you should not have a heavy load to carry, and we agree. You need to do only these things: 29Stay away from any food that has been offered to idols, eating any animals that have been strangled, and blood, and any kind of sexual sin. If you stay away from these things, you will do well.

Good-bye.

30So they left Jerusalem and went to Antioch where they gathered the church and gave them the letter. 31When they read it, they were very happy because of the encouraging message. 32Judas and Silas, who were also prophets, said many things to encourage the believers and make them stronger. 33After some time Judas and Silas were sent off in peace by the believers, and they went back to those who had sent them [, 34but Silas decided to remain there].[n]

35But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch and, along with many others, preached the Good News and taught the people the message of the Lord.

## *Paul and Barnabas Separate*

36After some time, Paul said to Barnabas, “We should go back to all those towns where we preached the message of the Lord. Let’s visit the believers and see how they are doing.”

37Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, 38but he had left them at Pamphylia; he did not continue with them in the work. So Paul did not think it was a good idea to take him. 39Paul and Barnabas had such a serious argument about this that they separated and went different ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, 40but Paul chose Silas and left. The believers in Antioch put Paul into the Lord’s care, 41and he went through Syria and Cilicia, giving strength to the churches.

# July 10

## God's Priority

*"I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Open your mouth and I will feed you."*

Psalm 81:10

"Depend on the LORD; trust him, and he will take care of you" (Psalm 37:5). God is committed to caring for our needs. Paul tells us that a man who won't feed his own family is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8). How much more will a holy God care for his children? After all, how can we fulfill his mission unless our needs are met? How can we teach or minister or influence unless we have our basic needs satisfied? Will God enlist us in his army and not provide a commissary? Of course not.

"I pray that the God of peace will give you every good thing you need so you can do what he wants" (Hebrews 13:20). Hasn't that prayer been answered in our life? We may not have had a feast, but haven't we always had food? Perhaps there was no banquet, but at least there was bread. And many times there was a banquet.

from *The Great House of God*

### 2 Chronicles 15:1—16:14

#### *Asa's Changes*

15 The Spirit of God entered Azariah son of Oded. 2Azariah went
to meet Asa and said, "Listen to me, Asa and all you people of
Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with
him. If you obey him, you will find him, but if you leave him, he
will leave you. 3For a long time Israel was without the true God
and without a priest to teach them and without the teachings.
4But when they were in trouble, they turned to the LORD, the
God of Israel. They looked for him and found him. 5In those

days no one could travel safely. There was much trouble in all the nations. 6One nation would destroy another nation, and one city would destroy another city, because God troubled them with all kinds of distress. 7But you should be strong. Don't give up, because you will get a reward for your good work."

8Asa felt brave when he heard these words and the message from Azariah son of Oded the prophet. So he removed the hateful idols from all of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim. He repaired the LORD's altar that was in front of the porch of the Temple of the LORD.

9Then Asa gathered all the people from Judah and Benjamin and from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were living in Judah. Many people came to Asa even from Israel, because they saw that the LORD, Asa's God, was with him.

10Asa and these people gathered in Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's rule. 11At that time they sacrificed to the LORD seven hundred bulls and seven thousand sheep and goats from the valuable things Asa's army had taken from their enemies. 12Then they made an agreement to obey the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with their whole being. 13Anyone who refused to obey the LORD, the God of Israel, was to be killed. It did not matter if that person was important or unimportant, a man or woman. 14Then Asa and the people made a promise before the LORD, shouting with a loud voice and blowing trumpets and sheep's horns. 15All the people of Judah were happy about the promise, because they had promised with all their heart. They looked for God and found him. So the LORD gave them peace in all the country.

16King Asa also removed Maacah, his grandmother, from being queen mother, because she had made a terrible Asherah idol. Asa cut down that idol, smashed it into pieces, and burned it in the Kidron Valley. 17But the places of worship to gods were not removed from Judah. Even so, Asa was faithful all his life.

18Asa brought into the Temple of God the gifts he and his father had given: silver, gold, and utensils.

19There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's rule.

## *Asa's Last Years*

16 In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's rule, Baasha king of Israel attacked Judah. He made the town of Ramah strong so he could keep people from leaving or entering Judah, Asa's country.

2Asa took silver and gold from the treasuries of the Temple of the LORD and out of his own palace. Then he sent it with messengers to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who lived in Damascus. Asa said, 3"Let there be a treaty between you and me as there was between my father and your father. I am sending you silver

and gold. Break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will leave my land."

4Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies to attack the towns of Israel. They defeated the towns of Ijon, Dan, and Abel Beth Maacah, and all the towns in Naphtali where treasures were stored. 5When Baasha heard about this, he stopped building up Ramah and left his work. 6Then King Asa brought all the people of Judah to Ramah, and they carried away the rocks and wood that Baasha had used. And they used them to build up Geba and Mizpah.

7At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "You depended on the king of Aram to help you and not on the LORD your God. So the king of Aram's army escaped from you. 8The Cushites and Libyans had a large and powerful army and many chariots and horsemen. But you depended on the LORD to help you, so he handed them over to you. 9The LORD searches all the earth for people who have given themselves completely to him. He wants to make them strong. Asa, you did a foolish thing, so from now on you will have wars."

10Asa was angry with Hanani the seer because of what he had said; he was so angry that he put Hanani in prison. And Asa was cruel to some of the people at the same time.

11Everything Asa did as king, from the beginning to the end, is written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 12In the thirty-ninth year of his rule, Asa got a disease in his feet. Though his disease was very bad, he did not ask for help from the LORD, but only from the doctors. 13Then Asa died in the forty-first year of his rule. 14The people buried Asa in the tomb he had made for himself in Jerusalem. They laid him on a bed filled with spices and different kinds of mixed perfumes, and they made a large fire to honor him.

## Psalm 81:6b–10

I heard a language I did not know, saying:

6"I took the load off their shoulders;
I let them put down their baskets.

7When you were in trouble, you called, and I saved you.
I answered you with thunder.
I tested you at the waters of Meribah. *Selah*

[8]My people, listen. I am warning you.
Israel, please listen to me!

[9]You must not have foreign gods;
you must not worship any false god.

[10]I, the LORD, am your God,
who brought you out of Egypt.
Open your mouth and I will feed you.

## Proverbs 20:24–25

[24]The LORD decides what a person will do;
no one understands what his life is all about.

[25]It's dangerous to promise something to God too quickly.
After you've thought about it, it may be too late.

## Acts 16:1–15

### *Timothy Goes with Paul*

16 Paul came to Derbe and Lystra, where a follower named Timothy lived. Timothy's mother was Jewish and a believer, but his father was a Greek.

[2]The believers in Lystra and Iconium respected Timothy and said good things about him. [3]Paul wanted Timothy to travel with him, but all the people living in that area knew that Timothy's father was Greek. So Paul circumcised Timothy to please his mother's people. [4]Paul and those with him traveled from town to town and gave the decisions made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. [5]So the churches became stronger in the faith and grew larger every day.

### *Paul Is Called Out of Asia*

6 Paul and those with him went through the areas of Phrygia
and Galatia since the Holy Spirit did not let them preach the
Good News in Asia. 7 When they came near the country of
Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did
not let them. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went to Troas. 9 That
night Paul saw in a vision a man from Macedonia. The man
stood and begged, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."
10 After Paul had seen the vision, we immediately prepared to
leave for Macedonia, understanding that God had called us to
tell the Good News to those people.

## *Lydia Becomes a Christian*

11 We left Troas and sailed straight to the island of
Samothrace. The next day we sailed to Neapolis.[n] 12 Then we
went by land to Philippi, a Roman colony[n] and the leading city
in that part of Macedonia. We stayed there for several days.

13 On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the
river where we thought we would find a special place for
prayer. Some women had gathered there, so we sat down and
talked with them. 14 One of the listeners was a woman named
Lydia from the city of Thyatira whose job was selling purple
cloth. She worshiped God, and he opened her mind to pay
attention to what Paul was saying. 15 She and all the people in
her house were baptized. Then she invited us to her home,
saying, "If you think I am truly a believer in the Lord, then come
stay in my house." And she persuaded us to stay with her.

# July 11

# Fear and Faith

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing songs to God as the other prisoners listened.*

Acts 16:25

Great acts of faith are seldom born out of calm calculation. It wasn't logic that caused Moses to raise his staff on the bank of the Red Sea. It wasn't medical research that convinced Naaman to dip seven times in the river.

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

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

And never were they stronger.

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

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## 2 Chronicles 17:1—19:3

### *Jehoshaphat King of Judah*

17 Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became king of Judah in his place.
Jehoshaphat made Judah strong so they could fight against
Israel. 2He put troops in all the strong, walled cities of Judah, in
the land of Judah, and in the towns of Ephraim that his father
Asa had captured.
3The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he lived as his
ancestor David had lived when he first became king.
Jehoshaphat did not ask for help from the Baal idols, 4but from
the God of his father. He obeyed God's commands and did not

live as the people of Israel lived. 5The LORD made Jehoshaphat a strong king over Judah. All the people of Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so he had much wealth and honor. 6He wanted very much to obey the LORD. He also removed the places for worshiping gods and the Asherah idols from Judah.

7During the third year of his rule, Jehoshaphat sent his officers to teach in the towns of Judah. These officers were Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah. 8Jehoshaphat sent with them these Levites: Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-Adonijah. He also sent the priests Elishama and Jehoram. 9These leaders, Levites, and priests taught the people in Judah. They took the Book of the Teachings of the LORD and went through all the towns of Judah and taught the people.

10The nations near Judah were afraid of the LORD, so they did not start a war against Jehoshaphat. 11Some of the Philistines brought gifts and silver to Jehoshaphat as he demanded. Some Arabs brought him flocks: seventy-seven hundred sheep and seventy-seven hundred goats.

12Jehoshaphat grew more and more powerful. He built strong, walled cities and towns for storing supplies in Judah. 13He kept many supplies in the towns of Judah, and he kept trained soldiers in Jerusalem. 14These soldiers were listed by families. From the families of Judah, these were the commanders of groups of a thousand men: Adnah was the commander of three hundred thousand soldiers; 15Jehohanan was the commander of two hundred eighty thousand soldiers; 16Amasiah was the commander of two hundred thousand soldiers. Amasiah son of Zicri had volunteered to serve the LORD.

17These were the commanders from the families of Benjamin: Eliada, a brave soldier, had two hundred thousand soldiers who used bows and shields. 18And Jehozabad had one hundred eighty thousand men armed for war.

19All these soldiers served King Jehoshaphat. The king also put other men in the strong, walled cities through all of Judah.

## *Micaiah Warns King Ahab*

18 Jehoshaphat had much wealth and honor, and he made an agreement with King Ahab through marriage.[n] 2A few years later Jehoshaphat went to visit Ahab in Samaria. Ahab sacrificed many sheep and cattle as a great feast to honor Jehoshaphat and the people with him. He encouraged Jehoshaphat to attack Ramoth in Gilead. 3Ahab king of Israel asked Jehoshaphat king of Judah, “Will you go with me to attack Ramoth in Gilead?”

Jehoshaphat answered, “I will go with you, and my soldiers are yours. We will join you in the battle.” 4Jehoshaphat also said

to Ahab, “But first we should ask if this is the LORD’s will.”

5So King Ahab called four hundred prophets together and asked them, “Should we go to war against Ramoth in Gilead or not?”

They answered, “Go, because God will hand them over to you.”

6But Jehoshaphat asked, “Isn’t there a prophet of the LORD here? Let’s ask him what we should do.”

7Then King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, “There is one other prophet. We could ask the LORD through him, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything good about me, but always something bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.”

Jehoshaphat said, “King Ahab, you shouldn’t say that!”

8So Ahab king of Israel told one of his officers to bring Micaiah to him at once.

9Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah had on their royal robes and were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor, near the entrance to the gate of Samaria. All the prophets were standing before them speaking their messages. 10Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made some iron horns. He said to Ahab, “This is what the LORD says: ‘You will use these horns to fight the Arameans until they are destroyed.’”

11All the other prophets said the same thing, “Attack Ramoth in Gilead and win, because the LORD will hand the Arameans over to you.”

12The messenger who had gone to get Micaiah said to him, “All the other prophets are saying King Ahab will win. You should agree with them and give the king a good answer.”

13But Micaiah answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what my God says.”

14When Micaiah came to Ahab, the king asked him, “Micaiah, should we attack Ramoth in Gilead or not?”

Micaiah answered, “Attack and win! They will be handed over to you.”

15But Ahab said to Micaiah, “How many times do I have to tell you to speak only the truth to me in the name of the LORD?”

16So Micaiah answered, “I saw the army of Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd. The LORD said, ‘They have no leaders. They should go home and not fight.’”

17Then Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I told you! He never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad.”

18But Micaiah said, “Hear the message from the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with his heavenly army standing on his right and on his left. 19The LORD said, ‘Who will trick King Ahab of Israel into attacking Ramoth in Gilead where he will be killed?’

“Some said one thing; some said another. 20Then one spirit came and stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will trick him.’

“The LORD asked, ‘How will you do it?’

21 “The spirit answered, ‘I will go to Ahab’s prophets and
make them tell lies.’
“So the LORD said, ‘You will succeed in tricking him. Go and
do it.’”
22 Micaiah said, “Ahab, the LORD has made your prophets lie
to you, and the LORD has decided that disaster should come to
you.”
23 Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up to Micaiah and
slapped him in the face. Zedekiah said, “Has the LORD’s Spirit
left me to speak through you?”
24 Micaiah answered, “You will find out on the day you go to
hide in an inside room.”
25 Then Ahab king of Israel ordered, “Take Micaiah and send
him to Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king’s
son. 26 Tell them I said to put this man in prison and give him
only bread and water until I return safely from the battle.”
27 Micaiah said, “Ahab, if you come back safely from the
battle, the LORD has not spoken through me. Remember my
words, all you people!”

## *Ahab Is Killed*

28 So Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went
to Ramoth in Gilead. 29 King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, “I will go
into battle, but I will wear other clothes so no one will recognize
me. But you wear your royal clothes.” So Ahab wore other
clothes, and they went into battle.
30 The king of Aram ordered his chariot commanders, “Don’t
fight with anyone—important or unimportant—except the king
of Israel.” 31 When these commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they
thought he was the king of Israel, so they turned to attack him.
But Jehoshaphat began shouting, and the LORD helped him. God
made the chariot commanders turn away from Jehoshaphat.
32 When they saw he was not King Ahab, they stopped chasing
him.
33 By chance, a soldier shot an arrow which hit Ahab king of
Israel between the pieces of his armor. King Ahab said to his
chariot driver, “Turn around and get me out of the battle,
because I am hurt!” 34 The battle continued all day. King Ahab
held himself up in his chariot and faced the Arameans until
evening. Then he died at sunset.
19 Jehoshaphat king of Judah came back safely to his palace in
Jerusalem. 2 Jehu son of Hanani, a seer, went out to meet him
and said to the king, “Why did you help evil people? Why do you
love those who hate the LORD? That is the reason the LORD is
angry with you. 3 But there is some good in you. You took the
Asherah idols out of this country, and you have tried to obey
God.”

## Psalm 81:11–16

11 “But my people did not listen to me;
Israel did not want me.

12 So I let them go their stubborn way
and follow their own advice.

13 I wish my people would listen to me;
I wish Israel would live my way.

14 Then I would quickly defeat their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes.

15 Those who hate the LORD would bow before him.
Their punishment would continue forever.

16 But I would give you the finest wheat
and fill you with honey from the rocks.”

## Proverbs 20:26–28

26 A wise king sorts out the evil people,
and he punishes them as they deserve.

27 The LORD looks deep inside people
and searches through their thoughts.

28 Loyalty and truth keep a king in power;
he continues to rule if he is loyal.

# Acts 16:16–40

## *Paul and Silas in Jail*

16 Once, while we were going to the place for prayer, a
servant girl met us. She had a special spirit[n] in her, and she
earned a lot of money for her owners by telling fortunes. 17 This
girl followed Paul and us, shouting, “These men are servants of
the Most High God. They are telling you how you can be saved.”
18 She kept this up for many days. This bothered Paul, so he
turned and said to the spirit, “By the power of Jesus Christ, I
command you to come out of her!” Immediately, the spirit came
out.
19 When the owners of the servant girl saw this, they knew
that now they could not use her to make money. So they
grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the city rulers
in the marketplace. 20 They brought Paul and Silas to the Roman
rulers and said, “These men are Jews and are making trouble in
our city. 21 They are teaching things that are not right for us as
Romans to do.”
22 The crowd joined the attack against them. The Roman
officers tore the clothes of Paul and Silas and had them beaten
with rods. 23 Then Paul and Silas were thrown into jail, and the
jailer was ordered to guard them carefully. 24 When he heard
this order, he put them far inside the jail and pinned their feet
down between large blocks of wood.
25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing
songs to God as the other prisoners listened. 26 Suddenly, there
was a strong earthquake that shook the foundation of the jail.
Then all the doors of the jail broke open, and all the prisoners
were freed from their chains. 27 The jailer woke up and saw that
the jail doors were open. Thinking that the prisoners had
already escaped, he got his sword and was about to kill
himself.[n] 28 But Paul shouted, “Don’t hurt yourself! We are all
here.”
29 The jailer told someone to bring a light. Then he ran inside
and, shaking with fear, fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 He
brought them outside and said, “Men, what must I do to be
saved?”
31 They said to him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be
saved—you and all the people in your house.” 32 So Paul and
Silas told the message of the Lord to the jailer and all the
people in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took
Paul and Silas and washed their wounds. Then he and all his
people were baptized immediately. 34 After this the jailer took

Paul and Silas home and gave them food. He and his family were very happy because they now believed in God.

35 The next morning, the Roman officers sent the police to tell the jailer, “Let these men go free.”

36 The jailer said to Paul, “The officers have sent an order to let you go free. You can leave now. Go in peace.”

37 But Paul said to the police, “They beat us in public without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens.[n] And they threw us in jail. Now they want to make us go away quietly. No! Let them come themselves and bring us out.”

38 The police told the Roman officers what Paul said. When the officers heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were afraid. 39 So they came and told Paul and Silas they were sorry and took them out of jail and asked them to leave the city.
40 So when they came out of the jail, they went to Lydia’s house where they saw some of the believers and encouraged them. Then they left.

# July 12

## Character Creates Courage

*"Have faith in the LORD your God, and you will stand strong."*

2 Chronicles 20:20

A legend from India tells about a mouse who was terrified of cats until a magician agreed to transform him into a cat. That resolved his fear … until he met a dog, so the magician changed him into a dog. The mouse-turned-cat-turned-dog was content until he met a tiger—so, once again, the magician changed him into what he feared. But when the tiger came complaining that he had met a hunter, the magician refused to help. "I will make you into a mouse again, for though you have the body of a tiger, you still have the heart of a mouse."

Sound familiar? How many people do you know who have built a formidable exterior, only to tremble inside with fear? … We face our fears with force … or … we stockpile wealth. We seek security in things. We cultivate fame and seek status.

But do these approaches work?

Courage is an outgrowth of who we are. Exterior supports may temporarily sustain, but only inward character creates courage.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### 2 Chronicles 19:4—21:3

#### *Jehoshaphat Chooses Judges*

4 Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem. He went out again to be
with the people, from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim,
and he turned them back to the LORD, the God of their
ancestors. 5 Jehoshaphat appointed judges in all the land, in
each of the strong, walled cities of Judah. 6 Jehoshaphat said to
them, "Watch what you do, because you are not judging for
people but for the LORD. He will be with you when you make a

decision. 7Now let each of you fear the LORD. Watch what you
do, because the LORD our God wants people to be fair. He wants
all people to be treated the same, and he doesn't want decisions
influenced by money."

8And in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed some of the
Levites, priests, and leaders of Israelite families to be judges.
They were to decide cases about the law of the LORD and settle
problems between the people who lived in Jerusalem.
9Jehoshaphat commanded them, "You must always serve the
LORD completely, and you must fear him. 10Your people living in
the cities will bring you cases about killing, about the teachings,
commands, rules, or some other law. In all these cases you must
warn the people not to sin against the LORD. If you don't, he will
be angry with you and your people. But if you warn them, you
won't be guilty.

11"Amariah, the leading priest, will be over you in all cases
about the LORD. Zebadiah son of Ishmael, a leader in the tribe of
Judah, will be over you in all cases about the king. Also, the
Levites will serve as officers for you. Have courage. May the
LORD be with those who do what is right."

## *Jehoshaphat Faces War*

20 Later the Moabites, Ammonites, and some Meunites came to
start a war with Jehoshaphat. 2Messengers came and told
Jehoshaphat, "A large army is coming against you from Edom,
from the other side of the Dead Sea. They are already in
Hazazon Tamar!" (Hazazon Tamar is also called En Gedi.)
3Jehoshaphat was afraid, so he decided to ask the LORD what to
do. He announced that everyone in Judah should fast during this
special time of prayer to God. 4The people of Judah came
together to ask the LORD for help; they came from every town in
Judah.

5The people of Judah and Jerusalem met in front of the new
courtyard in the Temple of the LORD. Then Jehoshaphat stood up,
6and he said, "LORD, God of our ancestors, you are the God in
heaven. You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. You have
power and strength, so no one can stand against you. 7Our God,
you forced out the people who lived in this land as your people
Israel moved in. And you gave this land forever to the
descendants of your friend Abraham. 8They lived in this land
and built a Temple for you. They said, 9'If trouble comes upon
us, or war, punishment, sickness, or hunger, we will stand
before you and before this Temple where you have chosen to be
worshiped. We will cry out to you when we are in trouble. Then
you will hear and save us.'

10"But now here are men from Ammon, Moab, and Edom.
You wouldn't let the Israelites enter their lands when the

Israelites came from Egypt. So the Israelites turned away and did not destroy them. 11But see how they repay us for not destroying them! They have come to force us out of your land, which you gave us as our own. 12Our God, punish those people. We have no power against this large army that is attacking us. We don't know what to do, so we look to you for help."

13All the men of Judah stood before the LORD with their babies, wives, and children. 14Then the Spirit of the LORD entered Jahaziel. (Jahaziel was Zechariah's son. Zechariah was Benaiah's son. Benaiah was Jeiel's son, and Jeiel was Mattaniah's son.) Jahaziel, a Levite and a descendant of Asaph, stood up in the meeting. 15He said, "Listen to me, King Jehoshaphat and all you people living in Judah and Jerusalem. The LORD says this to you: 'Don't be afraid or discouraged because of this large army. The battle is not your battle, it is God's. 16Tomorrow go down there and fight those people. They will come up through the Pass of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the ravine that leads to the Desert of Jeruel. 17You won't need to fight in this battle. Just stand strong in your places, and you will see the LORD save you. Judah and Jerusalem, don't be afraid or discouraged, because the LORD is with you. So go out against those people tomorrow.'"

18Jehoshaphat bowed facedown on the ground. All the people of Judah and Jerusalem bowed down before the LORD and worshiped him. 19Then some Levites from the Kohathite and Korahite people stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with very loud voices.

20Jehoshaphat's army went out into the Desert of Tekoa early in the morning. As they were starting out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, people of Judah and Jerusalem. Have faith in the LORD your God, and you will stand strong. Have faith in his prophets, and you will succeed." 21Jehoshaphat listened to the people's advice. Then he chose men to be singers to the LORD, to praise him because he is holy and wonderful. As they marched in front of the army, they said,

"Thank the LORD,
because his love continues forever."

22As they began to sing and praise God, the LORD set ambushes for the people of Ammon, Moab, and Edom who had come to attack Judah. And they were defeated. 23The Ammonites and Moabites attacked the Edomites, destroying them completely. After they had killed the Edomites, they killed each other.

24When the men from Judah came to a place where they could see the desert, they looked at the enemy's large army. But they only saw dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had

escaped. 25When Jehoshaphat and his army came to take their valuables, they found many supplies, much clothing, and other valuable things. There was more than they could carry away; there was so much it took three days to gather it all. 26On the fourth day Jehoshaphat and his army met in the Valley of Beracah and praised the LORD. That is why that place has been called the Valley of Beracah[n] to this day.

27Then Jehoshaphat led all the men from Judah and Jerusalem back to Jerusalem. The LORD had made them happy because their enemies were defeated. 28They entered Jerusalem with harps, lyres, and trumpets and went to the Temple of the LORD.

29When all the kingdoms of the lands around them heard how the LORD had fought Israel's enemies, they feared God. 30So Jehoshaphat's kingdom was not at war. His God gave him peace from all the countries around him.

### *Jehoshaphat's Rule Ends*

31Jehoshaphat ruled over the country of Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled in Jerusalem for twenty-five years. His mother's name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi. 32Jehoshaphat was good like his father Asa, and he did what the LORD said was right. 33But the places where gods were worshiped were not removed, and the people did not really want to follow the God of their ancestors.

34The other things Jehoshaphat did as king, from the beginning to the end, are written in the records of Jehu son of Hanani, which are in the book of the kings of Israel.

35Later, Jehoshaphat king of Judah made a treaty with Ahaziah king of Israel, which was a wrong thing to do. 36Jehoshaphat agreed with Ahaziah to build trading ships, which they built in the town of Ezion Geber. 37Then Eliezer son of Dodavahu from the town of Mareshah spoke against Jehoshaphat. He said, "Jehoshaphat, because you joined with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy what you have made." The ships were wrecked so they could not sail out to trade.

21 Jehoshaphat died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David. Then his son Jehoram became king in his place. 2Jehoram's brothers were Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariahu, Michael, and Shephatiah. They were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Judah. 3Jehoshaphat gave his sons many gifts of silver, gold, and valuable things, and he gave them strong, walled cities in Judah. But Jehoshaphat gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the first son.

## Psalm 82:1–8

## *A Cry for Justice*

**A psalm of Asaph.**

82 God is in charge of the great meeting;
he judges among the “gods.”

2He says, “How long will you defend evil people?
How long will you show greater kindness to the wicked?
*Selah*

3Defend the weak and the orphans;
defend the rights of the poor and suffering.

4Save the weak and helpless;
free them from the power of the wicked.

5“You know nothing. You don’t understand.

You walk in the dark,
while the world is falling apart.

6I said, ‘You are “gods.”
You are all sons of God Most High.’

7But you will die like any other person;
you will fall like all the leaders.”

8God, come and judge the earth,
because you own all the nations.

## Proverbs 20:29–30

29 The young glory in their strength,
and the old are honored for their gray hair.

30 Hard punishment will get rid of evil,
and whippings can change an evil heart.

## Acts 17:1–15

### *Paul and Silas in Thessalonica*

17 Paul and Silas traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and
came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue. 2 Paul went
into the synagogue as he always did, and on each Sabbath day
for three weeks, he talked with his fellow Jews about the
Scriptures. 3 He explained and proved that the Christ must die
and then rise from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I am telling
you about is the Christ." 4 Some of them were convinced and
joined Paul and Silas, along with many of the Greeks who
worshiped God and many of the important women.

5 But some others became jealous. So they got some evil men
from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot. They
ran to Jason's house, looking for Paul and Silas, wanting to
bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them,
they dragged Jason and some other believers to the leaders of
the city. The people were yelling, "These people have made
trouble everywhere in the world, and now they have come here
too! 7 Jason is keeping them in his house. All of them do things
against the laws of Caesar, saying there is another king, called
Jesus."

8 When the people and the leaders of the city heard these
things, they became very upset. 9 They made Jason and the
others put up a sum of money. Then they let the believers go
free.

### *Paul and Silas Go to Berea*

10 That same night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea
where they went to the synagogue. 11 These people were more
willing to listen than the people in Thessalonica. The Bereans
were eager to hear what Paul and Silas said and studied the

Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true. [12]So, many of them believed, as well as many important Greek women and men. [13]But the people in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, too. So they came there, upsetting the people and making trouble. [14]The believers quickly sent Paul away to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. [15]The people leading Paul went with him to Athens. Then they carried a message from Paul back to Silas and Timothy for them to come to him as soon as they could.

# July 13

## The Doorway to Your Heart

*The LORD can control a king's mind as he controls a river; he can direct it as he pleases.*

Proverbs 21:1

Your heart is a fertile greenhouse ready to produce good fruit. Your mind is the doorway to your heart—the strategic place where you determine which seeds are sown and which seeds are discarded. The Holy Spirit is ready to help you manage and filter the thoughts that try to enter. He can help you guard your heart.

He stands with you on the threshold. A thought approaches, a questionable thought. Do you throw open the door and let it enter? Of course not. You "capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). You don't leave the door unguarded. You stand equipped with handcuffs and leg irons, ready to capture any thought not fit to enter.

from *Just Like Jesus*

### 2 Chronicles 21:4—23:7

### *Jehoram King of Judah*

4When Jehoram took control of his father's kingdom, he killed all his brothers with a sword and also killed some of the leaders of Judah. 5He was thirty-two years old when he began to rule, and he ruled eight years in Jerusalem. 6He followed in the ways of the kings of Israel, just as the family of Ahab had done, because he married Ahab's daughter. Jehoram did what the LORD said was wrong. 7But the LORD would not destroy David's family because of the agreement he had made with David. He had promised that one of David's descendants would always rule.

8In Jehoram's time, Edom broke away from Judah's rule and

chose their own king. 9So Jehoram went to Edom with all his commanders and chariots. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but Jehoram got up and attacked the Edomites at night. 10From then until now the country of Edom has fought against the rule of Judah. At the same time the people of Libnah also broke away from Jehoram because Jehoram left the LORD, the God of his ancestors.

11Jehoram also built places to worship gods on the hills in Judah. He led the people of Jerusalem to sin, and he led the people of Judah away from the LORD. 12Then Jehoram received this letter from Elijah the prophet:

This is what the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, says, "Jehoram, you have not lived as your father Jehoshaphat lived and as Asa king of Judah lived. 13But you have lived as the kings of Israel lived, leading the people of Judah and Jerusalem to sin against God, as Ahab and his family did. You have killed your brothers, and they were better than you. 14So now the LORD is about to punish your people, your children, wives, and everything you own. 15You will have a terrible disease in your intestines that will become worse every day. Finally it will cause your intestines to come out."

16The LORD caused the Philistines and the Arabs who lived near the Cushites to be angry with Jehoram. 17So the Philistines and Arabs attacked Judah and carried away all the wealth of Jehoram's palace, as well as his sons and wives. Only Jehoram's youngest son, Ahaziah, was left.

18After these things happened, the LORD gave Jehoram a disease in his intestines that could not be cured. 19After he was sick for two years, Jehoram's intestines came out because of the disease, and he died in terrible pain. The people did not make a fire to honor Jehoram as they had done for his ancestors.

20Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he ruled eight years in Jerusalem. No one was sad when he died. He was buried in Jerusalem, but not in the graves for the kings.

## *Ahaziah King of Judah*

22 The people of Jerusalem chose Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, to be king in his place. The robbers who had come with the Arabs to attack Jehoram's camp had killed all of Jehoram's older sons. So Ahaziah began to rule Judah. 2Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he ruled one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri. 3Ahaziah followed the ways of Ahab's family, because his mother encouraged him to do wrong. 4Ahaziah did what the LORD said was wrong, as Ahab's family had done. They gave advice to Ahaziah after his father died, and their bad advice led

to his death. [5]Following their advice, Ahaziah went with Joram
son of Ahab to Ramoth in Gilead, where they fought against
Hazael king of Aram. The Arameans wounded Joram. [6]So Joram
returned to Jezreel to heal from the wounds he received at
Ramoth when he fought Hazael king of Aram.

Ahaziah son of Jehoram and king of Judah went down to visit
Joram son of Ahab at Jezreel because he had been wounded.

[7]God caused Ahaziah's death when he went to visit Joram.
Ahaziah arrived and went out with Joram to meet Jehu son of
Nimshi, whom the LORD had appointed to destroy Ahab's family.
[8]While Jehu was punishing Ahab's family, he found the leaders
of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's relatives who served
Ahaziah, and Jehu killed them all. [9]Then Jehu looked for
Ahaziah. Jehu's men caught him hiding in Samaria, so they
brought him to Jehu. Then they killed and buried him. They
said, "Ahaziah is a descendant of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat
obeyed the LORD with all his heart." No one in Ahaziah's family
had the power to take control of the kingdom of Judah.

## *Athaliah and Joash*

[10]When Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, saw that her son was
dead, she killed all the royal family in Judah. [11]But Jehosheba,
King Jehoram's daughter, took Joash, Ahaziah's son. She stole
him from among the other sons of the king who were going to
be murdered and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. So
Jehosheba, who was King Jehoram's daughter and Ahaziah's
sister and the wife of Jehoiada the priest, hid Joash so Athaliah
could not kill him. [12]He hid with them in the Temple of God for
six years. During that time Athaliah ruled the land.

[23] In the seventh year Jehoiada decided to do something. He
made an agreement with the commanders of the groups of a
hundred men: Azariah son of Jeroham, Ishmael son of
Jehohanan, Azariah son of Obed, Maaseiah son of Adaiah, and
Elishaphat son of Zicri. [2]They went around in Judah and
gathered the Levites from all the towns, and they gathered the
leaders of the families of Judah. Then they went to Jerusalem.
[3]All the people together made an agreement with the king in
the Temple of God.

Jehoiada said to them, "The king's son will rule, as the LORD
promised about David's descendants. [4]Now this is what you
must do: You priests and Levites go on duty on the Sabbath. A
third of you will guard the doors. [5]A third of you will be at the
king's palace, and a third of you will be at the Foundation Gate.
All the other people will stay in the courtyards of the Temple of
the LORD. [6]Don't let anyone come into the Temple of the LORD
except the priests and Levites who serve. They may come
because they have been made ready to serve the LORD, but all

the others must do the job the LORD has given them. 7The Levites must stay near the king, each man with his weapon in his hand. If anyone tries to enter the Temple, kill him. Stay close to the king when he goes in and when he goes out."

## Psalm 83:1–8

### *A Prayer Against the Enemies*

**A song. A psalm of Asaph.**

83 God, do not keep quiet;
God, do not be silent or still.

2Your enemies are making noises;
those who hate you are getting ready to attack.

3They are making secret plans against your people;
they plot against those you love.

4They say, "Come, let's destroy them as a nation.
Then no one will ever remember the name 'Israel.'"

5They are united in their plan.
These have made an agreement against you:

6the families of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagrites,

7the people of Byblos, Ammon, Amalek,
Philistia, and Tyre.

8Even Assyria has joined them
to help Ammon and Moab, the descendants of Lot. *Selah*

## Proverbs 21:1

21 The LORD can control a king's mind as he
controls a river;
he can direct it as he pleases.

## Acts 17:16–34

### *Paul Preaches in Athens*

16While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, he
was troubled because he saw that the city was full of idols. 17In
the synagogue, he talked with the Jews and the Greeks who
worshiped God. He also talked every day with people in the
marketplace.
18Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers[n] argued
with him, saying, "This man doesn't know what he is talking
about. What is he trying to say?" Others said, "He seems to be
telling us about some other gods," because Paul was telling
them about Jesus and his rising from the dead. 19They got Paul
and took him to a meeting of the Areopagus,[n] where they said,
"Please explain to us this new idea you have been teaching.
20The things you are saying are new to us, and we want to know
what this teaching means." 21(All the people of Athens and
those from other countries who lived there always used their
time to talk about the newest ideas.)
22Then Paul stood before the meeting of the Areopagus and
said, "People of Athens, I can see you are very religious in all
things. 23As I was going through your city, I saw the objects you
worship. I found an altar that had these words written on it: to a
god who is not known. You worship a god that you don't know, and
this is the God I am telling you about! 24The God who made the
whole world and everything in it is the Lord of the land and the
sky. He does not live in temples built by human hands. 25This
God is the One who gives life, breath, and everything else to
people. He does not need any help from them; he has
everything he needs. 26God began by making one person, and
from him came all the different people who live everywhere in
the world. God decided exactly when and where they must live.
27God wanted them to look for him and perhaps search all
around for him and find him, though he is not far from any of

us: [28]‘By his power we live and move and exist.’ Some of your
own poets have said: ‘For we are his children.’ [29]Since we are
God’s children, you must not think that God is like something
that people imagine or make from gold, silver, or rock. [30]In the
past, people did not understand God, and he ignored this. But
now, God tells all people in the world to change their hearts and
lives. [31]God has set a day that he will judge all the world with
fairness, by the man he chose long ago. And God has proved
this to everyone by raising that man from the dead!”

[32]When the people heard about Jesus being raised from the
dead, some of them laughed. But others said, “We will hear
more about this from you later.” [33]So Paul went away from
them. [34]But some of the people believed Paul and joined him.
Among those who believed was Dionysius, a member of the
Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and some others.

# July 14

# An Undeserved Gift

*These followers had believed in Jesus because of God's grace.*

Acts 18:27

we take our free gift of salvation and try to earn it or diagnose it or pay for it instead of simply saying "thank you" and accepting it. Ironic as it may appear, one of the hardest things to do is to be saved by grace. There's something in us that reacts to God's free gift. We have some weird compulsion to create laws, systems, and regulations that will make us "worthy" of our gift.

Why do we do that? The only reason I can figure is pride. To accept grace means to accept its necessity, and most folks don't like to do that. To accept grace also means that one realizes his despair, and most people aren't too keen on doing that either.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## 2 Chronicles 23:8—24:27

### *Joash Becomes King*

8 The Levites and all the people of Judah obeyed everything
Jehoiada the priest had commanded. He did not excuse anyone
from the groups of the priests. So each commander took his
men who came on duty on the Sabbath with those who went off
duty on the Sabbath. 9 Jehoiada gave the commanders of a
hundred men the spears and the large and small shields that
had belonged to King David and that were kept in the Temple of
God. 10 Then Jehoiada told the soldiers where to stand with
weapon in hand. There were guards from the south side of the
Temple to the north side. They stood by the altar and the
Temple and around the king.

11 Jehoiada and his sons brought out the king's son and put
the crown on him and gave him a copy of the agreement. Then
they appointed him king and poured olive oil on him and

shouted, “Long live the king!”

12When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went to them at the Temple of the LORD. 13She looked, and there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance. The officers and the trumpeters were standing beside him, and all the people of the land were happy and blowing trumpets. The singers were playing musical instruments and leading praises. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and screamed, “Traitors! Traitors!”

14Jehoiada the priest sent out the commanders of a hundred men, who led the army. He said, “Surround her with soldiers and take her out of the Temple area. Kill with a sword anyone who follows her.” He had said, “Don’t put Athaliah to death in the Temple of the LORD.” 15So they caught her when she came to the entrance of the Horse Gate near the palace. There they put her to death.

16Then Jehoiada made an agreement with the people and the king that they would be the LORD’s special people. 17All the people went to the temple of Baal and tore it down, smashing the altars and idols. They killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars.

18Then Jehoiada chose the priests, who were Levites, to be responsible for the Temple of the LORD. David had given them duties in the Temple of the LORD. They were to offer the burnt offerings to the LORD as the Teachings of Moses commanded, and they were to offer them with much joy and singing as David had commanded. 19Jehoiada put guards at the gates of the Temple of the LORD so that anyone who was unclean in any way could not enter.

20Jehoiada took with him the commanders of a hundred men, the important men, the rulers of the people, and all the people of the land to take the king out of the Temple of the LORD. They went through the Upper Gate into the palace, and then they seated the king on the throne. 21So all the people of the land were very happy, and Jerusalem had peace, because Athaliah had been put to death with the sword.

## *Joash Repairs the Temple*

24 Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he ruled forty years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Zibiah, and she was from Beersheba. 2Joash did what the LORD said was right as long as Jehoiada the priest was alive. 3Jehoiada chose two wives for Joash, and Joash had sons and daughters.

4Later, Joash decided to repair the Temple of the LORD. 5He called the priests and the Levites together and said to them, “Go to the towns of Judah and gather the money all the Israelites have to pay every year. Use it to repair the Temple of

your God. Do this now." But the Levites did not hurry.

6So King Joash called for Jehoiada the leading priest and said to him, "Why haven't you made the Levites bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax money that Moses, the LORD's servant, and the people of Israel used for the Holy Tent?"

7In the past the sons of wicked Athaliah had broken into the Temple of God and used its holy things for worshiping the Baal idols.

8King Joash commanded that a box for contributions be made. They put it outside, at the gate of the Temple of the LORD. 9Then the Levites made an announcement in Judah and Jerusalem, telling people to bring to the LORD the tax money Moses, the servant of God, had made the Israelites give while they were in the desert. 10All the officers and people were happy to bring their money, and they put it in the box until the box was full. 11When the Levites would take the box to the king's officers, they would see that it was full of money. Then the king's royal secretary and the leading priest's officer would come and take out the money and return the box to its place. They did this often and gathered much money. 12King Joash and Jehoiada gave the money to the people who worked on the Temple of the LORD. And they hired stoneworkers and carpenters to repair the Temple of the LORD. They also hired people to work with iron and bronze to repair the Temple.

13The people worked hard, and the work to repair the Temple went well. They rebuilt the Temple of God to be as it was before, but even stronger. 14When the workers finished, they brought the money that was left to King Joash and Jehoiada. They used that money to make utensils for the Temple of the LORD, utensils for the service in the Temple and for the burnt offerings, and bowls and other utensils from gold and silver. Burnt offerings were given every day in the Temple of the LORD while Jehoiada was alive.

15Jehoiada grew old and lived many years. Then he died when he was one hundred thirty years old. 16Jehoiada was buried in Jerusalem with the kings, because he had done much good in Judah for God and his Temple.

## *Joash Does Evil*

17After Jehoiada died, the officers of Judah came and bowed down to King Joash, and he listened to them. 18The king and these leaders stopped worshiping in the Temple of the LORD, the God of their ancestors. Instead, they began to worship the Asherah idols and other idols. Because they did wrong, God was angry with the people of Judah and Jerusalem. 19Even though the LORD sent prophets to the people to turn them back to him and even though the prophets warned them, they refused to

listen.

20Then the Spirit of God entered Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. Zechariah stood before the people and said, “This is what God says: ‘Why do you disobey the LORD’s commands? You will not be successful. Because you have left the LORD, he has also left you.’”

21But the king and his officers made plans against Zechariah. At the king’s command they threw stones at him in the courtyard of the Temple of the LORD until he died. 22King Joash did not remember Jehoiada’s kindness to him, so Joash killed Zechariah, Jehoiada’s son. Before Zechariah died, he said, “May the LORD see what you are doing and punish you.”

23At the end of the year, the Aramean army came against Joash. They attacked Judah and Jerusalem, killed all the leaders of the people, and sent all the valuable things to their king in Damascus. 24The Aramean army came with only a small group of men, but the LORD handed over to them a very large army from Judah, because the people of Judah had left the LORD, the God of their ancestors. So Joash was punished. 25When the Arameans left, Joash was badly wounded. His own officers made plans against him because he had killed Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. So they killed Joash in his own bed. He died and was buried in Jerusalem but not in the graves of the kings.

26The officers who made plans against Joash were Jozabad and Jehozabad. Jozabad was the son of Shimeath, a woman from Ammon. And Jehozabad was the son of Shimrith, a woman from Moab. 27The story of Joash’s sons, the great prophecies against him, and how he repaired the Temple of God are written in the book of the kings. Joash’s son Amaziah became king in his place.

## Psalm 83:9–18

9God, do to them what you did to Midian,
what you did to Sisera and Jabin at the Kishon River.

10They died at Endor,
and their bodies rotted on the ground.

11Do to their important leaders what you did to Oreb and Zeeb.
Do to their princes what you did to Zebah and Zalmunna.

12 They said, “Let’s take for ourselves
the pasturelands that belong to God.”

13 My God, make them like tumbleweed,
like chaff blown away by the wind.

14 Be like a fire that burns a forest
or like flames that blaze through the hills.

15 Chase them with your storm,
and frighten them with your wind.

16 Cover them with shame.
Then people will look for you, LORD.

17 Make them afraid and ashamed forever.
Disgrace them and destroy them.

18 Then they will know that you are the LORD,
that only you are God Most High over all the earth.

## Proverbs 21:2–3

2 You may believe you are doing right,
but the LORD judges your reasons.

3 Doing what is right and fair
is more important to the LORD than sacrifices.

## Acts 18:1–28

### *Paul in Corinth*

18 Later Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2Here he met a
Jew named Aquila who had been born in the country of Pontus.
But Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, had recently moved to Corinth
from Italy, because Claudius[n] commanded that all Jews must
leave Rome. Paul went to visit Aquila and Priscilla. 3Because
they were tentmakers, just as he was, he stayed with them and
worked with them. 4Every Sabbath day he talked with the Jews
and Greeks in the synagogue, trying to persuade them to
believe in Jesus.

5Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia and joined Paul in
Corinth. After this, Paul spent all his time telling people the
Good News, showing them that Jesus is the Christ. 6But they
would not accept Paul's teaching and said some evil things. So
he shook off the dust from his clothes[n] and said to them, "If you
are not saved, it will be your own fault! I have done all I can do!
After this, I will go to other nations." 7Paul left the synagogue
and moved into the home of Titius Justus, next to the
synagogue. This man worshiped God. 8Crispus was the leader of
that synagogue, and he and all the people living in his house
believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also listened to
Paul and believed and were baptized.

9During the night, the Lord told Paul in a vision: "Don't be
afraid. Continue talking to people and don't be quiet. 10I am
with you, and no one will hurt you because many of my people
are in this city." 11Paul stayed there for a year and a half,
teaching God's word to the people.

## *Paul Is Brought Before Gallio*

12When Gallio was the governor of the country of Southern
Greece, some people came together against Paul and took him
to the court. 13They said, "This man is teaching people to
worship God in a way that is against our law."

14Paul was about to say something, but Gallio spoke, saying,
"I would listen to you if you were complaining about a crime or
some wrong. 15But the things you are saying are only questions
about words and names—arguments about your own law. So you
must solve this problem yourselves. I don't want to be a judge
of these things." 16And Gallio made them leave the court.

17Then they all grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the
synagogue, and beat him there before the court. But this did not
bother Gallio.

## *Paul Returns to Antioch*

18Paul stayed with the believers for many more days. Then

he left and sailed for Syria, with Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchrea Paul cut off his hair,[n] because he had made a promise to God. 19Then they went to Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. While Paul was there, he went into the synagogue and talked with the people. 20When they asked him to stay with them longer, he refused. 21But as he left, he said, “I will come back to you again if God wants me to.” And so he sailed away from Ephesus.

22When Paul landed at Caesarea, he went and gave greetings to the church in Jerusalem. After that, Paul went to Antioch. 23He stayed there for a while and then left and went through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia. He traveled from town to town in these regions, giving strength to all the followers.

## *Apollos in Ephesus and Corinth*

24A Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus. He was born in the city of Alexandria and was a good speaker who knew the Scriptures well. 25He had been taught about the way of the Lord and was always very excited when he spoke and taught the truth about Jesus. But the only baptism Apollos knew about was the baptism that John[n] taught. 26Apollos began to speak very boldly in the synagogue, and when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him to their home and helped him better understand the way of God. 27Now Apollos wanted to go to the country of Southern Greece. So the believers helped him and wrote a letter to the followers there, asking them to accept him. These followers had believed in Jesus because of God’s grace, and when Apollos arrived, he helped them very much. 28He argued very strongly with the Jews before all the people, clearly proving with the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

# July 15

## Repentance Is a Decision

*Many of the believers began to confess openly and tell all the evil things they had done.*

Acts 19:18

NO one is happier than the one who has sincerely repented of wrong. Repentance is the decision to turn from selfish desires and seek God. It is a genuine, sincere regret that creates sorrow and moves us to admit wrong and desire to do better.

It's an inward conviction that expresses itself in outward actions.

You look at the love of God and you can't believe he's loved you like he has, and this realization motivates you to change your life. That is the nature of repentance.

from *Walking with the Savior*

### 2 Chronicles 25:1—27:9

### *Amaziah King of Judah*

25 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddin, and she was from Jerusalem. 2Amaziah did what the LORD said was right, but he did not really want to obey him. 3As soon as Amaziah took strong control of the kingdom, he executed the officers who had murdered his father the king. 4But Amaziah did not put to death their children. He obeyed what was written in the Book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, "Parents must not be put to death when their children do wrong, and children must not be put to death when their parents do wrong. Each must die for his own sins."[n]

5Amaziah gathered the people of Judah together. He grouped all the people of Judah and Benjamin by families, and he put commanders over groups of a thousand and over groups of a

hundred. He counted the men who were twenty years old and older. In all there were three hundred thousand soldiers ready to fight and skilled with spears and shields. 6Amaziah also hired one hundred thousand soldiers from Israel for about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver. 7But a man of God came to Amaziah and said, “My king, don’t let the army of Israel go with you. The LORD is not with Israel or the people from the tribe of Ephraim. 8You can make yourself strong for war, but God will defeat you. He has the power to help you or to defeat you.”

9Amaziah said to the man of God, “But what about the seventy-five hundred pounds of silver I paid to the Israelite army?”

The man of God answered, “The LORD can give you much more than that.”

10So Amaziah sent the Israelite army back home to Ephraim. They were very angry with the people of Judah and went home angry.

11Then Amaziah became very brave and led his army to the Valley of Salt in the country of Edom. There Amaziah’s army killed ten thousand Edomites. 12The army of Judah also captured ten thousand and took them to the top of a cliff and threw them off so that they split open.

13At the same time the Israelite troops that Amaziah had not let fight in the war were robbing towns in Judah. From Samaria to Beth Horon they killed three thousand people and took many valuable things.

14When Amaziah came home after defeating the Edomites, he brought back the idols they worshiped and started to worship them himself. He bowed down to them and offered sacrifices to them. 15The LORD was very angry with Amaziah, so he sent a prophet to him who said, “Why have you asked their gods for help? They could not even save their own people from you!”

16As the prophet spoke, Amaziah said to him, “We never gave you the job of advising the king. Stop, or you will be killed.”

The prophet stopped speaking except to say, “I know that God has decided to destroy you because you have done this. You did not listen to my advice.”

17Amaziah king of Judah talked with those who advised him. Then he sent a message to Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, who was the son of Jehu king of Israel. Amaziah said to Jehoash, “Come, let’s meet face to face.”

18Then Jehoash king of Israel answered Amaziah king of Judah, “A thornbush in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar tree in Lebanon. It said, ‘Let your daughter marry my son.’ But then a wild animal from Lebanon came by, walking on and crushing the thornbush. 19You say to yourself that you have defeated Edom, but you have become proud, and you brag. But you stay at home! Don’t ask for trouble, or you and Judah will be

defeated.”

20But Amaziah would not listen. God caused this to happen
so that Jehoash would defeat Judah, because Judah asked for
help from the gods of Edom. 21So Jehoash king of Israel went to
attack. He and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other in battle
at Beth Shemesh in Judah. 22Israel defeated Judah, and every
man of Judah ran away to his home. 23At Beth Shemesh Jehoash
king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah. (Amaziah was
the son of Joash, who was the son of Ahaziah.) Then Jehoash
brought him to Jerusalem. Jehoash broke down the wall of
Jerusalem, from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate, about
six hundred feet. 24He took all the gold and silver and all the
utensils from the Temple of God that Obed-Edom had taken care
of. He also took the treasures from the palace and some
hostages. Then he returned to Samaria.

25Amaziah son of Joash, the king of Judah, lived fifteen years
after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, the king of Israel.
26The other things Amaziah did as king, from the beginning to
the end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.
27When Amaziah stopped obeying the LORD, the people in
Jerusalem made plans against him. So he ran away to the town
of Lachish, but they sent men after him to Lachish and killed
him. 28They brought his body back on horses, and he was
buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David.

## *Uzziah King of Judah*

26 Then all the people of Judah made Uzziah[n] king in place of
his father Amaziah. Uzziah was sixteen years old. 2He rebuilt
the town of Elath and made it part of Judah again after Amaziah
died.

3Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he
ruled fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was
Jecoliah, and she was from Jerusalem. 4He did what the LORD
said was right, just as his father Amaziah had done. 5Uzziah
obeyed God while Zechariah was alive, because he taught
Uzziah how to respect and obey God. And as long as Uzziah
obeyed the LORD, God gave him success.

6Uzziah fought a war against the Philistines. He tore down
the walls around their towns of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod and
built new towns near Ashdod and in other places among the
Philistines. 7God helped Uzziah fight the Philistines, the Arabs
living in Gur Baal, and the Meunites. 8Also, the Ammonites
made the payments Uzziah demanded. He was very powerful, so
his name became famous all the way to the border of Egypt.

9Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, the
Valley Gate, and where the wall turned, and he made them
strong. 10He also built towers in the desert and dug many wells,

because he had many cattle on the western hills and in the plains. He had people who worked his fields and vineyards in the hills and in the fertile lands, because he loved the land.

11 Uzziah had an army of trained soldiers. They were counted and put in groups by Jeiel the royal secretary and Maaseiah the officer. Hananiah, one of the king's commanders, was their leader. 12 There were twenty-six hundred leaders over the soldiers. 13 They were in charge of an army of three hundred seven thousand five hundred men who fought with great power to help the king against the enemy. 14 Uzziah gave his army shields, spears, helmets, armor, bows, and stones for their slings. 15 In Jerusalem Uzziah made cleverly designed devices. These devices on the towers and corners of the city walls were used to shoot arrows and large rocks. So Uzziah became famous in faraway places, because he had much help until he became powerful.

16 But when Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his ruin. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God; he went into the Temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar for incense. 17 Azariah and eighty other brave priests who served the LORD followed Uzziah into the Temple. 18 They told him he was wrong and said to him, "You don't have the right to burn incense to the LORD. Only the priests, Aaron's descendants, should burn the incense, because they have been made holy. Leave this holy place. You have been unfaithful, and the LORD God will not honor you for this."

19 Uzziah was standing beside the altar for incense in the Temple of the LORD, and in his hand was a pan for burning incense. He was very angry with the priests. As he was standing in front of the priests, a skin disease broke out on his forehead. 20 Azariah, the leading priest, and all the other priests looked at him and saw the skin disease on his forehead. So they hurried him out of the Temple. Uzziah also rushed out, because the LORD was punishing him. 21 So King Uzziah had the skin disease until the day he died. He had to live in a separate house and could not enter the Temple of the LORD. His son Jotham was in charge of the palace, and he governed the people of the land.

22 The other things Uzziah did as king, from beginning to end, were written down by the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. 23 Uzziah died and was buried near his ancestors in a graveyard that belonged to the kings. This was because people said, "He had a skin disease." And his son Jotham became king in his place.

## *Jotham King of Judah*

27 Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. 2 Jotham did what the LORD said was

right, just as his father Uzziah had done. But Jotham did not enter the Temple of the LORD to burn incense as his father had. But the people continued doing wrong. 3Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the Temple of the LORD, and he added greatly to the wall at Ophel. 4He also built towns in the hill country of Judah, as well as walled cities and towers in the forests.

5Jotham also fought the king of the Ammonites and defeated them. So each year for three years they gave Jotham about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver, about sixty-two thousand bushels of wheat, and about sixty-two thousand bushels of barley. 6Jotham became powerful, because he always obeyed the LORD his God.

7The other things Jotham did while he was king and all his wars are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. 8Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. 9Jotham died and was buried in Jerusalem, the city of David. Then Jotham's son Ahaz became king in his place.

## Psalm 84:1–7

### *Wishing to Be in the Temple*

**For the director of music. On the gittith. A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

84 LORD All-Powerful,
how lovely is your Temple!

2I want more than anything
to be in the courtyards of the LORD's Temple.

My whole being wants
to be with the living God.

3The sparrows have found a home,
and the swallows have nests.

They raise their young near your altars,

LORD All-Powerful, my King and my God.

4Happy are the people who live at your Temple;
they are always praising you. *Selah*

5Happy are those whose strength comes from you,
who want to travel to Jerusalem.

6As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
they make it like a spring.
The autumn rains fill it with pools of water.

7The people get stronger as they go,
and everyone meets with God in Jerusalem.

## Proverbs 21:4–5

4Proud looks, proud thoughts,
and evil actions are sin.

5The plans of hard-working people earn a profit,
but those who act too quickly become poor.

## Acts 19:1–22

### *Paul in Ephesus*

19 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul was visiting some places on the way to Ephesus. There he found some followers 2and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They said, “We have never even heard of a Holy Spirit.”

3So he asked, “What kind of baptism did you have?”

They said, “It was the baptism that John taught.”

4Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of changed hearts

and lives. He told people to believe in the one who would come after him, and that one is Jesus."

5When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6Then Paul laid his hands on them,[n] and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They began speaking different languages[n] and prophesying. 7There were about twelve people in this group.

8Paul went into the synagogue and spoke out boldly for three months. He talked with the people and persuaded them to accept the things he said about the kingdom of God. 9But some of them became stubborn. They refused to believe and said evil things about the Way of Jesus before all the people. So Paul left them, and taking the followers with him, he went to the school of a man named Tyrannus. There Paul talked with people every day 10for two years. Because of his work, every Jew and Greek in Asia heard the word of the Lord.

## *The Sons of Sceva*

11God used Paul to do some very special miracles. 12Some people took handkerchiefs and clothes that Paul had used and put them on the sick. When they did this, the sick were healed and evil spirits left them.

13But some people also were traveling around and making evil spirits go out of people. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus to force the evil spirits out. They would say, "By the same Jesus that Paul talks about, I order you to come out!" 14Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this.

15But one time an evil spirit said to them, "I know Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

16Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them. Because he was so much stronger than all of them, they ran away from the house naked and hurt. 17All the people in Ephesus—Jews and Greeks—learned about this and were filled with fear and gave great honor to the Lord Jesus. 18Many of the believers began to confess openly and tell all the evil things they had done. 19Some of them who had used magic brought their magic books and burned them before everyone. Those books were worth about fifty thousand silver coins.[n]

20So in a powerful way the word of the Lord kept spreading and growing.

21After these things, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, planning to go through the countries of Macedonia and Southern Greece and then on to Jerusalem. He said, "After I have been to Jerusalem, I must also visit Rome." 22Paul sent Timothy and Erastus, two of his helpers, ahead to Macedonia, but he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

# July 16

## God's View of Your Life

*LORD All-Powerful, happy are the people who trust you!*

Psalm 84:12

Have bad things *really* happened to you? You and God may have different definitions for the word *bad.* Parents and children do. Look up the word *bad* in a middle-schooler's dictionary, and you'll read definitions such as "pimple on nose," or "pop quiz in geometry." "Dad, this is really bad!" the youngster says. Dad, having been around the block a time or two, thinks differently. Pimples pass …

What you and I might rate as an absolute disaster, God may rate as a pimple-level problem that will pass. He views your life the way you view a movie after you've read the book. When something bad happens, you feel the air sucked out of the theater. Everyone else gasps at the crisis on the screen. Not you. Why? You've read the book. You know how the good guy gets out of the tight spot. God views your life with the same confidence. He's not only read your story … he wrote it.

from *Come Thirsty*

### 2 Chronicles 28:1—29:36

#### *Ahaz King of Judah*

28 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. Unlike his ancestor David, he did not do what the LORD said was right. 2Ahaz did the same things the kings of Israel had done. He made metal idols to worship Baal. 3He burned incense in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and made his children pass through the fire. He did the same hateful sins as the nations had done whom the LORD had forced out of the land ahead of the Israelites. 4Ahaz offered sacrifices and burned incense at the places where gods were worshiped,

and on the hills, and under every green tree.

5So the LORD his God handed over Ahaz to the king of Aram. The Arameans defeated Ahaz and took many people of Judah as prisoners to Damascus.

He also handed over Ahaz to Pekah king of Israel, and Pekah's army killed many soldiers of Ahaz. 6The army of Pekah son of Remaliah killed one hundred twenty thousand brave soldiers from Judah in one day. Pekah defeated them because they had left the LORD, the God of their ancestors. 7Zicri, a warrior from Ephraim, killed King Ahaz's son Maaseiah. He also killed Azrikam, the officer in charge of the palace, and Elkanah, who was second in command to the king. 8The Israelite army captured two hundred thousand of their own relatives. They took women, sons and daughters, and many valuable things from Judah and carried them back to Samaria. 9But a prophet of the LORD named Oded was there. He met the Israelite army when it returned to Samaria and said to them, "The LORD, the God of your ancestors, handed Judah over to you, because he was angry with those people. But God has seen the cruel way you killed them. 10Now you plan to make the people of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves, but you also have sinned against the LORD your God. 11Now listen to me. Send back your brothers and sisters whom you captured, because the LORD is very angry with you."

12Then some of the leaders in Ephraim—Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berekiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai—met the Israelite soldiers coming home from war. 13They warned the soldiers, "Don't bring the prisoners from Judah here. If you do, we will be guilty of sin against the LORD, and that will make our sin and guilt even worse. Our guilt is already so great that he is angry with Israel."

14So the soldiers left the prisoners and valuable things in front of the officers and people there. 15The leaders who were named took the prisoners and gave those who were naked the clothes that the Israelite army had taken. They gave the prisoners clothes, sandals, food, drink, and medicine. They put the weak prisoners on donkeys and took them back to their families in Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned home to Samaria.

16–17At that time the Edomites came again and attacked Judah and carried away prisoners. So King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help. 18The Philistines also robbed the towns in the western hills and in southern Judah. They captured the towns of Beth Shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco, Timnah, and Gimzo, and the villages around them. Then the Philistines lived in those towns. 19The LORD brought trouble on Judah because Ahaz their king led the people of Judah to sin, and he was unfaithful to the LORD. 20Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to

Ahaz, but he gave Ahaz trouble instead of help. 21Ahaz took some valuable things from the Temple of the LORD, from the palace, and from the princes, and he gave them to the king of Assyria, but it did not help.

22During Ahaz's troubles he was even more unfaithful to the LORD. 23He offered sacrifices to the gods of the people of Damascus, who had defeated him. He thought, "The gods of the kings of Aram helped them. If I offer sacrifices to them, they will help me also." But this brought ruin to Ahaz and all Israel.

24Ahaz gathered the things from the Temple of God and broke them into pieces. Then he closed the doors of the Temple of the LORD. He made altars and put them on every street corner in Jerusalem. 25In every town in Judah, Ahaz made places for burning sacrifices to worship other gods. So he made the LORD, the God of his ancestors, very angry.

26The other things Ahaz did as king, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27Ahaz died and was buried in the city of Jerusalem, but not in the graves of the kings of Israel. Ahaz's son Hezekiah became king in his place.

## *Hezekiah Purifies the Temple*

29 Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. 2Hezekiah did what the LORD said was right, just as his ancestor David had done.

3Hezekiah opened the doors of the Temple of the LORD and repaired them in the first month of the first year he was king. 4Hezekiah brought in the priests and Levites and gathered them in the courtyard on the east side of the Temple. 5Hezekiah said, "Listen to me, Levites. Make yourselves ready for the LORD's service, and make holy the Temple of the LORD, the God of your ancestors. Remove from the Temple everything that makes it impure. 6Our ancestors were unfaithful to God and did what the LORD said was wrong. They left the LORD and stopped worshiping at the Temple where he lives. They rejected him. 7They shut the doors of the porch of the Temple, and they let the fire go out in the lamps. They stopped burning incense and offering burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. 8So the LORD became very angry with the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and he punished them. Other people are frightened and shocked by what he did to them. So they insult the people of Judah. You know these things are true. 9That is why our ancestors were killed in battle and our sons, daughters, and wives were taken captive. 10Now I, Hezekiah, have decided to make an agreement with the LORD, the God of Israel, so he will not be angry with us anymore. 11My sons, don't waste any more time. The LORD chose

you to stand before him, to serve him, to be his servants, and to burn incense to him."

12These are the Levites who started to work. From the Kohathite family there were Mahath son of Amasai and Joel son of Azariah. From the Merarite family there were Kish son of Abdi and Azariah son of Jehallelel. From the Gershonite family there were Joah son of Zimmah and Eden son of Joah. 13From Elizaphan's family there were Shimri and Jeiel. From Asaph's family there were Zechariah and Mattaniah. 14From Heman's family there were Jehiel and Shimei. From Jeduthun's family there were Shemaiah and Uzziel.

15These Levites gathered their brothers together and made themselves holy for service in the Temple. Then they went into the Temple of the LORD to purify it. They obeyed the king's command that had come from the LORD. 16When the priests went into the Temple of the LORD to purify it, they took out all the unclean things they found in the Temple of the LORD and put them in the Temple courtyard. Then the Levites took these things out to the Kidron Valley. 17Beginning on the first day of the first month, they made the Temple holy for the LORD's service. On the eighth day of the month, they came to the porch of the Temple, and for eight more days they made the Temple of the LORD holy. So they finished on the sixteenth day of the first month.

18Then they went to King Hezekiah and said, "We have purified the entire Temple of the LORD, the altar for burnt offerings and its utensils, and the table for the holy bread and all its utensils. 19When Ahaz was king, he was unfaithful to God and removed some things from the Temple. But we have put them back and made them holy for the LORD. They are now in front of the LORD's altar."

20Early the next morning King Hezekiah gathered the leaders of the city and went up to the Temple of the LORD. 21They brought seven bulls, seven male sheep, seven lambs, and seven male goats. These animals were an offering to remove the sin of the people and the kingdom of Judah and to make the Temple ready for service to God. King Hezekiah commanded the priests, the descendants of Aaron, to offer these animals on the LORD's altar. 22So the priests killed the bulls and sprinkled their blood on the altar. They killed the sheep and sprinkled their blood on the altar. Then they killed the lambs and sprinkled their blood on the altar. 23Then the priests brought the male goats for the sin offering before the king and the people there. After the king and the people put their hands on the goats, 24the priests killed them. With the goats' blood they made an offering on the altar to remove the sins of the Israelites so they would belong to God. The king had said that the burnt offering and sin offering should be made for all Israel.

25King Hezekiah put the Levites in the Temple of the LORD

with cymbals, harps, and lyres, as David, Gad, and Nathan had commanded. (Gad was the king's seer, and Nathan was a prophet.) This command came from the LORD through his prophets. 26So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments of music, and the priests stood ready with their trumpets.

27Then Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the singing to the LORD also began. The trumpets were blown, and the musical instruments of David king of Israel were played. 28All the people worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters blew their trumpets until the burnt offering was finished.

29When the sacrifices were completed, King Hezekiah and everyone with him bowed down and worshiped. 30King Hezekiah and his officers ordered the Levites to praise the LORD, using the words David and Asaph the seer had used. So they praised God with joy and bowed down and worshiped.

31Then Hezekiah said, "Now that you people of Judah have given yourselves to the LORD, come near to the Temple of the LORD. Bring sacrifices and offerings, to show thanks to him." So the people brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and anyone who was willing also brought burnt offerings. 32For burnt offerings they brought a total of seventy bulls, one hundred male sheep, and two hundred lambs; all these animals were sacrificed as burnt offerings to the LORD. 33The holy offerings totaled six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep and goats. 34There were not enough priests to skin all the animals for the burnt offerings. So their relatives the Levites helped them until the work was finished and other priests could be made holy. The Levites had been more careful to make themselves holy for the LORD's service than the priests. 35There were many burnt offerings along with the fat of fellowship offerings and drink offerings. So the service in the Temple of the LORD began again. 36And Hezekiah and the people were very happy that God had made it happen so quickly for his people.

## Psalm 84:8–12

8LORD God All-Powerful, hear my prayer;
God of Jacob, listen to me. *Selah*

9God, look at our shield;
be kind to your appointed king.

[10]One day in the courtyards of your Temple is better
than a thousand days anywhere else.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the Temple of my God
than live in the homes of the wicked.

[11]The LORD God is like a sun and shield;
the LORD gives us kindness and honor.

He does not hold back anything good
from those whose lives are innocent.

[12]LORD All-Powerful,
happy are the people who trust you!

## Proverbs 21:6–8

[6]Wealth that comes from telling lies
vanishes like a mist and leads to death.

[7]The violence of the wicked will destroy them,
because they refuse to do what is right.

[8]Guilty people live dishonest lives,
but honest people do right.

## Acts 19:23–41

### *Trouble in Ephesus*

[23]And during that time, there was some serious trouble in Ephesus about the Way of Jesus. [24]A man named Demetrius, who worked with silver, made little silver models that looked

like the temple of the goddess Artemis.[n] Those who did this work made much money. 25Demetrius had a meeting with them and some others who did the same kind of work. He told them, "Men, you know that we make a lot of money from our business. 26But look at what this man Paul is doing. He has convinced and turned away many people in Ephesus and in almost all of Asia! He says the gods made by human hands are not real. 27There is a danger that our business will lose its good name, but there is also another danger: People will begin to think that the temple of the great goddess Artemis is not important. Her greatness will be destroyed, and Artemis is the goddess that everyone in Asia and the whole world worships."

28When the others heard this, they became very angry and shouted, "Artemis, the goddess of Ephesus, is great!" 29The whole city became confused. The people grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, who were from Macedonia and were traveling with Paul, and ran to the theater. 30Paul wanted to go in and talk to the crowd, but the followers did not let him. 31Also, some leaders of Asia who were friends of Paul sent him a message, begging him not to go into the theater. 32Some people were shouting one thing, and some were shouting another. The meeting was completely confused; most of them did not know why they had come together. 33They put a man named Alexander in front of the people, and some of them told him what to do. Alexander waved his hand so he could explain things to the people. 34But when they saw that Alexander was a Jew, they all shouted the same thing for two hours: "Great is Artemis of Ephesus!"

35Then the city clerk made the crowd be quiet. He said, "People of Ephesus, everyone knows that Ephesus is the city that keeps the temple of the great goddess Artemis and her holy stone[n] that fell from heaven. 36Since no one can say this is not true, you should be quiet. Stop and think before you do anything. 37You brought these men here, but they have not said anything evil against our goddess or stolen anything from her temple. 38If Demetrius and those who work with him have a charge against anyone they should go to the courts and judges where they can argue with each other. 39If there is something else you want to talk about, it can be decided at the regular town meeting of the people. 40I say this because some people might see this trouble today and say that we are rioting. We could not explain this, because there is no real reason for this meeting." 41After the city clerk said these things, he told the people to go home.

# July 17

## Descend Into God's Love

*LORD, show us your love, and save us.*

Psalm 85:7

My friend Keith took his wife, Sarah, to Cozumel, Mexico, to celebrate their anniversary. Sarah loves to snorkel. Give her fins, a mask, and a breathing tube, and watch her go deep. Down she swims, searching for the mysteries below.

Keith's idea of snorkeling includes fins, a mask, and a breathing tube, but it also includes a bellyboard. The surface satisfies him.

Sarah, however, convinced him to take the plunge. Forty feet offshore, she shouted for him to paddle out. He did. The two plunged into the water where she showed him a twenty-foot-tall submerged cross. "If I'd had another breath," he confessed, "the sight would have taken it away."

Jesus waves for you to descend and see the same. Forget surface glances. No more sunburned back. Go deep. Take a breath and descend so deeply into his love that you see nothing else.

from *Come Thirsty*

## 2 Chronicles 30:1—31:21

### *The Passover Celebration*

30 King Hezekiah sent messages to all the people of Israel and
Judah, and he wrote letters to the people of Ephraim and
Manasseh. Hezekiah invited all these people to come to the
Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for
the LORD, the God of Israel. 2King Hezekiah, his officers, and all
the people in Jerusalem agreed to celebrate the Passover in the
second month. 3They could not celebrate it at the normal time,
because not enough priests had made themselves ready to

serve the LORD, and the people had not yet gathered in Jerusalem. 4This plan satisfied King Hezekiah and all the people. 5So they made an announcement everywhere in Israel, from Beersheba to Dan,[n] telling the people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for the LORD, the God of Israel. For a long time most of the people had not celebrated the Passover as the law commanded. 6At the king's command, the messengers took letters from him and his officers all through Israel and Judah. This is what the letters said:

People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Then God will return to you who are still alive, who have escaped from the kings of Assyria. 7Don't be like your ancestors or your relatives. They turned against the LORD, the God of their ancestors, so he caused other people to be disgusted with them. You know this is true. 8Don't be stubborn as your ancestors were, but obey the LORD willingly. Come to the Temple, which he has made holy forever. Serve the LORD your God so he will not be angry with you. 9Come back to the LORD. Then the people who captured your relatives and children will be kind to them and will let them return to this land. The LORD your God is kind and merciful. He will not turn away from you if you return to him.

10The messengers went to every town in Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the way to Zebulun, but the people laughed at them and made fun of them. 11But some men from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun were sorry for what they had done and went to Jerusalem. 12And God united all the people of Judah in obeying King Hezekiah and his officers, because their command had come from the LORD.

13In the second month a large crowd came together in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 14The people removed the altars and incense altars to gods in Jerusalem and threw them into the Kidron Valley.

15They killed the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, so they made themselves holy and brought burnt offerings into the Temple of the LORD. 16They took their regular places in the Temple as the Teachings of Moses, the man of God, commanded. The Levites gave the blood of the sacrifices to the priests, who sprinkled it on the altar. 17Since many people in the crowd had not made themselves holy, the Levites killed the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean. The Levites made each lamb holy for the LORD. 18–19Although many people from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun had not purified themselves for the feast, they ate the Passover even though it was against the law. So Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "LORD, you are good. You are the LORD, the God of our ancestors. Please forgive all those who try to obey you even if they did not make themselves clean as the rules of the Temple

command.” 20The LORD listened to Hezekiah’s prayer, and he
healed the people. 21The Israelites in Jerusalem celebrated the
Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great joy to the
LORD. The Levites and priests praised the LORD every day with
loud music. 22Hezekiah encouraged all the Levites who showed
they understood well how to do their service for the LORD. The
people ate the feast for seven days, offered fellowship offerings,
and praised the LORD, the God of their ancestors.

23Then all the people agreed to stay seven more days, so
they celebrated with joy for seven more days. 24Hezekiah king
of Judah gave one thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep to
the people. The officers gave one thousand bulls and ten
thousand sheep to the people. Many priests made themselves
holy. 25All the people of Judah, the priests, the Levites, those
who came from Israel, the foreigners from Israel, and the
foreigners living in Judah were very happy. 26There was much
joy in Jerusalem, because there had not been a celebration like
this since the time of Solomon son of David and king of Israel.
27The priests and Levites stood up and blessed the people, and
God heard them because their prayer reached heaven, his holy
home.

## *The Collection for the Priests*

31 When the Passover celebration was finished, all the Israelites
in Jerusalem went out to the towns of Judah. There they
smashed the stone pillars used to worship gods. They cut down
the Asherah idols and destroyed the altars and places for
worshiping gods in all of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and
Manasseh. After they had destroyed all of them, the Israelites
returned to their own towns and homes.

2King Hezekiah appointed groups of priests and Levites for
their special duties. They were to offer burnt offerings and
fellowship offerings, to worship, and to give thanks and praise
at the gates of the LORD’s house. 3Hezekiah gave some of his
own animals for the burnt offerings, which were given every
morning and evening, on Sabbath days, during New Moons, and
at other feasts commanded in the LORD’s Teachings.

4Hezekiah commanded the people living in Jerusalem to give
the priests and Levites the portion that belonged to them. Then
the priests and Levites could give all their time to the LORD’s
Teachings. 5As soon as the king’s command went out to the
Israelites, they gave freely of the first portion of their grain,
new wine, oil, honey, and everything they grew in their fields.
They brought a large amount, one-tenth of everything. 6The
people of Israel and Judah who lived in Judah also brought one-
tenth of their cattle and sheep and one-tenth of the holy things
that were given to the LORD their God, and they put all of them

in piles. [7]The people began the piles in the third month and finished in the seventh month. [8]When Hezekiah and his officers came and saw the piles, they praised the LORD and his people, the people of Israel. [9]Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites about the piles. [10]Azariah, the leading priest from Zadok's family, answered Hezekiah, "Since the people began to bring their offerings to the Temple of the LORD, we have had plenty to eat and plenty left over, because the LORD has blessed his people. So we have all this left over."

[11]Then Hezekiah commanded the priests to prepare the storerooms in the Temple of the LORD. So this was done. [12]Then the priests brought in the offerings and the things given to the LORD and one-tenth of everything the people had given. Conaniah the Levite was in charge of these things, and his brother Shimei was second to him. [13]Conaniah and his brother Shimei were over these supervisors: Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismakiah, Mahath, and Benaiah. King Hezekiah and Azariah the officer in charge of the Temple of God had chosen them.

[14]Kore son of Imnah the Levite was in charge of the special gifts the people wanted to give to God. He was responsible for giving out the contributions made to the LORD and the holy gifts. Kore was the guard at the East Gate. [15]Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah helped Kore in the towns where the priests lived. They gave from what was collected to the other groups of priests, both young and old.

[16]From what was collected, these men also gave to the males three years old and older who had their names in the Levite family histories. They were to enter the Temple of the LORD for their daily service, each group having its own responsibilities. [17]The priests were given their part of the collection, by families, as listed in the family histories. The Levites twenty years old and older were given their part of the collection, based on their responsibilities and their groups. [18]The Levites' babies, wives, sons, and daughters also got part of the collection. This was done for all the Levites who were listed in the family histories, because they always kept themselves ready to serve the LORD.

[19]Some of Aaron's descendants, the priests, lived on the farmlands near the towns or in the towns. Men were chosen by name to give part of the collection to these priests. All the males and those named in the family histories of the Levites received part of the collection.

[20]This is what King Hezekiah did in Judah. He did what was good and right and obedient before the LORD his God. [21]Hezekiah tried to obey God in his service of the Temple of God, and he tried to obey God's teachings and commands. He gave himself fully to his work for God. So he had success.

## Psalm 85:1–7

### *A Prayer for the Nation*

**For the director of music. A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

85 LORD, you have been kind to your land;
you brought back the people of Jacob.

2 You forgave the guilt of the people
and covered all their sins. *Selah*

3 You stopped all your anger;
you turned back from your strong anger.

4 God our Savior, bring us back again.
Stop being angry with us.

5 Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you stay angry from now on?

6 Won't you give us life again?
Your people would rejoice in you.

7 LORD, show us your love,
and save us.

## Proverbs 21:9–11

9 It is better to live in a corner on the roof[n]
than inside the house with a quarreling wife.

10 Evil people only want to harm others.
Their neighbors get no mercy from them.

11 If you punish those who make fun of wisdom, a foolish person may gain some wisdom.
But if you teach the wise, they will get knowledge.

## Acts 20:1–16

### *Paul in Macedonia and Greece*

20 When the trouble stopped, Paul sent for the followers to come to him. After he encouraged them and then told them good-bye, he left and went to the country of Macedonia. 2 He said many things to strengthen the followers in the different places on his way through Macedonia. Then he went to Greece, 3 where he stayed for three months. He was ready to sail for Syria, but some evil people were planning something against him. So Paul decided to go back through Macedonia to Syria. 4 The men who went with him were Sopater son of Pyrrhus, from the city of Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus, from the city of Thessalonica; Gaius, from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus, two men from Asia. 5 These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. 6 We sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Five days later we met them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

### *Paul's Last Visit to Troas*

7 On the first day of the week,[n] we all met together to break bread,[n] and Paul spoke to the group. Because he was planning to leave the next day, he kept on talking until midnight. 8 We were all together in a room upstairs, and there were many lamps in the room. 9 A young man named Eutychus was sitting in the window. As Paul continued talking, Eutychus was falling into a deep sleep. Finally, he went sound asleep and fell to the ground from the third floor. When they picked him up, he was dead. 10 Paul went down to Eutychus, knelt down, and put his arms around him. He said, "Don't worry. He is alive now." 11 Then Paul went upstairs again, broke bread, and ate. He spoke to them a long time, until it was early morning, and then he left. 12 They took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

## *The Trip from Troas to Miletus*

[13]We went on ahead of Paul and sailed for the city of Assos,
where he wanted to join us on the ship. Paul planned it this way
because he wanted to go to Assos by land. [14]When he met us
there, we took him aboard and went to Mitylene. [15]We sailed
from Mitylene and the next day came to a place near Kios. The
following day we sailed to Samos, and the next day we reached
Miletus. [16]Paul had already decided not to stop at Ephesus,
because he did not want to stay too long in Asia. He was
hurrying to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, if that were
possible.

# July 18

## Listening for God

*I will listen to God the* LORD*.*

Psalm 85:8

EQUIPPED with the right tools, we can learn to listen to God. What are those tools? Here are the ones I have found helpful. *A regular time and place.* Select a slot on your schedule and a corner of your world, and claim it for God. For some it may be the best to do this in the morning … Others prefer the evening …

A second tool you need [is] *an open Bible.* God speaks to us through his Word. The first step in reading the Bible is to ask God to help you understand it … Don't go to Scripture looking for your own idea; go searching for God's …

There is a third tool … Not only do we need a regular time and an open Bible, we also need *a listening heart* … If you want to be just like Jesus, let God have you. Spend time listening for him until you receive your lesson for the day—then apply it.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## 2 Chronicles 32:1—33:25

### *Assyria Attacks Judah*

32 After Hezekiah did all these things to serve the LORD,
Sennacherib king of Assyria came and attacked Judah. He and
his army surrounded and attacked the strong, walled cities,
hoping to take them for himself. 2Hezekiah knew that
Sennacherib had come to Jerusalem to attack it. 3So Hezekiah
and his officers and army commanders decided to cut off the
water from the springs outside the city. So the officers and
commanders helped Hezekiah. 4Many people came and cut off
all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land.
They said, "The king of Assyria will not find much water when

he comes here.” 5Then Hezekiah made Jerusalem stronger. He rebuilt all the broken parts of the wall and put towers on it. He also built another wall outside the first one and strengthened the area that was filled in on the east side of the old part of Jerusalem. He also made many weapons and shields.

6Hezekiah put army commanders over the people and met with them at the open place near the city gate. Hezekiah encouraged them, saying, 7“Be strong and brave. Don’t be afraid or worried because of the king of Assyria or his large army. There is a greater power with us than with him. 8He only has men, but we have the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles.” The people were encouraged by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

9After this King Sennacherib of Assyria and all his army surrounded and attacked Lachish. Then he sent his officers to Jerusalem with this message for King Hezekiah of Judah and all the people of Judah in Jerusalem:

10Sennacherib king of Assyria says this: “You have nothing to trust in to help you. It is no use for you to stay in Jerusalem under attack. 11Hezekiah says to you, ‘The LORD our God will save us from the king of Assyria,’ but he is fooling you. If you stay in Jerusalem, you will die from hunger and thirst. 12Hezekiah himself removed your LORD’s places of worship and altars. He told you people of Judah and Jerusalem that you must worship and burn incense on only one altar.

13“You know what my ancestors and I have done to all the people in other nations. The gods of those nations could not save their people from my power. 14My ancestors destroyed those nations; none of their gods could save them from me. So your god cannot save you from my power. 15Do not let Hezekiah fool you or trick you, and do not believe him. No god of any nation or kingdom has been able to save his people from me or my ancestors. Your god is even less able to save you from me.”

16Sennacherib’s officers said worse things against the LORD God and his servant Hezekiah. 17King Sennacherib also wrote letters insulting the LORD, the God of Israel. They spoke against him, saying, “The gods of the other nations could not save their people from me. In the same way Hezekiah’s god won’t be able to save his people from me.” 18Then the king’s officers shouted in Hebrew, calling out to the people of Jerusalem who were on the city wall. The officers wanted to scare the people away so they could capture Jerusalem. 19They spoke about the God of Jerusalem as though he were like the gods the people of the world worshiped, which are made by human hands.

20King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz prayed to heaven about this. 21Then the LORD sent an angel who killed all the soldiers, leaders, and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So the king went back to his own country in disgrace. When he went into the temple of his god, some of his own sons

killed him with a sword.
22So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the people in Jerusalem
from Sennacherib king of Assyria and from all other people. He
took care of them on every side. 23Many people brought gifts
for the LORD to Jerusalem, and they also brought valuable gifts
to King Hezekiah of Judah. From then on all the nations
respected Hezekiah.

## *Hezekiah Dies*

24At that time Hezekiah became so sick he almost died.
When he prayed to the LORD, the LORD spoke to him and gave
him a sign.[n] 25But Hezekiah did not thank God for his kindness,
because he was so proud. So the LORD was angry with him and
the people of Judah and Jerusalem. 26But later Hezekiah and the
people of Jerusalem were sorry and stopped being proud, so the
LORD did not punish them while Hezekiah was alive.
27Hezekiah had many riches and much honor. He made
treasuries for his silver, gold, gems, spices, shields, and other
valuable things. 28He built storage buildings for grain, new
wine, and oil and stalls for all the cattle and pens for the sheep.
29He also built many towns. He had many flocks and herds,
because God had given Hezekiah much wealth.
30It was Hezekiah who cut off the upper pool of the Gihon
spring and made those waters flow straight down to the west
side of the older part of Jerusalem. And Hezekiah was
successful in everything he did. 31But one time the leaders of
Babylon sent messengers to Hezekiah, asking him about a
strange sign that had happened in the land. When they came,
God left Hezekiah alone to test him so he could know everything
that was in Hezekiah's heart.[n]
32Hezekiah's love for God and the other things he did as king
are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. This
is in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 33Hezekiah died
and was buried on a hill, where the graves of David's ancestors
are. All the people of Judah and Jerusalem honored Hezekiah
when he died, and his son Manasseh became king in his place.

## *Manasseh King of Judah*

33 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he
was king for fifty-five years in Jerusalem. 2He did what the LORD
said was wrong. He did the hateful things the nations had done
—the nations that the LORD had forced out of the land ahead of
the Israelites. 3Manasseh's father, Hezekiah, had torn down the
places where gods were worshiped, but Manasseh rebuilt them.
He also built altars for the Baal gods, and he made Asherah
idols and worshiped all the stars of the sky and served them.

4The LORD had said about the Temple, “I will be worshiped in
Jerusalem forever,” but Manasseh built altars in the Temple of
the LORD. 5He built altars to worship the stars in the two
courtyards of the Temple of the LORD. 6He made his children
pass through fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. He practiced
magic and witchcraft and told the future by explaining signs
and dreams. He got advice from mediums and fortune-tellers.
He did many things the LORD said were wrong, which made the
LORD angry.

7Manasseh carved an idol and put it in the Temple of God.
God had said to David and his son Solomon about the Temple, “I
will be worshiped forever in this Temple and in Jerusalem,
which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel. 8I will never
again make the Israelites leave the land I gave to their
ancestors. But they must obey everything I have commanded
them in all the teachings, rules, and commands I gave them
through Moses.” 9But Manasseh led the people of Judah and
Jerusalem to do wrong. They did more evil than the nations the
LORD had destroyed ahead of the Israelites.

10The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they did
not listen. 11So the LORD brought the king of Assyria’s army
commanders to attack Judah. They captured Manasseh, put
hooks in him, placed bronze chains on his hands, and took him
to Babylon. 12As Manasseh suffered, he begged the LORD his
God for help and humbled himself before the God of his
ancestors. 13When Manasseh prayed, the LORD heard him and
had pity on him. So the LORD let him return to Jerusalem and to
his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is the true
God.

14After that happened, Manasseh rebuilt the outer wall of
Jerusalem and made it higher. It was in the valley on the west
side of the Gihon spring and went to the entrance of the Fish
Gate and around the hill of Ophel. Then he put commanders in
all the strong, walled cities in Judah.

15Manasseh removed the idols of other nations, including the
idol in the Temple of the LORD. He removed all the altars he had
built on the Temple hill and in Jerusalem and threw them out of
the city. 16Then he set up the LORD’s altar and sacrificed on it
fellowship offerings and offerings to show thanks to God.
Manasseh commanded all the people of Judah to serve the LORD,
the God of Israel. 17The people continued to offer sacrifices at
the places of worship, but their sacrifices were only to the LORD
their God. 18The other things Manasseh did as king, his prayer
to his God, and what the seers said to him in the name of the
LORD, the God of Israel—all are recorded in the book of the
history of the kings of Israel. 19Manasseh’s prayer and God’s
pity for him, his sins, his unfaithfulness, the places he built for
worshiping gods and the Asherah idols before he humbled
himself—all are written in the book of the seers. 20Manasseh

died and was buried in his palace. Then Manasseh's son Amon became king in his place.

### *Amon King of Judah*

21 Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and
he was king for two years in Jerusalem. 22 He did what the LORD
said was wrong, as his father Manasseh had done. Amon
worshiped and offered sacrifices to all the carved idols
Manasseh had made. 23 Amon did not humble himself before the
LORD as his father Manasseh had done. Instead, Amon sinned
even more.
24 King Amon's officers made plans against him and killed
him in his palace. 25 Then the people of the land killed all those
who had made plans to kill King Amon, and they made his son
Josiah king in his place.

## Psalm 85:8–13

8 I will listen to God the LORD.
He has ordered peace for those who worship him.
Don't let them go back to foolishness.

9 God will soon save those who respect him,
and his glory will be seen in our land.

10 Love and truth belong to God's people;
goodness and peace will be theirs.

11 On earth people will be loyal to God,
and God's goodness will shine down from heaven.

12 The LORD will give his goodness,
and the land will give its crops.

13 Goodness will go before God
and prepare the way for him.

## Proverbs 21:12

12 God, who is always right, watches the house of the wicked
and brings ruin on every evil person.

## Acts 20:17–38

### *The Elders from Ephesus*

17 Now from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called for the
elders of the church. 18 When they came to him, he said, “You
know about my life from the first day I came to Asia. You know
the way I lived all the time I was with you. 19 The evil people
made plans against me, which troubled me very much. But you
know I always served the Lord unselfishly, and I often cried.
20 You know I preached to you and did not hold back anything
that would help you. You know that I taught you in public and in
your homes. 21 I warned both Jews and Greeks to change their
lives and turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus. 22 But now I
must obey the Holy Spirit and go to Jerusalem. I don’t know
what will happen to me there. 23 I know only that in every city
the Holy Spirit tells me that troubles and even jail wait for me.
24 I don’t care about my own life. The most important thing is
that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave
me—to tell people the Good News about God’s grace.

25 “And now, I know that none of you among whom I was
preaching the kingdom of God will ever see me again. 26 So
today I tell you that if any of you should be lost, I am not
responsible, 27 because I have told you everything God wants
you to know. 28 Be careful for yourselves and for all the people
the Holy Spirit has given to you to oversee. You must be like
shepherds to the church of God,[n] which he bought with the
death of his own son. 29 I know that after I leave, some people
will come like wild wolves and try to destroy the flock. 30 Also,
some from your own group will rise up and twist the truth and
will lead away followers after them. 31 So be careful! Always
remember that for three years, day and night, I never stopped
warning each of you, and I often cried over you.

32 “Now I am putting you in the care of God and the message
about his grace. It is able to give you strength, and it will give

you the blessings God has for all his holy people. [33]When I was
with you, I never wanted anyone's money or fine clothes. [34]You
know I always worked to take care of my own needs and the
needs of those who were with me. [35]I showed you in all things
that you should work as I did and help the weak. I taught you to
remember the words Jesus said: 'It is more blessed to give than
to receive.'"

[36]When Paul had said this, he knelt down with all of them
and prayed. [37–38]And they all cried because Paul had said they
would never see him again. They put their arms around him and
kissed him. Then they went with him to the ship.

# July 19

## Loaded with Love

*Lord, you are kind and forgiving and have great love for those who call to you.*

Psalm 86:5

It's time to let God's love cover all things in your life. All secrets. All hurts. All hours of evil, minutes of worry. The mornings you awoke in the bed of a stranger? His love will cover that. The years you peddled prejudice and pride? His love will cover that. Every promise broken, drug taken, penny stolen. Every cross word, cuss word, and harsh word. His love covers all things.

Let it. Discover along with the psalmist: "He … loads me with love and mercy" (Psalm 103:4). Picture a giant dump truck full of love. There you are behind it. God lifts the bed until the love starts to slide. Slowly at first, then down, down, down until you are hidden, buried, covered in his love.

"Hey, where are you?" someone asks.

"In here, covered in love."

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## 2 Chronicles 34:1—36:23

### *Josiah King of Judah*

34 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he ruled thirty-one years in Jerusalem. 2He did what the LORD said was right. He lived as his ancestor David had lived, and he did not stop doing what was right.

3In his eighth year as king while he was still young, Josiah began to obey the God of his ancestor David. In his twelfth year as king, Josiah began to remove from Judah and Jerusalem the gods, the places for worshiping gods, the Asherah idols, and the wooden and metal idols. 4The people tore down the altars for

the Baal gods as Josiah directed. Then Josiah cut down the incense altars that were above them. He broke up the Asherah idols and the wooden and metal idols and beat them into powder. Then he sprinkled the powder on the graves of the people who had offered sacrifices to these gods. 5He burned the bones of their priests on their own altars. So Josiah removed idol worship from Judah and Jerusalem, 6and from the towns in the areas of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon all the way to Naphtali, and in the ruins near these towns. 7Josiah broke down the altars and Asherah idols and beat the idols into powder. He cut down all the incense altars in all of Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

8In Josiah's eighteenth year as king, he made Judah and the Temple pure again. He sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the city leader, and Joah son of Joahaz the recorder to repair the Temple of the LORD, the God of Josiah. 9These men went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money the Levite gatekeepers had gathered from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim, and all the Israelites who were left alive, and also from all the people of Judah, Benjamin, and Jerusalem. This is the money they had brought into the Temple of God. 10Then the Levites gave it to the supervisors of the work on the Temple of the LORD, and they paid the workers who rebuilt and repaired the Temple. 11They gave money to carpenters and builders to buy cut stone and wood. The wood was used to rebuild the buildings and to make beams for them, because the kings of Judah had let the buildings fall into ruin. 12The men did their work well. Their supervisors were Jahath and Obadiah, who were Levites from the family of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, who were from the family of Kohath. These Levites were all skilled musicians. 13They were also in charge of the workers who carried loads and all the other workers. Some Levites worked as secretaries, officers, and gatekeepers.

## *The Book of the Teachings Is Found*

14The Levites brought out the money that was in the Temple of the LORD. As they were doing this, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the LORD's Teachings that had been given through Moses. 15Hilkiah said to Shaphan the royal secretary, "I've found the Book of the Teachings in the Temple of the LORD!" Then he gave it to Shaphan.

16Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to Josiah, "Your officers are doing everything you told them to do. 17They have paid out the money that was in the Temple of the LORD and have given it to the supervisors and the workers." 18Then Shaphan the royal secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from the book to the

king.

19When the king heard the words of the Teachings, he tore his clothes to show how upset he was. 20He gave orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the royal secretary, and Asaiah, the king's servant. These were the orders: 21"Go and ask the LORD about the words in the book that was found. Ask for me and for the people who are left alive in Israel and Judah. The LORD is very angry with us, because our ancestors did not obey the LORD's word; they did not do everything this book says to do."

22So Hilkiah and those the king sent with him went to talk to Huldah the prophetess. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, who took care of the king's clothes. Huldah lived in Jerusalem, in the new area of the city.

23She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, 24'This is what the LORD says: I will bring trouble to this place and to the people living here. I will bring all the curses that are written in the book that was read to the king of Judah. 25The people of Judah have left me and have burned incense to other gods. They have made me angry by all the evil things they have made. So I will punish them in my anger, which will not be put out.' 26Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to ask the LORD, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about the words you heard: 27When you heard my words against this place and its people, you became sorry for what you had done and you humbled yourself before me. You tore your clothes to show how upset you were, and you cried in my presence. This is why I have heard you, says the LORD. 28So I will let you die and be buried in peace. You won't see all the trouble I will bring to this place and the people living here.'"

So they took her message back to the king.

29Then the king gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem together. 30He went up to the Temple of the LORD, and all the people from Judah and from Jerusalem went with him. The priests, the Levites, and all the people—from the most important to the least important—went with him. He read to them all the words in the Book of the Agreement that was found in the Temple of the LORD. 31The king stood by his pillar and made an agreement in the presence of the LORD to follow the LORD and obey his commands, rules, and laws with his whole being and to obey the words of the agreement written in this book. 32Then Josiah made all the people in Jerusalem and Benjamin promise to accept the agreement. So the people of Jerusalem obeyed the agreement of God, the God of their ancestors.

33And Josiah threw out the hateful idols from all the land that belonged to the Israelites. He led everyone in Israel to serve the LORD their God. While Josiah lived, the people obeyed the LORD,

the God of their ancestors.

## *Josiah Celebrates the Passover*

35 King Josiah celebrated the Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem.
The Passover lamb was killed on the fourteenth day of the first
month. 2Josiah chose the priests to do their duties, and he
encouraged them as they served in the Temple of the LORD. 3The
Levites taught the Israelites and were made holy for service to
the LORD. Josiah said to them, "Put the Holy Ark in the Temple
that David's son Solomon, the king of Israel, built. Do not carry
it from place to place on your shoulders anymore. Now serve
the LORD your God and his people Israel. 4Prepare yourselves by
your family groups for service, and do the jobs that King David
and his son Solomon gave you to do.

5"Stand in the holy place with a group of the Levites for each
family group of the people. 6Kill the Passover lambs, and make
yourselves holy to the LORD. Prepare the lambs for your
relatives, the people of Israel, as the LORD through Moses
commanded us to do."

7Josiah gave the Israelites thirty thousand sheep and goats to
kill for the Passover sacrifices, and he gave them three
thousand cattle. They were all his own animals.

8Josiah's officers also gave willingly to the people, the
priests, and the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the
officers in charge of the Temple, gave the priests twenty-six
hundred lambs and goats and three hundred cattle for Passover
sacrifices. 9Conaniah, his brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel, and
Hashabiah, Jeiel, and Jozabad gave the Levites five thousand
sheep and goats and five hundred cattle for Passover sacrifices.
These men were leaders of the Levites.

10When everything was ready for the Passover service, the
priests and Levites went to their places, as the king had
commanded. 11The Passover lambs were killed. Then the
Levites skinned the animals and gave the blood to the priests,
who sprinkled it on the altar. 12Then they gave the animals for
the burnt offerings to the different family groups so the burnt
offerings could be offered to the LORD as was written in the book
of Moses. They also did this with the cattle. 13The Levites
roasted the Passover sacrifices over the fire as they were
commanded, and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, kettles,
and pans. Then they quickly gave the meat to the people.
14After this was finished, the Levites prepared meat for
themselves and for the priests, the descendants of Aaron. The
priests worked until night, offering the burnt offerings and
burning the fat of the sacrifices.

15The Levite singers from Asaph's family stood in the places
chosen for them by King David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun,

the king's seer. The gatekeepers at each gate did not have to leave their places, because their fellow Levites had prepared everything for them for the Passover.

16So everything was done that day for the worship of the LORD, as King Josiah commanded. The Passover was celebrated, and the burnt offerings were offered on the LORD's altar. 17The Israelites who were there celebrated the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. 18The Passover had not been celebrated like this in Israel since the prophet Samuel was alive. None of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated a Passover like it was celebrated by King Josiah, the priests, the Levites, the people of Judah and Israel who were there, and the people of Jerusalem. 19This Passover was celebrated in the eighteenth year Josiah was king.

## *The Death of Josiah*

20After Josiah did all this for the Temple, Neco king of Egypt led an army to attack Carchemish, a town on the Euphrates River. And Josiah marched out to fight against Neco. 21But Neco sent messengers to Josiah, saying, "King Josiah, there should not be war between us. I did not come to fight you, but my enemies. God told me to hurry, and he is on my side. So don't fight God, or he will destroy you."

22But Josiah did not go away. He wore different clothes so no one would know who he was. Refusing to listen to what Neco said at God's command, Josiah went to fight on the plain of Megiddo. 23In the battle King Josiah was shot by archers. He told his servants, "Take me away because I am badly wounded." 24So they took him out of his chariot and put him in another chariot and carried him to Jerusalem. There he died and was buried in the graves where his ancestors were buried. All the people of Judah and Jerusalem were very sad because he was dead.

25Jeremiah wrote some sad songs about Josiah. Even to this day all the men and women singers remember and honor Josiah with these songs. It became a custom in Israel to sing these songs that are written in the collection of sad songs.

26–27The other things Josiah did as king, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. It tells how he loved what was written in the LORD's teachings.

## *Jehoahaz King of Judah*

36 The people of Judah chose Josiah's son Jehoahaz and made him king in Jerusalem in his father's place.

2Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for three months. 3Then King

Neco of Egypt removed Jehoahaz from being king in Jerusalem. Neco made the people of Judah pay about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver and about seventy-five pounds of gold. [4]The king of Egypt made Jehoahaz's brother Eliakim the king of Judah and Jerusalem and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took his brother Jehoahaz to Egypt.

## *Jehoiakim King of Judah*

[5]Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. He did what the LORD his God said was wrong. [6]King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked Judah, captured Jehoiakim, put bronze chains on him, and took him to Babylon. [7]Nebuchadnezzar removed some of the things from the Temple of the LORD, took them to Babylon, and put them in his own palace.

[8]The other things Jehoiakim did as king, the hateful things he did, and everything he was guilty of doing, are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin became king in his place.

## *Jehoiachin King of Judah*

[9]Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king of Judah, and he was king in Jerusalem for three months and ten days. He did what the LORD said was wrong. [10]In the spring King Nebuchadnezzar sent for Jehoiachin and brought him and some valuable treasures from the Temple of the LORD to Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah the king of Judah and Jerusalem.

## *Zedekiah King of Judah*

[11]Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king of Judah, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. [12]Zedekiah did what the LORD his God said was wrong. The prophet Jeremiah spoke messages from the LORD, but Zedekiah did not obey. [13]Zedekiah turned against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had forced him to swear in God's name to be loyal to him. But Zedekiah became stubborn and refused to obey the LORD, the God of Israel. [14]Also, all the leaders of the priests and the people of Judah became more wicked, following the evil example of the other nations. The LORD had made the Temple in Jerusalem holy, but the leaders made it unholy.

## *The Fall of Jerusalem*

15 The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent prophets again
and again to warn his people, because he had pity on them and
on his Temple. 16 But they made fun of God's prophets and hated
God's messages. They refused to listen to the prophets until,
finally, the LORD became so angry with his people that he could
not be stopped. 17 So God brought the king of Babylon to attack
them. The king killed the young men even when they were in
the Temple. He had no mercy on the young men or women, the
old men or those who were sick. God handed all of them over to
Nebuchadnezzar. 18 Nebuchadnezzar carried away to Babylon all
the things from the Temple of God, both large and small, and all
the treasures from the Temple of the LORD and from the king
and his officers. 19 Nebuchadnezzar and his army set fire to
God's Temple and broke down Jerusalem's wall and burned all
the palaces. They took or destroyed every valuable thing in
Jerusalem.

20 Nebuchadnezzar took captive to Babylon the people who
were left alive, and he forced them to be slaves for him and his
descendants. They remained there as slaves until the Persian
kingdom defeated Babylon. 21 And so what the LORD had told
Israel through the prophet Jeremiah happened: The country was
an empty wasteland for seventy years to make up for the years
of Sabbath rest[n] that the people had not kept.

22 In the first year Cyrus was king of Persia, the LORD had
Cyrus send an announcement to his whole kingdom. This
happened so the LORD's message spoken by Jeremiah would
come true. He wrote:

23 This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms
of the earth, and he has appointed me to build a Temple for him
at Jerusalem in Judah. Now may the LORD your God be with all of
you who are his people. You are free to go to Jerusalem.

## Psalm 86:1–7

### *A Cry for Help*

**A prayer of David.**

86 LORD, listen to me and answer me.
I am poor and helpless.

[2]Protect me, because I worship you.
My God, save me, your servant who trusts in you.

[3]Lord, have mercy on me,
because I have called to you all day.

[4]Give happiness to me, your servant,
because I give my life to you, Lord.

[5]Lord, you are kind and forgiving
and have great love for those who call to you.

[6]Lord, hear my prayer,
and listen when I ask for mercy.

[7]I call to you in times of trouble,
because you will answer me.

## Proverbs 21:13–14

[13]Whoever ignores the poor when they cry for help
will also cry for help and not be answered.

[14]A secret gift will calm an angry person;
a present given in secrecy will quiet great anger.

## Acts 21:1–16

### *Paul Goes to Jerusalem*

[21] After we all said good-bye to them, we sailed straight to the island of Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes, and from there we went to Patara. [2]There we found a ship going to Phoenicia,

so we went aboard and sailed away. 3We sailed near the island of Cyprus, seeing it to the north, but we sailed on to Syria. We stopped at Tyre because the ship needed to unload its cargo there. 4We found some followers in Tyre and stayed with them for seven days. Through the Holy Spirit they warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. 5When we finished our visit, we left and continued our trip. All the followers, even the women and children, came outside the city with us. After we all knelt on the beach and prayed, 6we said good-bye and got on the ship, and the followers went back home.

7We continued our trip from Tyre and arrived at Ptolemais, where we greeted the believers and stayed with them for a day. 8The next day we left Ptolemais and went to the city of Caesarea. There we went into the home of Philip the preacher, one of the seven helpers,[n] and stayed with him. 9He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophesying. 10After we had been there for some time, a prophet named Agabus arrived from Judea. 11He came to us and borrowed Paul's belt and used it to tie his own hands and feet. He said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'This is how evil people in Jerusalem will tie up the man who wears this belt. Then they will give him to the older leaders.'"

12When we all heard this, we and the people there begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. 13But he said, "Why are you crying and making me so sad? I am not only ready to be tied up in Jerusalem, I am ready to die for the Lord Jesus!"

14We could not persuade him to stay away from Jerusalem. So we stopped begging him and said, "We pray that what the Lord wants will be done."

15After this, we got ready and started on our way to Jerusalem. 16Some of the followers from Caesarea went with us and took us to the home of Mnason, where we would stay. He was from Cyprus and was one of the first followers.

# July 20

## Honest Evaluation

*LORD, teach me what you want me to do, and I will live by your truth.*

Psalm 86:11

*Guide me in your truth, and teach me, my God, my Savior.*

Psalm 25:5

Raise your hand if any of the following describe you: *You are at peace with everyone.* Every relationship as sweet as fudge. Even your old flames speak highly of you. Love all and are loved by all. Is that you?

*You have no fears.* Call you the Teflon toughie. Wall Street plummets—no problem. Heart condition discovered—yawn. Does this describe you?

*You need no forgiveness.* Never made a mistake. As square as a game of checkers. As clean as grandma's kitchen. Is that you? No?

Let's evaluate this. A few of your relationships are shaky. You have fears and faults. Hmmm. Do you really want to hang on to your chest of self-reliance? Sounds to me as if you could use a shepherd.

from *Traveling Light*

## Ezra 1:1—2:70

### *Cyrus Helps the Captives Return*

1 In the first year Cyrus was king of Persia, the LORD caused
Cyrus to send an announcement to his whole kingdom and to
put it in writing. This happened so the LORD's message spoken
by Jeremiah would come true. He wrote:

2This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:
The LORD, the God of heaven, has given all the kingdoms of
the earth to me, and he has appointed me to build a Temple for
him at Jerusalem in Judah. 3May God be with all of you who are
his people. You are free to go to Jerusalem in Judah and build
the Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, who is in Jerusalem.
4Those who stay behind, wherever they live, should support
those who want to go. Give them silver and gold, supplies and
cattle, and special gifts for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.
5Then the family leaders of Judah and Benjamin and the
priests and Levites got ready to go to Jerusalem—everyone God
had caused to want to go to Jerusalem to build the Temple of
the LORD. 6All their neighbors helped them, giving them things
made of silver and gold, along with supplies, cattle, valuable
gifts, and special gifts for the Temple. 7Also, King Cyrus brought
out the bowls and pans that belonged in the Temple of the LORD,
which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the
temple of his own god. 8Cyrus king of Persia had Mithredath the
treasurer bring them and count them out for Sheshbazzar, the
prince of Judah.
9He listed thirty gold dishes, one thousand silver dishes,
twenty-nine pans, 10thirty gold bowls, four hundred ten
matching silver bowls, and one thousand other pieces.
11There was a total of fifty-four hundred pieces of gold and
silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these things along when the
captives went from Babylon to Jerusalem.

## *The Captives Who Returned*

2 These are the people of the area who returned from captivity,
whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken away to
Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each going
back to his own town. 2These people returned with Zerubbabel,
Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan,
Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.
These are the people from Israel: 3the descendants of Parosh
—2,172; 4the descendants of Shephatiah—372; 5the
descendants of Arah—775; 6the descendants of Pahath-Moab
(through the family of Jeshua and Joab)—2,812; 7the
descendants of Elam—1,254; 8the descendants of Zattu—945;
9the descendants of Zaccai—760; 10the descendants of Bani—
642; 11the descendants of Bebai—623; 12the descendants of
Azgad—1,222; 13the descendants of Adonikam—666; 14the
descendants of Bigvai—2,056; 15the descendants of Adin—454;
16the descendants of Ater (through the family of Hezekiah)—98;
17the descendants of Bezai—323; 18the descendants of Jorah—
112; 19the descendants of Hashum—223; 20the descendants of

Gibbar—95.

[21]These are the people from the towns: of Bethlehem—123;
[22]of Netophah—56; [23]of Anathoth—128; [24]of Azmaveth—42; [25]of
Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth—743; [26]of Ramah and
Geba—621; [27]of Micmash—122; [28]of Bethel and Ai—223; [29]of
Nebo—52; [30]of Magbish—156; [31]of the other town of Elam—
1,254; [32]of Harim—320; [33]of Lod, Hadid and Ono—725; [34]of
Jericho—345; [35]of Senaah—3,630.

[36]These are the priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through
the family of Jeshua)—973; [37]the descendants of Immer—1,052;
[38]the descendants of Pashhur—1,247; [39]the descendants of
Harim—1,017.

[40]These are the Levites: the descendants of Jeshua and
Kadmiel (through the family of Hodaviah)—74.

[41]These are the singers: the descendants of Asaph—128.

[42]These are the gatekeepers of the Temple: the descendants
of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai—139.

[43]These are the Temple servants: the descendants of Ziha,
Hasupha, Tabbaoth, [44]Keros, Siaha, Padon, [45]Lebanah,
Hagabah, Akkub, [46]Hagab, Shalmai, Hanan, [47]Giddel, Gahar,
Reaiah, [48]Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, [49]Uzza, Paseah, Besai,
[50]Asnah, Meunim, Nephussim, [51]Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur,
[52]Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, [53]Barkos, Sisera, Temah, [54]Neziah,
and Hatipha.

[55]These are the descendants of the servants of Solomon: the
descendants of Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, [56]Jaala, Darkon,
Giddel, [57]Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and Ami.

[58]The Temple servants and the descendants of the servants
of Solomon numbered 392.

[59]Some people came to Jerusalem from the towns of Tel
Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer, but they could
not prove that their ancestors came from Israel. [60]They were
the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—652.

[61]Also these priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz,
and Barzillai, who had married a daughter of Barzillai from
Gilead and was called by her family name.

[62]These people searched for their family records but could
not find them. So they could not be priests, because they were
thought to be unclean. [63]The governor ordered them not to eat
any of the food offered to God until a priest had settled this
matter by using the Urim and Thummim.

[64]The total number of those who returned was 42,360. [65]This
is not counting their 7,337 male and female servants and the
200 male and female singers they had with them. [66]They had
736 horses, 245 mules, [67]435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

[68]When they arrived at the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem,
some of the leaders of families gave offerings to rebuild the

Temple of God on the same site as before. [69]They gave as much as they could to the treasury to rebuild the Temple—about 1,100 pounds of gold, about 6,000 pounds of silver, and 100 pieces of clothing for the priests.

[70]All the Israelites settled in their hometowns. The priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants, along with some of the other people, settled in their own towns as well.

## Psalm 86:8–13

[8]Lord, there is no god like you
and no works like yours.

[9]Lord, all the nations you have made
will come and worship you.
They will honor you.

[10]You are great and you do miracles.
Only you are God.

[11]LORD, teach me what you want me to do,
and I will live by your truth.

Teach me to respect you completely.

[12]Lord, my God, I will praise you with all my heart,
and I will honor your name forever.

[13]You have great love for me.
You have saved me from death.

## Proverbs 21:15–16

15 When justice is done, good people are happy,
but evil people are ruined.

16 Whoever does not use good sense
will end up among the dead.

## Acts 21:17–40

### *Paul Visits James*

17 In Jerusalem the believers were glad to see us. 18 The next
day Paul went with us to visit James, and all the elders were
there. 19 Paul greeted them and told them everything God had
done among the other nations through him. 20 When they heard
this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul, “Brother, you can
see that many thousands of our people have become believers.
And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses.
21 They have heard about your teaching, that you tell our people
who live among the nations to leave the law of Moses. They
have heard that you tell them not to circumcise their children
and not to obey customs. 22 What should we do? They will learn
that you have come. 23 So we will tell you what to do: Four of our
men have made a promise to God. 24 Take these men with you
and share in their cleansing ceremony.[n] Pay their expenses so
they can shave their heads.[n] Then it will prove to everyone that
what they have heard about you is not true and that you follow
the law of Moses in your own life. 25 We have already sent a
letter to the non-Jewish believers. The letter said: ‘Do not eat
food that has been offered to idols, or blood, or animals that
have been strangled. Do not take part in sexual sin.’”

26 The next day Paul took the four men and shared in the
cleansing ceremony with them. Then he went to the Temple and
announced the time when the days of the cleansing ceremony
would be finished. On the last day an offering would be given
for each of the men.

27 When the seven days were almost over, some of his people
from Asia saw Paul at the Temple. They caused all the people to
be upset and grabbed Paul. 28 They shouted, “People of Israel,
help us! This is the man who goes everywhere teaching against
the law of Moses, against our people, and against this Temple.
Now he has brought some Greeks into the Temple and has made
this holy place unclean!” 29 (They said this because they had
seen Trophimus, a man from Ephesus, with Paul in Jerusalem.

They thought that Paul had brought him into the Temple.)

30All the people in Jerusalem became upset. Together they ran, took Paul, and dragged him out of the Temple. The Temple doors were closed immediately. 31While they were trying to kill Paul, the commander of the Roman army in Jerusalem learned that there was trouble in the whole city. 32Immediately he took some officers and soldiers and ran to the place where the crowd was gathered. When the people saw them, they stopped beating Paul. 33The commander went to Paul and arrested him. He told his soldiers to tie Paul with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done wrong. 34Some in the crowd were yelling one thing, and some were yelling another. Because of all this confusion and shouting, the commander could not learn what had happened. So he ordered the soldiers to take Paul to the army building. 35When Paul came to the steps, the soldiers had to carry him because the people were ready to hurt him. 36The whole mob was following them, shouting, “Kill him!”

37As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the army building, he spoke to the commander, “May I say something to you?”

The commander said, “Do you speak Greek? 38I thought you were the Egyptian who started some trouble against the government not long ago and led four thousand killers out to the desert.”

39Paul said, “No, I am a Jew from Tarsus in the country of Cilicia. I am a citizen of that important city. Please, let me speak to the people.”

40The commander gave permission, so Paul stood on the steps and waved his hand to quiet the people. When there was silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language.

# July 21

## The Love of God

*But, Lord, you are a God who shows mercy and is kind. You don't become angry quickly. You have great love and faithfulness.*

Psalm 86:15

our love depends on the receiver of the love. Let a thousand people pass before us, and we will not feel the same about each. Our love will be regulated by their appearance, by their personalities. Even when we find a few people we like, our feelings will fluctuate. How they treat us will affect how we love them. The receiver regulates our love.

Not so with the love of God. We have no thermostatic impact on his love for us. The love of God is born from within him, not from what he finds in us. His love is uncaused and spontaneous …

Does he love us because of our goodness? Because of our kindness? Because of our great faith? No, he loves us because of *his* goodness, kindness, and great faith.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Ezra 3:1—4:24

### *Rebuilding the Altar*

3 In the seventh month, after the Israelites were settled in their
hometowns, they met together in Jerusalem. 2Then Jeshua son
of Jozadak and his fellow priests joined Zerubbabel son of
Shealtiel and began to build the altar of the God of Israel where
they could offer burnt offerings, just as it is written in the
Teachings of Moses, the man of God. 3Even though they were
afraid of the people living around them, they built the altar
where it had been before. And they offered burnt offerings on it
to the LORD morning and evening. 4Then, to obey what was

written, they celebrated the Feast of Shelters. They offered the right number of sacrifices for each day of the festival. 5After the Feast of Shelters, they had regular sacrifices every day, as well as sacrifices for the New Moon and all the festivals commanded by the LORD. Also there were special offerings brought as gifts to the LORD. 6On the first day of the seventh month they began to bring burnt offerings to the LORD, but the foundation of the LORD's Temple had not yet been laid.

## *Rebuilding the Temple*

7Then they gave money to the bricklayers and carpenters. They also gave food, wine, and oil to the cities of Sidon and Tyre so they would float cedar logs from Lebanon to the seacoast town of Joppa. Cyrus king of Persia had given permission for this.

8In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the Temple of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jozadak, their fellow priests and Levites, and all who had returned from captivity to Jerusalem began to work. They chose Levites twenty years old and older to be in charge of the building of the Temple of the LORD. 9These men were in charge of the work of building the Temple of God: Jeshua and his sons and brothers; Kadmiel and his sons who were the descendants of Hodaviah; and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers. They were all Levites.

10The builders finished laying the foundation of the Temple of the LORD. Then the priests, dressed in their robes, stood with their trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, stood with their cymbals. They all took their places and praised the LORD just as David king of Israel had said to do. 11With praise and thanksgiving, they sang to the LORD:

"He is good;
his love for Israel continues forever."

And then all the people shouted loudly, "Praise the LORD! The foundation of his Temple has been laid." 12But many of the older priests, Levites, and family leaders who had seen the first Temple cried when they saw the foundation of this Temple. Most of the other people were shouting with joy. 13The people made so much noise it could be heard far away, and no one could tell the difference between the joyful shouting and the sad crying.

## *Enemies of the Rebuilding*

4 When the enemies of the people of Judah and Benjamin heard

that the returned captives were building a Temple for the LORD, the God of Israel, 2they came to Zerubbabel and the leaders of the families. The enemies said, “Let us help you build, because we are like you and want to worship your God. We have been offering sacrifices to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.”

3But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the leaders of Israel answered, “You will not help us build a Temple to our God. We will build it ourselves for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us to do.”

4Then the people around them tried to discourage the people of Judah by making them afraid to build. 5Their enemies hired others to delay the building plans during the time Cyrus was king of Persia. And it continued to the time Darius was king of Persia.

## *More Problems for the Builders*

6When Xerxes first became king, those enemies wrote a letter against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

7When Artaxerxes became king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and those with them wrote a letter to Artaxerxes. It was written in the Aramaic language and translated.

8Rehum the governor and Shimshai the governor’s secretary wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king. It said:

9This letter is from Rehum the governor, Shimshai the secretary, and their fellow workers—the judges and important officers over the men who came from Tripolis, Persia, Erech, and Babylon, the Elamite people of Susa, 10and those whom the great and honorable Ashurbanipal forced out of their countries and settled in the city of Samaria and in other places of the Trans-Euphrates.

11(This is a copy of the letter they sent to Artaxerxes.)

To King Artaxerxes.

From your servants who live in Trans-Euphrates.

12King Artaxerxes, you should know that the Jewish people who came to us from you have gone to Jerusalem to rebuild that evil city that refuses to obey. They are fixing the walls and repairing the foundations of the buildings.

13Now, King Artaxerxes, you should know that if Jerusalem is built and its walls are fixed, Jerusalem will not pay taxes of any kind. Then the amount of money your government collects will be less. 14Since we must be loyal to the government, we don’t want to see the king dishonored. So we are writing to let the king know. 15We suggest you search the records of the kings who ruled before you. You will find out that the city of Jerusalem refuses to obey and makes trouble for kings and

areas controlled by Persia. Since long ago it has been a place where disobedience has started. That is why it was destroyed.
16We want you to know, King Artaxerxes, that if this city is rebuilt and its walls fixed, you will be left with nothing in Trans-Euphrates.

17King Artaxerxes sent this answer:

To Rehum the governor and Shimshai the secretary, to all their fellow workers living in Samaria, and to those in other places in Trans-Euphrates.

Greetings.

18The letter you sent to us has been translated and read to me. 19I ordered the records to be searched, and it was done. We found that Jerusalem has a history of disobedience to kings and has been a place of problems and trouble. 20Jerusalem has had powerful kings who have ruled over the whole area of Trans-Euphrates, and taxes of all kinds have been paid to them.
21Now, give an order for those men to stop work. The city of Jerusalem will not be rebuilt until I say so. 22Make sure you do this, because if they continue, it will hurt the government.

23A copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes sent was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and the others. Then they quickly went to the Jewish people in Jerusalem and forced them to stop building.

24So the work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem stopped until the second year Darius was king of Persia.

## Psalm 86:14–17

14God, proud people are attacking me;
a gang of cruel people is trying to kill me.
They do not respect you.

15But, Lord, you are a God who shows mercy and is kind.
You don’t become angry quickly.
You have great love and faithfulness.

16Turn to me and have mercy.
Give me, your servant, strength.
Save me, the son of your female servant.

17Show me a sign of your goodness.

When my enemies look, they will be ashamed.
You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

## Proverbs 21:17–18

17 Whoever loves pleasure will become poor;
whoever loves wine and perfume will never be rich.

18 Wicked people will suffer instead of good people,
and those who cannot be trusted will suffer instead of those who do right.

## Acts 22:1–29

### *Paul Speaks to the People*

22 Paul said, “Brothers and fathers, listen to my defense to you.”
2 When they heard him speaking the Hebrew language,[n] they became very quiet. Paul said, 3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in the country of Cilicia, but I grew up in this city. I was a student of Gamaliel,[n] who carefully taught me everything about the law of our ancestors. I was very serious about serving God, just as are all of you here today. 4 I persecuted the people who followed the Way of Jesus, and some of them were even killed. I arrested men and women and put them in jail. 5 The high priest and the whole council of elders can tell you this is true. They gave me letters to the brothers in Damascus. So I was going there to arrest these people and bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished.

6 “About noon when I came near Damascus, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed all around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ 8 I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The voice said, ‘I am Jesus from Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’ 9 Those who were with me did not understand the voice, but they saw the light. 10 I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘Get up and go to Damascus. There you will be told about all the things I have planned for you to do.’ 11 I could not see, because the bright light had made me blind. So my companions led me

into Damascus.

12“There a man named Ananias came to me. He was a
religious man; he obeyed the law of Moses, and all the Jews who
lived there respected him. 13He stood by me and said, ‘Brother
Saul, see again!’ Immediately I was able to see him. 14He said,
‘The God of our ancestors chose you long ago to know his plan,
to see the Righteous One, and to hear words from him. 15You
will be his witness to all people, telling them about what you
have seen and heard. 16Now, why wait any longer? Get up, be
baptized, and wash your sins away, trusting in him to save you.’

17“Later, when I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the
Temple, and I saw a vision. 18I saw the Lord saying to me,
‘Hurry! Leave Jerusalem now! The people here will not accept
the truth about me.’ 19But I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every
synagogue I put the believers in jail and beat them. 20They also
know I was there when Stephen, your witness, was killed. I
stood there agreeing and holding the coats of those who were
killing him!’ 21But the Lord said to me, ‘Leave now. I will send
you far away to the other nations.’”

22The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they
began shouting, “Get rid of him! He doesn’t deserve to live!”
23They shouted, threw off their coats,[n] and threw dust into the
air.[n]

24Then the commander ordered the soldiers to take Paul into
the army building and beat him. He wanted to make Paul tell
why the people were shouting against him like this. 25But as the
soldiers were tying him up, preparing to beat him, Paul said to
an officer nearby, “Do you have the right to beat a Roman
citizen[n] who has not been proven guilty?”

26When the officer heard this, he went to the commander
and reported it. The officer said, “Do you know what you are
doing? This man is a Roman citizen.”

27The commander came to Paul and said, “Tell me, are you
really a Roman citizen?”

He answered, “Yes.”

28The commander said, “I paid a lot of money to become a
Roman citizen.”

But Paul said, “I was born a citizen.”

29The men who were preparing to question Paul moved away
from him immediately. The commander was frightened because
he had already tied Paul, and Paul was a Roman citizen.

# July 22

# Each Day Matters

*"You have told people ... about me."*

Acts 23:11

"You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God" (1 Peter 2:9). Let's spend a lifetime making our heavenly Father proud. Use your uniqueness to do so. You exited the womb called. Don't see yourself as a product of your parents' DNA, but rather as a brand-new idea from heaven.

Make a big deal out of God. Become who you are for him! Has he not transferred you from a dull, death-destined life to a rich, heaven-bound adventure? Remember, "You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God" (1 Peter 2:9). And do so every day of your life.

With God, every day matters, every person counts.

And that includes you.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Ezra 5:1—6:22

### *Tattenai's Letter to Darius*

5 The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo,
prophesied to the Jewish people in Judah and Jerusalem in the
name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2Then
Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak started
working again to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem. And
the prophets of God were there, helping them.

3At that time Tattenai, the governor of Trans-Euphrates, and
Shethar-Bozenai, and their fellow workers went to the Jewish
people and asked, "Who gave you permission to rebuild this
Temple and fix these walls?" 4They also asked, "What are the
names of the men working on this building?" 5But their God was
watching over the elders of the Jewish people. The builders

were not stopped until a report could go to King Darius and his written answer could be received.

6This is a copy of the letter that was sent to King Darius by Tattenai, the governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and the other important officers of Trans-Euphrates. 7This is what was said in the report they sent to him:

To King Darius.

Greetings. May you have peace.

8King Darius, you should know that we went to the district of Judah where the Temple of the great God is. The people are building that Temple with large stones, and they are putting timbers in the walls. They are working very hard and are building very fast.

9We asked their elders, “Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and these walls?” 10We also asked for their names, and we wrote down the names of their leaders so you would know who they are.

11This is the answer they gave to us: “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the Temple that a great king of Israel built and finished many years ago. 12But our ancestors made the God of heaven angry, so he handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who destroyed this Temple and took the people to Babylon as captives.

13“Later, in the first year Cyrus was king of Babylon, he gave a special order for this Temple to be rebuilt. 14Cyrus brought out from the temple in Babylon the gold and silver bowls and pans that came from the Temple of God. Nebuchadnezzar had taken them from the Temple in Jerusalem and had put them in the temple in Babylon.

“Then King Cyrus gave them to Sheshbazzar, his appointed governor. 15Cyrus said to him, ‘Take these gold and silver bowls and pans, and put them back in the Temple in Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of God where it was.’ 16So Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. From that day until now the work has been going on, but it is not yet finished.”

17Now, if the king wishes, let a search be made in the royal records of Babylon. See if King Cyrus gave an order to rebuild this Temple in Jerusalem. Then let the king write us and tell us what he has decided.

## *The Order of Darius*

6 So King Darius gave an order to search the records kept in the treasury in Babylon. 2A scroll was found in Ecbatana, the capital city of Media. This is what was written on it:

Note:

3King Cyrus gave an order about the Temple of God in

Jerusalem in the first year he was king. This was the order:

"Let the Temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices. Let its foundations be laid; it should be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide. [4]It must have three layers of large stones and then one layer of timbers. The costs should be paid from the king's treasury. [5]The gold and silver utensils from the Temple of God should be put back in their places. Nebuchadnezzar took them from the Temple in Jerusalem and brought them to Babylon, but they are to be put back in the Temple of God in Jerusalem."

[6]Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and all the officers of that area, stay away from there. [7]Do not bother the work on that Temple of God. Let the governor of the Jewish people and the Jewish elders rebuild this Temple where it was before.

[8]Also, I order you to do this for those elders of the Jewish people who are building this Temple: The cost of the building is to be fully paid from the royal treasury, from taxes collected from Trans-Euphrates. Do this so the work will not stop. [9]Give those people anything they need—young bulls, male sheep, or lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, or wheat, salt, wine, or olive oil. Give the priests in Jerusalem anything they ask for every day without fail. [10]Then they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven, and they may pray for the life of the king and his sons.

[11]Also, I give this order: If anyone changes this order, a wood beam is to be pulled from his house and driven through his body. Because of his crime, make his house a pile of ruins. [12]God has chosen Jerusalem as the place he is to be worshiped. May he punish any king or person who tries to change this order and destroy this Temple.

I, Darius, have given this order. Let it be obeyed quickly and carefully.

## *Completion of the Temple*

[13]So, Tattenai, the governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their fellow workers carried out King Darius' order quickly and carefully. [14]The Jewish elders continued to build and were successful because of the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the Temple as the God of Israel had commanded and as kings Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes of Persia had ordered. [15]The Temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar in the sixth year Darius was king.

[16]Then the people of Israel celebrated and gave the Temple to God to honor him. Everybody was happy: the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the Jewish people who had returned

from captivity. [17]They gave the Temple to God by offering a hundred bulls, two hundred male sheep, and four hundred lambs as sacrifices. And as an offering to forgive the sins of all Israel, they offered twelve male goats, one goat for each tribe in Israel. [18]Then they put the priests and the Levites into their separate groups. Each group had a certain time to serve God in the Temple at Jerusalem as it is written in the Book of Moses.

### *The Passover Is Celebrated*

[19]The Jewish people who returned from captivity celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. [20]The priests and Levites had made themselves clean. Then the Levites killed the Passover lambs for all the people who had returned from captivity, for their relatives the priests, and for themselves. [21]So all the people of Israel who returned from captivity ate the Passover lamb. So did the people who had given up the unclean ways of their non-Jewish neighbors in order to worship the LORD, the God of Israel. [22]For seven days they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread in a very joyful way. The LORD had made them happy by changing the mind of the king of Assyria so that he helped them in the work on the Temple of the God of Israel.

## Psalm 87:1–7

### *God Loves Jerusalem*

**A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

87 The LORD built Jerusalem on the holy mountain.
2 He loves its gates more than any other place in Israel.

3City of God,
wonderful things are said about you. *Selah*

4God says, “I will put Egypt and Babylonia
on the list of nations that know me.

People from Philistia, Tyre, and Cush

will be born there.”

5They will say about Jerusalem,
“This one and that one were born there.
God Most High will strengthen her.”

6The LORD will keep a list of the nations.
He will note, “This person was born there.” *Selah*

7They will dance and sing,
“All good things come from Jerusalem.”

## Proverbs 21:19–20

19It is better to live alone in the desert
than with a quarreling and complaining wife.

20Wise people’s houses are full of the best foods and olive oil,
but fools waste everything they have.

## Acts 22:30—23:22

### *Paul Speaks to Leaders*

30The next day the commander decided to learn why the Jews were accusing Paul. So he ordered the leading priests and the council to meet. The commander took Paul’s chains off. Then he brought Paul out and stood him before their meeting.
23 Paul looked at the council and said, “Brothers, I have lived my life without guilt feelings before God up to this day.”
2Ananias,[n] the high priest, heard this and told the men who were standing near Paul to hit him on the mouth. 3Paul said to Ananias, “God will hit you, too! You are like a wall that has been painted white. You sit there and judge me, using the law of Moses, but you are telling them to hit me, and that is against

the law.”
4The men standing near Paul said to him, “You cannot insult
God’s high priest like that!”
5Paul said, “Brothers, I did not know this man was the high
priest. It is written in the Scriptures, ‘You must not curse a
leader of your people.’”[n]
6Some of the men in the meeting were Sadducees, and
others were Pharisees. Knowing this, Paul shouted to them, “My
brothers, I am a Pharisee, and my father was a Pharisee. I am
on trial here because I believe that people will rise from the
dead.”
7When Paul said this, there was an argument between the
Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the group was divided. 8(The
Sadducees do not believe in angels or spirits or that people will
rise from the dead. But the Pharisees believe in them all.) 9So
there was a great uproar. Some of the teachers of the law, who
were Pharisees, stood up and argued, “We find nothing wrong
with this man. Maybe an angel or a spirit did speak to him.”
10The argument was beginning to turn into such a fight that
the commander was afraid some evil people would tear Paul to
pieces. So he told the soldiers to go down and take Paul away
and put him in the army building.
11The next night the Lord came and stood by Paul. He said,
“Be brave! You have told people in Jerusalem about me. You
must do the same in Rome.”
12In the morning some evil people made a plan to kill Paul,
and they took an oath not to eat or drink anything until they had
killed him. 13There were more than forty men who made this
plan. 14They went to the leading priests and the elders and said,
“We have taken an oath not to eat or drink until we have killed
Paul. 15So this is what we want you to do: Send a message to
the commander to bring Paul out to you as though you want to
ask him more questions. We will be waiting to kill him while he
is on the way here.”
16But Paul’s nephew heard about this plan and went to the
army building and told Paul. 17Then Paul called one of the
officers and said, “Take this young man to the commander. He
has a message for him.”
18So the officer brought Paul’s nephew to the commander
and said, “The prisoner, Paul, asked me to bring this young man
to you. He wants to tell you something.”
19The commander took the young man’s hand and led him to
a place where they could be alone. He asked, “What do you
want to tell me?”
20The young man said, “The Jews have decided to ask you to
bring Paul down to their council meeting tomorrow. They want
you to think they are going to ask him more questions. 21But
don’t believe them! More than forty men are hiding and waiting

to kill Paul. They have all taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. Now they are waiting for you to agree."

22 The commander sent the young man away, ordering him, "Don't tell anyone that you have told me about their plan."

# July 23

## Contentment

*Whoever tries to live right and be loyal finds life, success, and honor.*

Proverbs 21:21

In our world, contentment is a strange street vendor, roaming, looking for a home, but seldom finding an open door. He moves slowly from house to house, knocking on doors, offering his wares: an hour of peace, a smile of acceptance, a sigh of relief. But his goods are seldom taken. We are too busy to be content.

"Not now, thank you. I've too much to do," we say. "Too many marks to be made, too many achievements to be achieved …"

So the vendor moves on. When I asked him why so few welcomed him into their homes, his answer left me convicted. "I charge a high price, you know. My fee is steep. I ask people to trade in their schedules, frustrations, and anxieties. I demand that they put a torch to their fourteen-hour days and sleepless nights. You'd think I'd have more buyers." He scratched his beard, then added pensively, "But people seem strangely proud of their ulcers and headaches."

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Ezra 7:1—8:36

### *Ezra Comes to Jerusalem*

7 After these things[n] during the rule of Artaxerxes king of
Persia, Ezra came up from Babylon. Ezra was the son of
Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2the son of
Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3the son of
Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4the son of
Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5the son of Abishua,
the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the
high priest. 6This Ezra came to Jerusalem from Babylon. He was

a teacher and knew well the Teachings of Moses that had been given by the LORD, the God of Israel. Ezra received everything he asked for from the king, because the LORD his God was helping him. 7In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes more Israelites came to Jerusalem. Among them were priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants.

8Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of Artaxerxes' seventh year as king. 9Ezra had left Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, because God was helping him. 10Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the Teachings of the LORD and to teach his rules and commands to the Israelites.

## *Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra*

11King Artaxerxes had given a letter to Ezra, a priest and teacher who taught about the commands and laws the LORD gave Israel. This is a copy of the letter:

12From Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven.

Greetings.

13Now I give this order: Any Israelite in my kingdom who wishes may go with you to Jerusalem, including priests and Levites. 14Ezra, you are sent by the king and the seven people who advise him to ask how Judah and Jerusalem are obeying the Law of your God, which you are carrying with you. 15Also take with you the silver and gold that the king and those who advise him have given freely to the God of Israel, whose Temple is in Jerusalem. 16Also take the silver and gold you receive from the area of Babylon. Take the offerings the Israelites and their priests have given as gifts for the Temple of your God in Jerusalem. 17With this money buy bulls, male sheep, and lambs, and the grain offerings and drink offerings that go with those sacrifices. Then sacrifice them on the altar in the Temple of your God in Jerusalem.

18You and your fellow Jews may spend the silver and gold left over as you want and as God wishes. 19Take to the God of Jerusalem all the utensils for worship in the Temple of your God, 20which we have given you. Use the royal treasury to pay for anything else you need for the Temple of your God.

21Now I, King Artaxerxes, give this order to all the men in charge of the treasury of Trans-Euphrates: Give Ezra, a priest and a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, whatever he asks for. 22Give him up to seventy-five hundred pounds of silver, six hundred bushels of wheat, six hundred gallons of wine, and six hundred gallons of olive oil. And give him as much salt as he wants. 23Carefully give him whatever the God of heaven wants for the Temple of the God of heaven. We do not want God to be

angry with the king and his sons. 24Remember, you must not make these people pay taxes of any kind: priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants, and other workers in this Temple of God.

25And you, Ezra, use the wisdom you have from your God to choose judges and lawmakers to rule the Jewish people of Trans-Euphrates. They know the laws of your God, and you may teach anyone who does not know them. 26Whoever does not obey the law of your God or of the king must be punished. He will be killed, or sent away, or have his property taken away, or be put in jail.

27Praise the LORD, the God of our ancestors. He caused the king to want to honor the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. 28The LORD has shown me, Ezra, his love in the presence of the king, those who advise the king, and the royal officers. Because the LORD my God was helping me, I had courage, and I gathered the leaders of Israel to return with me.

## *Leaders Who Returned with Ezra*

8 These are the leaders of the family groups and those who were listed with them who came back with me from Babylon during the rule of King Artaxerxes.

2From the descendants of Phinehas: Gershom.

From the descendants of Ithamar: Daniel.

From the descendants of David: Hattush 3of the descendants of Shecaniah.

From the descendants of Parosh: Zechariah, with one hundred fifty men.

4From the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah, with two hundred men.

5From the descendants of Zattu: Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, with three hundred men.

6From the descendants of Adin: Ebed son of Jonathan, with fifty men.

7From the descendants of Elam: Jeshaiah son of Athaliah, with seventy men.

8From the descendants of Shephatiah: Zebadiah son of Michael, with eighty men.

9From the descendants of Joab: Obadiah son of Jehiel, with two hundred eighteen men.

10From the descendants of Bani: Shelomith son of Josiphiah, with one hundred sixty men.

11From the descendants of Bebai: Zechariah son of Bebai, with twenty-eight men.

12From the descendants of Azgad: Johanan son of Hakkatan, with one hundred ten men.

13From the descendants of Adonikam, these were the last

ones: Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, with sixty men.
14From the descendants of Bigvai: Uthai and Zaccur, with seventy men.

## *The Return to Jerusalem*

15I called all those people together at the canal that flows toward Ahava, where we camped for three days. I checked all the people and the priests, but I did not find any Levites. 16So I called these leaders: Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And I called Joiarib and Elnathan, who were teachers. 17I sent these men to Iddo, the leader at Casiphia, and told them what to say to Iddo and his relatives, who are the Temple servants in Casiphia. I sent them to bring servants to us for the Temple of our God. 18Our God was helping us, so Iddo's relatives gave us Sherebiah, a wise man from the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, who was the son of Israel. And they brought Sherebiah's sons and brothers, for a total of eighteen men. 19And they brought to us Hashabiah and Jeshaiah from the descendants of Merari, and his brothers and nephews. In all there were twenty men. 20They also brought two hundred twenty of the Temple servants, a group David and the officers had set up to help the Levites. All of those men were listed by name.

21There by the Ahava Canal, I announced we would all fast and deny ourselves before our God. We would ask God for a safe trip for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions. 22I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road. We had said to the king, "Our God helps everyone who obeys him, but he is very angry with all who reject him." 23So we fasted and prayed to our God about our trip, and he answered our prayers.

24Then I chose twelve of the priests who were leaders, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their relatives. 25I weighed the offering of silver and gold and the utensils given for the Temple of our God, and I gave them to the twelve priests I had chosen. The king, the people who advised him, his officers, and all the Israelites there with us had given these things for the Temple. 26I weighed out and gave them about fifty thousand pounds of silver, about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver objects, and about seventy-five hundred pounds of gold. 27I gave them twenty gold bowls that weighed about nineteen pounds and two fine pieces of polished bronze that were as valuable as gold.

28Then I said to the priests, "You and these utensils belong to the LORD for his service. The silver and gold are gifts to the LORD, the God of your ancestors. 29Guard these things carefully. In Jerusalem, weigh them in front of the leading priests,

Levites, and the leaders of the family groups of Israel in the rooms of the Temple of the LORD.” 30So the priests and Levites accepted the silver, the gold, and the utensils that had been weighed to take them to the Temple of our God in Jerusalem.

31On the twelfth day of the first month we left the Ahava Canal and started toward Jerusalem. Our God helped us and protected us from enemies and robbers along the way. 32Finally we arrived in Jerusalem where we rested three days.

33On the fourth day we weighed out the silver, the gold, and the utensils in the Temple of our God. We handed them to the priest Meremoth son of Uriah. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with him, as were the Levites Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui. 34We checked everything by number and by weight, and the total weight was written down.

35Then the captives who returned made burnt offerings to the God of Israel. They sacrificed twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six male sheep, and seventy-seven lambs. For a sin offering there were twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD. 36They took King Artaxerxes’ orders to the royal officers and to the governors of Trans-Euphrates. Then these men gave help to the people and the Temple of God.

## Psalm 88:1–2

### *A Sad Complaint*

**A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah. For the director of music. By the mahalath leannoth. A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.**

88 LORD, you are the God who saves me.
I cry out to you day and night.

2Receive my prayer,
and listen to my cry.

## Proverbs 21:21–22

[21]Whoever tries to live right and be loyal
finds life, success, and honor.

[22]A wise person can defeat a city full of warriors
and tear down the defenses they trust in.

## Acts 23:23–35

### *Paul Is Sent to Caesarea*

[23]Then the commander called two officers and said, “I need some men to go to Caesarea. Get two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred men with spears ready to leave at nine o’clock tonight. [24]Get some horses for Paul to ride so he can be taken to Governor Felix safely.” [25]And he wrote a letter that said:

[26]From Claudius Lysias.
To the Most Excellent Governor Felix:
Greetings.

[27]Some of the Jews had taken this man and planned to kill him. But I learned that he is a Roman citizen, so I went with my soldiers and saved him. [28]I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him before their council meeting. [29]I learned that these people said Paul did some things that were wrong by their own laws, but no charge was worthy of jail or death. [30]When I was told that some of them were planning to kill Paul, I sent him to you at once. I also told them to tell you what they have against him.

[31]So the soldiers did what they were told and took Paul and brought him to the city of Antipatris that night. [32]The next day the horsemen went with Paul to Caesarea, but the other soldiers went back to the army building in Jerusalem. [33]When the horsemen came to Caesarea and gave the letter to the governor, they turned Paul over to him. [34]The governor read the letter and asked Paul, “What area are you from?” When he learned that Paul was from Cilicia, [35]he said, “I will hear your case when those who are against you come here, too.” Then the governor gave orders for Paul to be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.

# July 24

## No Secrets from God

*"You have been unfaithful … Now, confess it to the* LORD*."*

Ezra 10:10–11

*"If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new!"*

2 Corinthians 5:17

HAve you been there? Have you felt the ground of conviction give way beneath your feet? The ledge crumbles, your eyes widen, and down you go. *Poof!* Now what do you do? … When we fall, we can dismiss it. We can deny it. We can distort it. Or we can deal with it …

We keep no secrets from God. Confession is not telling God what we did. He already knows. Confession is simply agreeing with God that our acts were wrong …

How can God heal what we deny? … How can God grant us pardon when we won't admit our guilt? Ahh, there's that word: *guilt.* Isn't that what we avoid? Guilt. Isn't that what we detest? But is guilt so bad? What does guilt imply if not that we know right from wrong, that we aspire to be better than we are … That's what guilt is: a healthy regret for telling God one thing and doing another.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

### Ezra 9:1—10:44

#### *Ezra's Prayer*

9 After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "Ezra, the Israelites, including the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the people around us.

Those neighbors do evil things, as the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites did. 2The Israelite men and their sons have married these women. They have mixed the people who belong to God with the people around them. The leaders and officers of Israel have led the rest of the Israelites to do this unfaithful thing."

3When I heard this, I angrily tore my robe and coat, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down in shock. 4Everyone who trembled in fear at the word of the God of Israel gathered around me because of the unfaithfulness of the captives who had returned. I sat there in shock until the evening sacrifice.

5At the evening sacrifice I got up from where I had shown my shame. My robe and coat were torn, and I fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God. 6I prayed,

"My God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are so many. They are higher than our heads. Our guilt even reaches up to the sky. 7From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we, our kings, and our priests have been punished by the sword and captivity. Foreign kings have taken away our things and shamed us, even as it is today.

8"But now, for a short time, the LORD our God has been kind to us. He has let some of us come back from captivity and has let us live in safety in his holy place. And so our God gives us hope and a little relief from our slavery. 9Even though we are slaves, our God has not left us. He caused the kings of Persia to be kind to us and has given us new life. We can rebuild the Temple and repair its ruins. And he has given us a wall to protect us in Judah and Jerusalem.

10"But now, our God, what can we say after you have done all this? We have disobeyed your commands 11that you gave through your servants the prophets. You said, 'The land you are entering to own is ruined; the people living there have spoiled it by the evil they do. Their evil filled the land with uncleanness from one end to the other. 12So do not let your daughters marry their sons, and do not let their daughters marry your sons. Do not wish for their peace or success. Then you will be strong and eat the good things of the land. Then you can leave this land to your descendants forever.'

13"What has happened to us is our own fault. We have done evil things, and our guilt is great. But you, our God, have punished us less than we deserve; you have left a few of us alive. 14We should not again break your commands by allowing marriages with these wicked people. If we did, you would get angry enough to destroy us, and none of us would be left alive. 15LORD, God of Israel, by your goodness a few of us are left alive today. We admit that we are guilty and none of us should be allowed to stand before you."

## *The People Confess Sin*

10 As Ezra was praying and confessing and crying and throwing
himself down in front of the Temple, a large group of Israelite
men, women, and children gathered around him who were also
crying loudly. 2Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel the Elamite said to
Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying women
from the peoples around us. But even so, there is still hope for
Israel. 3Now let us make an agreement before our God. We will
send away all these women and their children as you and those
who respect the commands of our God advise. Let it be done to
obey God’s Teachings. 4Get up, Ezra. You are in charge, and we
will support you. Have courage and do it.”

5So Ezra got up and made the priests, Levites, and all the
people of Israel promise to do what was suggested; and they
promised. 6Then Ezra left the Temple and went to the room of
Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While Ezra was there, he did not eat
or drink, because he was still sad about the unfaithfulness of
the captives who had returned.

7They sent an order in Judah and Jerusalem for all the
captives who had returned to meet together in Jerusalem.
8Whoever did not come to Jerusalem within three days would
lose his property and would no longer be a member of the
community of the returned captives. That was the decision of
the officers and elders.

9So within three days all the men of Judah and Benjamin
gathered in Jerusalem. It was the twentieth day of the ninth
month. All the men were sitting in the open place in front of the
Temple and were upset because of the meeting and because it
was raining. 10Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You
have been unfaithful and have married non-Jewish women. You
have made Israel more guilty. 11Now, confess it to the LORD, the
God of your ancestors. Do his will and separate yourselves from
the people living around you and from your non-Jewish wives.”

12Then the whole group answered Ezra with a loud voice,
“Ezra, you’re right! We must do what you say. 13But there are
many people here, and it’s the rainy season. We can’t stand
outside, and this problem can’t be solved in a day or two,
because we have sinned badly. 14Let our officers make a
decision for the whole group. Then let everyone in our towns
who has married a non-Jewish woman meet with the elders and
judges of each town at a planned time, until the hot anger of
our God turns away from us.” 15Only Jonathan son of Asahel,
Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, Meshullam, and Shabbethai the Levite
were against the plan.

16So the returned captives did what was suggested. Ezra the
priest chose men who were leaders of the family groups and
named one from each family division. On the first day of the

tenth month they sat down to study each case. [17]By the first day of the first month, they had finished with all the men who had married non-Jewish women.

## *Those Guilty of Marrying Non-Jewish Women*

[18]These are the descendants of the priests who had married foreign women:

From the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and Jeshua's brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. [19](They all promised to divorce their wives, and each one brought a male sheep from the flock as a penalty offering.)

[20]From the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.

[21]From the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah.

[22]From the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

[23]Among the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (also called Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

[24]Among the singers: Eliashib.

Among the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

[25]And among the other Israelites, these married non-Jewish women:

From the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah, and Benaiah.

[26]From the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

[27]From the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

[28]From the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

[29]From the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.

[30]From the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

[31]From the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, [32]Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

[33]From the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

[34]From the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, [35]Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, [36]Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, [37]Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

[38]From the descendants of Binnui: Shimei, [39]Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, [40]Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, [41]Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, [42]Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

[43]From the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad,

Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.
44 All these men had married non-Jewish women, and some of
them had children by these wives.

## Psalm 88:3–10

3 My life is full of troubles,
and I am nearly dead.

4 They think I am on the way to my grave.
I am like a man with no strength.

5 I have been left as dead,
like a body lying in a grave

whom you don't remember anymore,
cut off from your care.

6 You have brought me close to death;
I am almost in the dark place of the dead.

7 You have been very angry with me;
all your waves crush me. *Selah*

8 You have taken my friends away from me
and have made them hate me.

I am trapped and cannot escape.
9 My eyes are weak from crying.

LORD, I have prayed to you every day;
I have lifted my hands in prayer to you.

10 Do you show your miracles for the dead?

Do their spirits rise up and praise you? *Selah*

## Proverbs 21:23–24

23 Those who are careful about what they say
keep themselves out of trouble.

24 People who act with stubborn pride
are called “proud,” “bragger,” and “mocker.”

## Acts 24:1–27

### *Paul Is Accused*

24 Five days later Ananias, the high priest, went to the city of Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. They had come to make charges against Paul before the governor. 2 Paul was called into the meeting, and Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, “Most Excellent Felix! Our people enjoy much peace because of you, and many wrong things in our country are being made right through your wise help. 3 We accept these things always and in every place, and we are thankful for them. 4 But not wanting to take any more of your time, I beg you to be kind and listen to our few words. 5 We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up his people everywhere in the world. He is a leader of the Nazarene group. 6 Also, he was trying to make the Temple unclean, but we stopped him. [And we wanted to judge him by our own law. 7 But the officer Lysias came and used much force to take him from us. 8 And Lysias commanded those who wanted to accuse Paul to come to you.][n] By asking him questions yourself, you can decide if all these things are true.” 9 The others agreed and said that all of this was true.

10 When the governor made a sign for Paul to speak, Paul said, “Governor Felix, I know you have been a judge over this nation for a long time. So I am happy to defend myself before you. 11 You can learn for yourself that I went to worship in Jerusalem only twelve days ago. 12 Those who are accusing me did not find me arguing with anyone in the Temple or stirring

up the people in the synagogues or in the city. [13]They cannot prove the things they are saying against me now. [14]But I will tell you this: I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way of Jesus. The others say that the Way of Jesus is not the right way. But I believe everything that is taught in the law of Moses and that is written in the books of the Prophets. [15]I have the same hope in God that they have—the hope that all people, good and bad, will surely be raised from the dead. [16]This is why I always try to do what I believe is right before God and people.

[17]"After being away from Jerusalem for several years, I went back to bring money to my people and to offer sacrifices. [18]I was doing this when they found me in the Temple. I had finished the cleansing ceremony and had not made any trouble; no people were gathering around me. [19]But there were some people from Asia who should be here, standing before you. If I have really done anything wrong, they are the ones who should accuse me. [20]Or ask these people here if they found any wrong in me when I stood before the council in Jerusalem. [21]But I did shout one thing when I stood before them: 'You are judging me today because I believe that people will rise from the dead!'"

[22]Felix already understood much about the Way of Jesus. He stopped the trial and said, "When commander Lysias comes here, I will decide your case." [23]Felix told the officer to keep Paul guarded but to give him some freedom and to let his friends bring what he needed.

## *Paul Speaks to Felix and His Wife*

[24]After some days Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish, and asked for Paul to be brought to him. He listened to Paul talk about believing in Christ Jesus. [25]But Felix became afraid when Paul spoke about living right, self-control, and the time when God will judge the world. He said, "Go away now. When I have more time, I will call for you." [26]At the same time Felix hoped that Paul would give him some money, so he often sent for Paul and talked with him.

[27]But after two years, Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus as governor. But Felix had left Paul in prison to please the Jews.

# July 25

## Working to Please God

*Lazy people … refuse to work … But good people give without holding back.*

Proverbs 21:25–26

"work as if you were serving the Lord, not as if you were serving only men and women" (Ephesians 6:7). What if everyone worked with God in mind? Suppose no one worked to satisfy self or please the bottom line but everyone worked to please God.

Many occupations would instantly cease: drug trafficking, thievery, prostitution, nightclub and casino management. Certain careers, by their nature, cannot please God. These would cease.

Certain behaviors would cease as well. If I'm repairing a car for God, I'm not going to overcharge his children. If I'm painting a wall for God, you think I'm going to use paint thinner?

Imagine if everyone worked for the audience of One. Every nurse, thoughtful. Every officer, careful. Every professor, insightful. Every salesperson, delightful. Every teacher, hopeful. Every lawyer, skillful.

Impossible? Not entirely. All we need is someone to start a worldwide revolution. Might as well be us.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Nehemiah 1:1—2:20

### *Nehemiah's Prayer*

1 These are the words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year,[n] I, Nehemiah, was in the capital city of Susa. 2One of my brothers named Hanani came with some other men from Judah. I asked them

about Jerusalem and the Jewish people who lived through the captivity.

3They answered me, “Those who are left from the captivity are back in Judah, but they are in much trouble and are full of shame. The wall around Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned.”

4When I heard these things, I sat down and cried for several days. I was sad and fasted. I prayed to the God of heaven, 5“LORD, God of heaven, you are the great God who is to be respected. You are loyal, and you keep your agreement with those who love you and obey your commands. 6Look and listen carefully. Hear the prayer that I, your servant, am praying to you day and night for your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we Israelites have done against you. My father’s family and I have sinned against you. 7We have been wicked toward you and have not obeyed the commands, rules, and laws you gave your servant Moses.

8“Remember what you taught your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. 9But if you return to me and obey my commands, I will gather your people from the far ends of the earth. And I will bring them from captivity to where I have chosen to be worshiped.’

10“They are your servants and your people, whom you have saved with your great strength and power. 11LORD, listen carefully to the prayer of your servant and the prayers of your servants who love to honor you. Give me, your servant, success today; allow this king to show kindness to me.”

I was the one who served wine to the king.

## *Nehemiah Is Sent to Jerusalem*

2 It was the month of Nisan in the twentieth year Artaxerxes was king. He wanted some wine, so I took some and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before. 2So the king said, “Why does your face look sad even though you are not sick? Your heart must be sad.”

Then I was very afraid. 3I said to the king, “May the king live forever! My face is sad because the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.”

4Then the king said to me, “What do you want?”

First I prayed to the God of heaven. 5Then I answered the king, “If you are willing and if I have pleased you, send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so I can rebuild it.”

6The queen was sitting next to the king. He asked me, “How long will your trip take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me, so I set a time.

7I also said to him, “If you are willing, give me letters for the

governors of Trans-Euphrates. Tell them to let me pass safely through their lands on my way to Judah. [8]And may I have a letter for Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, telling him to give me timber? I will need it to make boards for the gates of the palace, which is by the Temple, and for the city wall, and for the house in which I will live." So the king gave me the letters, because God was showing kindness to me. [9]Then I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and soldiers on horses with me.

[10]When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite officer heard about this, they were upset that someone had come to help the Israelites.

### *Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem*

[11]I went to Jerusalem and stayed there three days. [12]Then at night I started out with a few men. I had not told anyone what God had caused me to do for Jerusalem. There were no animals with me except the one I was riding.

[13]I went out at night through the Valley Gate. I rode toward the Dragon Well and the Trash Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and the gates that had been destroyed by fire. [14]Then I rode on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for the animal I was riding to pass through. [15]So I went up the valley at night, inspecting the wall. Finally, I turned and went back in through the Valley Gate. [16]The guards did not know where I had gone or what I was doing. I had not yet said anything to the Jewish people, the priests, the important men, the officers, or any of the others who would do the work.

[17]Then I said to them, "You can see the trouble we have here. Jerusalem is a pile of ruins, and its gates have been burned. Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so we won't be full of shame any longer." [18]I also told them how God had been kind to me and what the king had said to me.

Then they answered, "Let's start rebuilding." So they began to work hard.

[19]But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite officer, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they made fun of us and laughed at us. They said, "What are you doing? Are you turning against the king?"

[20]But I answered them, "The God of heaven will give us success. We, his servants, will start rebuilding, but you have no share, claim, or memorial in Jerusalem."

## Psalm 88:11–18

11 Will your love be told in the grave?
Will your loyalty be told in the place of death?

12 Will your miracles be known in the dark grave?
Will your goodness be known in the land of forgetfulness?

13 But, LORD, I have called out to you for help;
every morning I pray to you.

14 LORD, why do you reject me?
Why do you hide from me?

15 I have been weak and dying since I was young.
I suffer from your terrors, and I am helpless.

16 You have been angry with me,
and your terrors have destroyed me.

17 They surround me daily like a flood;
they are all around me.

18 You have taken away my loved ones and friends.
Darkness is my only friend.

## Proverbs 21:25–26

25 Lazy people's desire for sleep will kill them,
because they refuse to work.

26 All day long they wish for more,
but good people give without holding back.

# Acts 25:1–27

## *Paul Asks to See Caesar*

25 Three days after Festus became governor, he went from
Caesarea to Jerusalem. 2There the leading priests and the
important leaders made charges against Paul before Festus.
3They asked Festus to do them a favor. They wanted him to send
Paul back to Jerusalem, because they had a plan to kill him on
the way. 4But Festus answered that Paul would be kept in
Caesarea and that he himself was returning there soon. 5He
said, “Some of your leaders should go with me. They can accuse
the man there in Caesarea, if he has really done something
wrong.”

6Festus stayed in Jerusalem another eight or ten days and
then went back to Caesarea. The next day he told the soldiers to
bring Paul before him. Festus was seated on the judge’s seat
7when Paul came into the room. The people who had come from
Jerusalem stood around him, making serious charges against
him, which they could not prove. 8This is what Paul said to
defend himself: “I have done nothing wrong against the law,
against the Temple, or against Caesar.”

9But Festus wanted to please the people. So he asked Paul,
“Do you want to go to Jerusalem for me to judge you there on
these charges?”

10Paul said, “I am standing at Caesar’s judgment seat now,
where I should be judged. I have done nothing wrong to them;
you know this is true. 11If I have done something wrong and the
law says I must die, I do not ask to be saved from death. But if
these charges

are not true, then no one can give me to them. I want Caesar to
hear my case!”

12Festus talked about this with his advisers. Then he said,
“You have asked to see Caesar, so you will go to Caesar!”

## *Paul Before King Agrippa*

13A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice came to
Caesarea to visit Festus. 14They stayed there for some time, and
Festus told the king about Paul’s case. Festus said, “There is a
man that Felix left in prison. 15When I went to Jerusalem, the
leading priests and the elders there made charges against him,
asking me to sentence him to death. 16But I answered, ‘When a
man is accused of a crime, Romans do not hand him over until

he has been allowed to face his accusers and defend himself against their charges.’ 17So when these people came here to Caesarea for the trial, I did not waste time. The next day I sat on the judge’s seat and commanded that the man be brought in. 18They stood up and accused him, but not of any serious crime as I thought they would. 19The things they said were about their own religion and about a man named Jesus who died. But Paul said that he is still alive. 20Not knowing how to find out about these questions, I asked Paul, ‘Do you want to go to Jerusalem and be judged there?’ 21But he asked to be kept in Caesarea. He wants a decision from the emperor.[n] So I ordered that he be held until I could send him to Caesar.”

22Agrippa said to Festus, “I would also like to hear this man myself.”

Festus said, “Tomorrow you will hear him.”

23The next day Agrippa and Bernice appeared with great show, acting like very important people. They went into the judgment room with the army leaders and the important men of Caesarea. Then Festus ordered the soldiers to bring Paul in. 24Festus said, “King Agrippa and all who are gathered here with us, you see this man. All the people, here and in Jerusalem, have complained to me about him, shouting that he should not live any longer. 25When I judged him, I found no reason to order his death. But since he asked to be judged by Caesar, I decided to send him. 26But I have nothing definite to write the emperor about him. So I have brought him before all of you—especially you, King Agrippa. I hope you can question him and give me something to write. 27I think it is foolish to send a prisoner to Caesar without telling what charges are against him.”

# July 26

## Why Worship?

*I will always sing about the* LORD*'s love; I will tell of his loyalty from now on.*

Psalm 89:1

During our summer vacation I took … advantage of the occasion to solicit a sailing lesson. Ever puzzled by the difference in leeward, starboard, and stern, I asked the crew a few questions. After a while the captain offered, "Would you like to sail us home?"… He assured me I would have no trouble. "Target that cliff," he instructed. "Set your eyes and the boat on it."

I found the instruction hard to follow. Other sights invited my attention: the rich mahogany of the deck, rich foam cresting on the waves. I wanted to look at it all. But look too long and risk losing the course. The boat stayed on target as long as I set my eyes beyond the vessel.

Worship helps us do this in life. It lifts our eyes off the boat with its toys and passengers and sets them on "what is in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1).

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Nehemiah 3:1—5:19

### *Builders of the Wall*

3 Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work
and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They gave it to the Lord's service
and set its doors in place. They worked as far as the Tower of
the Hundred and gave it to the Lord's service. Then they went
on to the Tower of Hananel. 2Next to them, the people of Jericho
built part of the wall, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them.

3The sons of Hassenaah rebuilt the Fish Gate, laying its
boards and setting its doors, bolts, and bars in place.

[4]Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, made repairs next
to them. Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel,
made repairs next to Meremoth. And Zadok son of Baana made
repairs next to Meshullam. [5]The people from Tekoa made
repairs next to them, but the leading men of Tekoa would not
work under their supervisors.

[6]Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah
repaired the Old Gate. They laid its boards and set its doors,
bolts, and bars in place. [7]Next to them, Melatiah from Gibeon,
other men from Gibeon and Mizpah, and Jadon from Meronoth
made repairs. These places were ruled by the governor of
Trans-Euphrates. [8]Next to them, Uzziel son of Harhaiah, a
goldsmith, made repairs. And next to him, Hananiah, a perfume
maker, made repairs. These men rebuilt Jerusalem as far as the
Broad Wall. [9]The next part of the wall was repaired by Rephaiah
son of Hur, the ruler of half of the district of Jerusalem. [10]Next
to him, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his own
house. And next to him, Hattush son of Hashabneiah made
repairs. [11]Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-
Moab repaired another part of the wall and the Tower of the
Ovens. [12]Next to them Shallum son of Hallohesh, the ruler of
half of the district of Jerusalem, and his daughters made
repairs.

[13]Hanun and the people of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate,
rebuilding it and setting its doors, bolts, and bars in place. They
also repaired the five hundred yards of the wall to the Trash
Gate.

[14]Malkijah son of Recab, the ruler of the district of Beth
Hakkerem, repaired the Trash Gate. He rebuilt that gate and
set its doors, bolts, and bars in place.

[15]Shallun son of Col-Hozeh, the ruler of the district of
Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it, put a roof
over it, and set its doors, bolts, and bars in place. He also
repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam next to the King's
Garden all the way to the steps that went down from the older
part of the city. [16]Next to Shallun was Nehemiah[n] son of Azbuk,
the ruler of half of the district of Beth Zur. He made repairs
opposite the tombs of David and as far as the man-made pool
and the House of the Heroes.

[17]Next to him, the Levites made repairs, working under
Rehum son of Bani. Next to him, Hashabiah, the ruler of half of
the district of Keilah, for his district. [18]Next to him, Binnui son
of Henadad and his relatives made repairs. Binnui was the ruler
of the other half of the district of Keilah. [19]Next to them, Ezer
son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, repaired another part of the
wall. He worked across from the way up to the armory, as far as
the bend. [20]Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai worked hard on
the wall that went from the bend to the entrance to the house of

Eliashib, the high priest. [21]Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the wall that went from the entrance to Eliashib's house to the far end of it.

[22]Next to him worked the priests from the surrounding area. [23]Next to them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their own house. Next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his own house. [24]Next to him, Binnui son of Henadad repaired the wall that went from Azariah's house to the bend and on to the corner. [25]Palal son of Uzai worked across from the bend and by the tower on the upper palace, which is near the courtyard of the king's guard. Next to Palal, Pedaiah son of Parosh made repairs. [26]The Temple servants who lived on the hill of Ophel made repairs as far as a point opposite the Water Gate. They worked toward the east and the tower that extends from the palace. [27]Next to them, the people of Tekoa repaired the wall from the great tower that extends from the palace to the wall of Ophel.

[28]The priests made repairs above the Horse Gate, each working in front of his own house. [29]Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs across from his own house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard of the East Gate, made repairs. [30]Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, made repairs on another part of the wall. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs across from where he lived. [31]Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. He worked as far as the house of the Temple servants and the traders, which is across from the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner of the wall. [32]The goldsmiths and the traders made repairs between the room above the corner of the wall and the Sheep Gate.

## *Those Against the Rebuilding*

4 When Sanballat heard we were rebuilding the wall, he was very angry, even furious. He made fun of the Jewish people. [2]He said to his friends and those with power in Samaria, "What are these weak Jews doing? Will they rebuild the wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Can they finish it in one day? Can they bring stones back to life from piles of trash and ashes?"

[3]Tobiah the Ammonite, who was next to Sanballat, said, "If a fox climbed up on the stone wall they are building, it would break it down."

[4]I prayed, "Hear us, our God. We are hated. Turn the insults of Sanballat and Tobiah back on their own heads. Let them be captured and stolen like valuables. [5]Do not hide their guilt or take away their sins so that you can't see them, because they have insulted the builders."

[6]So we rebuilt the wall to half its height, because the people

were willing to work.

7But Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the people from Ashdod were very angry when they heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls were continuing and that the holes in the wall were being closed. 8So they all made plans to come to Jerusalem and fight and stir up trouble. 9But we prayed to our God and appointed guards to watch for them day and night.

10The people of Judah said, "The workers are getting tired. There is so much trash we cannot rebuild the wall."

11And our enemies said, "The Jews won't know or see anything until we come among them and kill them and stop the work."

12Then the Jewish people who lived near our enemies came and told us ten times, "Everywhere you turn, the enemy will attack us." 13So I put people behind the lowest places along the wall—the open places—and I put families together with their swords, spears, and bows. 14Then I looked around and stood up and said to the important men, the leaders, and the rest of the people: "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and powerful. Fight for your brothers, your sons and daughters, your wives, and your homes."

15Then our enemies heard that we knew about their plans and that God had ruined their plans. So we all went back to the wall, each to his own work.

16From that day on, half my people worked on the wall. The other half was ready with spears, shields, bows, and armor. The officers stood in back of the people of Judah 17who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and carried a weapon with the other. 18Each builder wore his sword at his side as he worked. The man who blew the trumpet to warn the people stayed next to me.

19Then I said to the important people, the leaders, and everyone else, "This is a very big job. We are spreading out along the wall so that we are far apart. 20Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, assemble there. Our God will fight for us."

21So we continued to work with half the men holding spears from sunrise till the stars came out. 22At that time I also said to the people, "Let every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night. They can be our guards at night and workmen during the day." 23Neither I, my brothers, my workers, nor the guards with me ever took off our clothes. Each person carried his weapon even when he went for water.

## *Nehemiah Helps Poor People*

5 The men and their wives complained loudly against their fellow Jews. 2Some of them were saying, "We have many sons

and daughters in our families. To eat and stay alive, we need grain."

3Others were saying, "We are borrowing money against our fields, vineyards, and homes to get grain because there is not much food."

4And still others were saying, "We are borrowing money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. 5We are just like our fellow Jews, and our sons are like their sons. But we have to sell our sons and daughters as slaves. Some of our daughters have already been sold. But there is nothing we can do, because our fields and vineyards already belong to other people."

6When I heard their complaints about these things, I was very angry. 7After I thought about it, I accused the important people and the leaders, "You are charging your own brothers too much interest." So I called a large meeting to deal with them. 8I said to them, "As much as possible, we have bought freedom for our fellow Jews who had been sold to foreigners. Now you are selling your fellow Jews to us!" The leaders were quiet and had nothing to say.

9Then I said, "What you are doing is not right. Don't you fear God? Don't let our foreign enemies shame us. 10I, my brothers, and my men are also lending money and grain to the people. But stop charging them so much for this. 11Give back their fields, vineyards, olive trees, and houses right now. Also give back the extra amount you charged—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine, and oil."

12They said, "We will give it back and not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."

Then I called for the priests, and I made the important people and leaders take an oath to do what they had said. 13Also I shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out everyone who does not keep his promise. May God shake him out of his house and out of the things that are his. Let that person be shaken out and emptied!"

Then the whole group said, "Amen," and they praised the LORD. So the people did what they had promised.

14I was appointed governor in the land of Judah in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' rule. I was governor of Judah for twelve years, until his thirty-second year. During that time neither my brothers nor I ate the food that was allowed for a governor. 15But the governors before me had placed a heavy load on the people. They took about one pound of silver from each person, along with food and wine. The governors' helpers before me also controlled the people, but I did not do that, because I feared God. 16I worked on the wall, as did all my men who were gathered there. We did not buy any fields.

17Also, I fed one hundred fifty Jewish people and officers at my table, as well as those who came from the nations around us. 18This is what was prepared every day: one ox, six good

sheep, and birds. And every ten days there were all kinds of wine. But I never demanded the food that was due a governor, because the people were already working very hard.

19 Remember to be kind to me, my God, for all the good I have done for these people.

## Psalm 89:1–4

### *A Song About God's Loyalty*

**A maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.**

89 I will always sing about the LORD's love;
I will tell of his loyalty from now on.

2 I will say, "Your love continues forever;
your loyalty goes on and on like the sky."

3 You said, "I made an agreement with the man of my choice;
I made a promise to my servant David.

4 I told him, 'I will make your family continue forever.
Your kingdom will go on and on.'" *Selah*

## Proverbs 21:27

27 The LORD hates sacrifices brought by evil people,
particularly when they offer them for the wrong reasons.

## Acts 26:1–32

### *Paul Defends Himself*

26 Agrippa said to Paul, “You may now speak to defend
yourself.”

Then Paul raised his hand and began to speak. 2He said,
“King Agrippa, I am very blessed to stand before you and will
answer all the charges the evil people make against me. 3You
know so much about all the customs and the things they argue
about, so please listen to me patiently.

4“All my people know about my whole life, how I lived from
the beginning in my own country and later in Jerusalem. 5They
have known me for a long time. If they want to, they can tell you
that I was a good Pharisee. And the Pharisees obey the laws of
my tradition more carefully than any other group. 6Now I am on
trial because I hope for the promise that God made to our
ancestors. 7This is the promise that the twelve tribes of our
people hope to receive as they serve God day and night. My
king, they have accused me because I hope for this same
promise! 8Why do any of you people think it is impossible for
God to raise people from the dead?

9“I, too, thought I ought to do many things against Jesus
from Nazareth. 10And that is what I did in Jerusalem. The
leading priests gave me the power to put many of God’s people
in jail, and when they were being killed, I agreed it was a good
thing. 11In every synagogue, I often punished them and tried to
make them speak against Jesus. I was so angry against them I
even went to other cities to find them and punish them.

12“One time the leading priests gave me permission and the
power to go to Damascus. 13On the way there, at noon, I saw a
light from heaven. It was brighter than the sun and flashed all
around me and those who were traveling with me. 14We all fell
to the ground. Then I heard a voice speaking to me in the
Hebrew language,[n] saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting
me? You are only hurting yourself by fighting me.’ 15I said, ‘Who
are you, Lord?’ The Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are
persecuting. 16Stand up! I have chosen you to be my servant
and my witness—you will tell people the things that you have
seen and the things that I will show you. This is why I have
come to you today. 17I will keep you safe from your own people
and also from the others. I am sending you to them 18to open
their eyes so that they may turn away from darkness to the
light, away from the power of Satan and to God. Then their sins
can be forgiven, and they can have a place with those people
who have been made holy by believing in me.’

19“King Agrippa, after I had this vision from heaven, I obeyed
it. 20I began telling people that they should change their hearts
and lives and turn to God and do things to show they really had
changed. I told this first to those in Damascus, then in
Jerusalem, and in every part of Judea, and also to the other

people. [21]This is why the Jews took me and were trying to kill me in the Temple. [22]But God has helped me, and so I stand here today, telling all people, small and great, what I have seen. But I am saying only what Moses and the prophets said would happen — [23]that the Christ would die, and as the first to rise from the dead, he would bring light to all people."

## *Paul Tries to Persuade Agrippa*

[24]While Paul was saying these things to defend himself, Festus said loudly, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Too much study has driven you crazy!"

[25]Paul said, "Most excellent Festus, I am not crazy. My words are true and sensible. [26]King Agrippa knows about these things, and I can speak freely to him. I know he has heard about all of these things, because they did not happen off in a corner. [27]King Agrippa, do you believe what the prophets wrote? I know you believe."

[28]King Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time?"

[29]Paul said, "Whether it is a short or a long time, I pray to God that not only you but every person listening to me today would be saved and be like me—except for these chains I have."

[30]Then King Agrippa, Governor Festus, Bernice, and all the people sitting with them stood up [31]and left the room. Talking to each other, they said, "There is no reason why this man should die or be put in jail." [32]And Agrippa said to Festus, "We could let this man go free, but he has asked Caesar to hear his case."

# July 27

## What a God!

*LORD God All-Powerful, who is like you? LORD, you are powerful and completely trustworthy.*

Psalm 89:8

Ponder the achievement of God. He doesn't condone our sin, nor does he compromise his standard. He doesn't ignore our rebellion, nor does he relax his demands.

Rather than dismiss our sin, he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself.

God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished … and we are redeemed.

God does what we cannot do so we can be what we dare not dream: perfect before God.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### Nehemiah 6:1—7:73a

### *More Problems for Nehemiah*

6 Then Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and our other
enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that there was not
one gap in it. But I had not yet set the doors in the gates. 2So
Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come,
Nehemiah, let's meet together in Kephirim on the plain of Ono."

But they were planning to harm me. 3So I sent messengers to
them with this answer: "I am doing a great work, and I can't
come down. I don't want the work to stop while I leave to meet
you." 4Sanballat and Geshem sent the same message to me four
times, and each time I sent back the same answer.

5The fifth time Sanballat sent his helper to me with the
message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter. 6This is what
was written:

A report is going around to all the nations, and Geshem says

it is true, that you and the Jewish people are planning to turn against the king and that you are rebuilding the wall. They say you are going to be their king [7]and that you have appointed prophets to announce in Jerusalem: “There is a king of Judah!” The king will hear about this. So come, let’s discuss this together.

[8]So I sent him back this answer: “Nothing you are saying is really happening. You are just making it up in your own mind.”

[9]Our enemies were trying to scare us, thinking, “They will get too weak to work. Then the wall will not be finished.”

But I prayed, “God, make me strong.”

[10]One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel. Shemaiah had to stay at home. He said, “Nehemiah, let’s meet in the Temple of God. Let’s go inside the Temple and close the doors, because men are coming at night to kill you.”

[11]But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Should I run for my life into the Temple? I will not go.” [12]I knew that God had not sent him but that Tobiah and Sanballat had paid him to prophesy against me. [13]They paid him to frighten me so I would do this and sin. Then they could give me a bad name to shame me.

[14]I prayed, “My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat and what they have done. Also remember the prophetess Noadiah and the other prophets who have been trying to frighten me.”

## *The Wall Is Finished*

[15]The wall of Jerusalem was completed on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul. It took fifty-two days to rebuild. [16]When all our enemies heard about it and all the nations around us saw it, they were shamed. They then understood that the work had been done with the help of our God.

[17]Also in those days the important people of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and he answered them. [18]Many Jewish people had promised to be faithful to Tobiah, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah. And Tobiah’s son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. [19]These important people kept telling me about the good things Tobiah was doing, and then they would tell Tobiah what I said about him. So Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

7 After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites were chosen. [2]I put my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah, the commander of the palace, in charge of Jerusalem. Hananiah was honest and feared God more than most people. [3]I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem should not be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut and bolt the doors.

Appoint people who live in Jerusalem as guards, and put some at guard posts and some near their own houses.”

## *The Captives Who Returned*

4The city was large and roomy, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. 5Then my God caused me to gather the important people, the leaders, and the common people so I could register them by families. I found the family history of those who had returned first. This is what I found written there:

6These are the people of the area who returned from captivity, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken away. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each going back to his own town. 7These people returned with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

These are the people from Israel: 8the descendants of Parosh —2,172; 9the descendants of Shephatiah—372; 10the descendants of Arah—652; 11the descendants of Pahath-Moab (through the family of Jeshua and Joab)—2,818; 12the descendants of Elam—1,254; 13the descendants of Zattu—845; 14the descendants of Zaccai—760; 15the descendants of Binnui —648; 16the descendants of Bebai—628; 17the descendants of Azgad—2,322; 18the descendants of Adonikam—667; 19the descendants of Bigvai—2,067; 20the descendants of Adin—655; 21the descendants of Ater (through Hezekiah)—98; 22the descendants of Hashum—328; 23the descendants of Bezai—324; 24the descendants of Hariph—112; 25the descendants of Gibeon —95.

26These are the people from the towns of Bethlehem and Netophah—188; 27of Anathoth—128; 28of Beth Azmaveth—42; 29of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth—743; 30of Ramah and Geba—621; 31of Micmash—122; 32of Bethel and Ai—123; 33of the other Nebo—52; 34of the other Elam—1,254; 35of Harim —320; 36of Jericho—345; 37of Lod, Hadid, and Ono—721; 38of Senaah—3,930.

39These are the priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua)—973; 40the descendants of Immer—1,052; 41the descendants of Pashhur—1,247; 42the descendants of Harim—1,017.

43These are the Levites: the descendants of Jeshua (through Kadmiel through the family of Hodaviah)—74.

44These are the singers: the descendants of Asaph—148.

45These are the gatekeepers: the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai—138.

46These are the Temple servants: the descendants of Ziha,

Hasupha, Tabbaoth, [47]Keros, Sia, Padon, [48]Lebana, Hagaba, Shalmai, [49]Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, [50]Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, [51]Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, [52]Besai, Meunim, Nephussim, [53]Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, [54]Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, [55]Barkos, Sisera, Temah, [56]Neziah, and Hatipha.

[57]These are the descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, Sophereth, Perida, [58]Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, [59]Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and Amon.

[60]The Temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon totaled 392 people.

[61]Some people came to Jerusalem from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not prove that their ancestors came from Israel. Here are their names and their number: [62]the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—642.

[63]And these priests could not prove that their ancestors came from Israel: the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai. (He had married a daughter of Barzillai from Gilead and was called by her family name.)

[64]These people searched for their family records, but they could not find them. So they could not be priests, because they were thought to be unclean. [65]The governor ordered them not to eat any of the holy food until a priest settled this matter by using the Urim and Thummim.

[66]The total number of those who returned was 42,360. [67]This is not counting their 7,337 male and female servants and the 245 male and female singers with them. [68]They had 736 horses, 245 mules, [69]435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

[70]Some of the family leaders gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury about 19 pounds of gold, 50 bowls, and 530 pieces of clothing for the priests. [71]Some of the family leaders gave about 375 pounds of gold and about 2,660 pounds of silver to the treasury for the work. [72]The total of what the other people gave was about 375 pounds of gold, about 2,250 pounds of silver, and 67 pieces of clothing for the priests. [73]So these people all settled in their own towns: the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Temple servants, and all the other people of Israel.

## Psalm 89:5–10

[5]LORD, the heavens praise you for your miracles
and for your loyalty in the meeting of your holy ones.

6 Who in heaven is equal to the LORD?
None of the angels is like the LORD.

7 When the holy ones meet, it is God they fear.
He is more frightening than all who surround him.

8 LORD God All-Powerful, who is like you?
LORD, you are powerful and completely trustworthy.

9 You rule the mighty sea
and calm the stormy waves.

10 You crushed the sea monster Rahab;
by your power you scattered your enemies.

## Proverbs 21:28

28 A lying witness will be forgotten,
but a truthful witness will speak on.

## Acts 27:1–26

### *Paul Sails for Rome*

27 It was decided that we would sail for Italy. An officer named Julius, who served in the emperor's[n] army, guarded Paul and some other prisoners. 2 We got on a ship that was from the city of Adramyttium and was about to sail to different ports in Asia. Aristarchus, a man from the city of Thessalonica in Macedonia, went with us. 3 The next day we came to Sidon. Julius was very good to Paul and gave him freedom to go visit his friends, who took care of his needs. 4 We left Sidon and sailed close to the island of Cyprus, because the wind was blowing against us. 5 We went across the sea by Cilicia and Pamphylia and landed at the city of Myra, in Lycia. 6 There the officer found a ship from

Alexandria that was going to Italy, so he put us on it.

7We sailed slowly for many days. We had a hard time reaching Cnidus because the wind was blowing against us, and we could not go any farther. So we sailed by the south side of the island of Crete near Salmone. 8Sailing past it was hard. Then we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

9We had lost much time, and it was now dangerous to sail, because it was already after the Day of Cleansing.[n] So Paul warned them, 10"Men, I can see there will be a lot of trouble on this trip. The ship, the cargo, and even our lives may be lost." 11But the captain and the owner of the ship did not agree with Paul, and the officer believed what the captain and owner of the ship said. 12Since that harbor was not a good place for the ship to stay for the winter, most of the men decided that the ship should leave. They hoped we could go to Phoenix and stay there for the winter. Phoenix, a city on the island of Crete, had a harbor which faced southwest and northwest.

## *The Storm*

13When a good wind began to blow from the south, the men on the ship thought, "This is the wind we wanted, and now we have it." So they pulled up the anchor, and we sailed very close to the island of Crete. 14But then a very strong wind named the "northeaster" came from the island. 15The ship was caught in it and could not sail against it. So we stopped trying and let the wind carry us. 16When we went below a small island named Cauda, we were barely able to bring in the lifeboat. 17After the men took the lifeboat in, they tied ropes around the ship to hold it together. The men were afraid that the ship would hit the sandbanks of Syrtis,[n] so they lowered the sail and let the wind carry the ship. 18The next day the storm was blowing us so hard that the men threw out some of the cargo. 19A day later with their own hands they threw out the ship's equipment. 20When we could not see the sun or the stars for many days, and the storm was very bad, we lost all hope of being saved.

21After the men had gone without food for a long time, Paul stood up before them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me. You should not have sailed from Crete. Then you would not have all this trouble and loss. 22But now I tell you to cheer up because none of you will die. Only the ship will be lost. 23Last night an angel came to me from the God I belong to and worship. 24The angel said, 'Paul, do not be afraid. You must stand before Caesar. And God has promised you that he will save the lives of everyone sailing with you.' 25So men, have courage. I trust in God that everything will happen as his angel told me. 26But we will crash on an island."

# July 28

## Truth in Love

*Your kingdom is built on what is right and fair. Love and truth are in all you do.*

Psalm 89:14

The single most difficult pursuit is truth and love. That sentence is grammatically correct. I know every English teacher would like to pluralize it to read: The most difficult pursuits are those of truth and love. But that's not what I mean to say.

Love is a difficult pursuit.

Truth is a tough one, too.

But put them together, pursue truth and love at the same time and hang on baby, you're in for the ride of your life.

Love in truth. Truth in love. Never one at the expense of the other. Never the embrace of love without the torch of truth. Never the heat of truth without the warmth of love …

To pursue both is our singular task.

from *The Inspirational Study Bible*

## Nehemiah 7:73b—9:37

### *Ezra Reads the Teachings*

By the seventh month the Israelites were settled in their own towns.

8 All the people of Israel gathered together in the square by the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the teacher to bring out the Book of the Teachings of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel.

2So on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought out the Teachings for the crowd. Men, women, and all who could listen and understand had gathered. 3At the square by the Water Gate Ezra read the Teachings out loud from early morning until noon to the men, women, and everyone who could listen and understand. All the people listened carefully to the

Book of the Teachings.

4Ezra the teacher stood on a high wooden platform that had
been built just for this time. On his right were Mattithiah,
Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. And on his left
were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah,
Zechariah, and Meshullam.

5Ezra opened the book in full view of everyone, because he
was above them. As he opened it, all the people stood up. 6Ezra
praised the LORD, the great God, and all the people held up their
hands and said, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and
worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

7These Levites explained the Teachings to the people as they
stood there: Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai,
Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah.
8They read from the Book of the Teachings of God and
explained what it meant so the people understood what was
being read.

9Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher,
and the Levites who were teaching said to all the people, "This
is a holy day to the LORD your God. Don't be sad or cry." All the
people had been crying as they listened to the words of the
Teachings.

10Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy good food and sweet drinks.
Send some to people who have none, because today is a holy
day to the LORD. Don't be sad, because the joy of the LORD will
make you strong."

11The Levites helped calm the people, saying, "Be quiet,
because this is a holy day. Don't be sad."

12Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send
some of their food to others, and to celebrate with great joy.
They finally understood what they had been taught.

13On the second day of the month, the leaders of all the
families, the priests, and the Levites met with Ezra the teacher.
They gathered to study the words of the Teachings. 14This is
what they found written in the Teachings: The LORD commanded
through Moses that the people of Israel were to live in shelters
during the feast of the seventh month. 15The people were
supposed to preach this message and spread it through all their
towns and in Jerusalem: "Go out into the mountains, and bring
back branches from olive and wild olive trees, myrtle trees,
palms, and shade trees. Make shelters with them, as it is
written."

16So the people went out and got tree branches. They built
shelters on their roofs,[n] in their courtyards, in the courtyards of
the Temple, in the square by the Water Gate, and in the square
next to the Gate of Ephraim. 17The whole group that had come
back from captivity built shelters and lived in them. The
Israelites had not done this since the time of Joshua son of Nun.
And they were very happy.

18 Ezra read to them every day from the Book of the
Teachings, from the first day to the last. The people of Israel
celebrated the feast for seven days, and then on the eighth day
the people gathered as the law said.

## *Israel Confesses Sins*

9 On the twenty-fourth day of that same month, the people of
Israel gathered. They fasted, and they wore rough cloth and put
dust on their heads to show their sadness. 2 Those people whose
ancestors were from Israel had separated themselves from all
foreigners. They stood and confessed their sins and their
ancestors' sins. 3 For a fourth of the day they stood where they
were and read from the Book of the Teachings of the LORD their
God. For another fourth of the day they confessed their sins and
worshiped the LORD their God. 4 These Levites were standing on
the stairs: Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah,
Bani, and Kenani. They called out to the LORD their God with
loud voices. 5 Then these Levites spoke: Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani,
Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah.
They said, "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who lives
forever and ever."

## *The People's Prayer*

"Blessed be your wonderful name.
It is more wonderful than all blessing and praise.

6 You are the only LORD.
You made the heavens, even the highest heavens,
with all the stars.

You made the earth and everything on it,
the seas and everything in them;
you give life to everything.

The heavenly army worships you.

7 "You are the LORD,
the God who chose Abram

and brought him out of Ur in Babylonia
and named him Abraham.

8 You found him faithful to you,
so you made an agreement with him

to give his descendants the land of the Canaanites,
Hittites, Amorites,
Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites.

You have kept your promise,
because you do what is right.

9 “You saw our ancestors suffering in Egypt
and heard them cry out at the Red Sea.

10 You did signs and miracles against the king of Egypt,
and against all his officers and all his people,
because you knew how proud they were.

You became as famous as you are today.

11 You divided the sea in front of our ancestors;
they walked through on dry ground.

But you threw the people chasing them into the deep water,
like a stone thrown into mighty waters.

12 You led our ancestors with a pillar of cloud by day
and with a pillar of fire at night.

It lit the way
they were supposed to go.

13 You came down to Mount Sinai
and spoke from heaven to our ancestors.

You gave them fair rules and true teachings,
good orders and commands.

14 You told them about your holy Sabbath
and gave them commands, orders, and teachings
through your servant Moses.

15 When they were hungry, you gave them bread from heaven.
When they were thirsty, you brought them water from the rock.

You told them to enter and take over
the land you had promised to give them.

16 "But our ancestors were proud and stubborn
and did not obey your commands.

17 They refused to listen;
they forgot the miracles you did for them.

So they became stubborn and turned against you,
choosing a leader to take them back to slavery.

But you are a forgiving God.
You are kind and full of mercy.

You do not become angry quickly, and you have great love.
So you did not leave them.

18 Our ancestors even made an idol of a calf for themselves.
They said, 'This is your god, Israel,
who brought you up out of Egypt.'

They spoke against you.

19 “You have great mercy,
so you did not leave them in the desert.

The pillar of cloud guided them by day,
and the pillar of fire led them at night,
lighting the way they were to go.

20 You gave your good Spirit to teach them.
You gave them manna to eat
and water when they were thirsty.

21 You took care of them for forty years in the desert;
they needed nothing.

Their clothes did not wear out,
and their feet did not swell.

22 “You gave them kingdoms and nations;
you gave them more land.

They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon
and the country of Og king of Bashan.

23 You made their children as many as the stars in the sky,
and you brought them into the land
that you told their ancestors to enter and take over.

24 So their children went into the land and took over.
The Canaanites lived there, but you defeated them for our ancestors.

You handed over to them the Canaanites, their kings, and the people of the land.
Our ancestors could do what they wanted with them.

25 They captured strong, walled cities and fertile land.
They took over houses full of good things,
wells that were already dug,

vineyards, olive trees, and many fruit trees.

They ate until they were full and grew fat;
they enjoyed your great goodness.

[26]“But they were disobedient and turned against you
and ignored your teachings.

Your prophets warned them to come back to you,
but they killed those prophets
and spoke against you.

[27]So you handed them over to their enemies,
and their enemies treated them badly.

But in this time of trouble our ancestors cried out to you,
and you heard from heaven.

You had great mercy
and gave them saviors who saved them from the power of their enemies.

[28]But as soon as they had rest,
they again did what was evil.

So you left them to their enemies
who ruled over them.

When they cried out to you again,
you heard from heaven.
Because of your mercy, you saved them again and again.

[29]You warned them to return to your teachings,
but they were proud and did not obey your commands.

If someone obeys your laws, he will live,
but they sinned against your laws.

They were stubborn, unwilling, and disobedient.

30 You were patient with them for many years
and warned them by your Spirit through the prophets,

but they did not pay attention.
So you handed them over to other countries.

31 But because your mercy is great, you did not kill them all or leave them.
You are a kind and merciful God.

32 “And so, our God, you are the great and mighty and wonderful God.
You keep your agreement of love.
Do not let all our trouble seem unimportant to you.

This trouble has come to us, to our kings and our leaders,
to our priests and prophets,
to our ancestors and all your people

from the days of the kings of Assyria until today.

33 You have been fair in everything that has happened to us;
you have been loyal, but we have been wicked.

34 Our kings, leaders, priests, and ancestors did not obey your teachings;
they did not pay attention to the commands and warnings you gave them.

35 Even when our ancestors were living in their kingdom,
enjoying all the good things you had given them,
enjoying the land that was fertile and full of room,
they did not stop their evil ways.

36 “Look, we are slaves today
in the land you gave our ancestors.

They were to enjoy its fruit and its good things,
but look, we are slaves here.

37 The land's great harvest belongs to the kings you have put over us
because of our sins.

Those kings rule over us and our cattle as they please,
so we are in much trouble.

## Psalm 89:11–18

11 The skies and the earth belong to you.
You made the world and everything in it.

12 You created the north and the south.
Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon sing for joy at your name.

13 Your arm has great power.
Your hand is strong; your right hand is lifted up.

14 Your kingdom is built on what is right and fair.
Love and truth are in all you do.

15 Happy are the people who know how to praise you.
LORD, let them live in the light of your presence.

16 In your name they rejoice
and continually praise your goodness.

17 You are their glorious strength,
and in your kindness you honor our king.

18 Our king, our shield, belongs to the LORD,
to the Holy One of Israel.

## Proverbs 21:29–31

29 Wicked people are stubborn,
but good people think carefully about what they do.

30 There is no wisdom, understanding, or advice
that can succeed against the LORD.

31 You can get the horses ready for battle,
but it is the LORD who gives the victory.

## Acts 27:27–44

27 On the fourteenth night we were still being carried around in the Adriatic Sea.[n] About midnight the sailors thought we were close to land, 28 so they lowered a rope with a weight on the end of it into the water. They found that the water was one hundred twenty feet deep. They went a little farther and lowered the rope again. It was ninety feet deep. 29 The sailors were afraid that we would hit the rocks, so they threw four anchors into the water and prayed for daylight to come. 30 Some of the sailors wanted to leave the ship, and they lowered the lifeboat, pretending they were throwing more anchors from the front of the ship. 31 But Paul told the officer and the other soldiers, “If these men do not stay in the ship, your lives cannot be saved.” 32 So the soldiers cut the ropes and let the lifeboat fall into the water.

33 Just before dawn Paul began persuading all the people to eat something. He said, “For the past fourteen days you have been waiting and watching and not eating. 34 Now I beg you to eat something. You need it to stay alive. None of you will lose even one hair off your heads.” 35 After he said this, Paul took some bread and thanked God for it before all of them. He broke off a piece and began eating. 36 They all felt better and started eating, too. 37 There were two hundred seventy-six people on the ship. 38 When they had eaten all they wanted, they began

making the ship lighter by throwing the grain into the sea.

## *The Ship Is Destroyed*

[39]When daylight came, the sailors saw land. They did not know what land it was, but they saw a bay with a beach and wanted to sail the ship to the beach if they could. [40]So they cut the ropes to the anchors and left the anchors in the sea. At the same time, they untied the ropes that were holding the rudders. Then they raised the front sail into the wind and sailed toward the beach. [41]But the ship hit a sandbank. The front of the ship stuck there and could not move, but the back of the ship began to break up from the big waves.

[42]The soldiers decided to kill the prisoners so none of them could swim away and escape. [43]But Julius, the officer, wanted to let Paul live and did not allow the soldiers to kill the prisoners. Instead he ordered everyone who could swim to jump into the water first and swim to land. [44]The rest were to follow using wooden boards or pieces of the ship. And this is how all the people made it safely to land.

# July 29

## God’s Goodness

*The rich and the poor are alike in that the* LORD *made them all.*

Proverbs 22:2

HAve you noticed that God doesn’t ask you to prove that you will put your salary to good use? Have you noticed that God doesn’t turn off your oxygen supply when you misuse his gifts? Aren’t you glad that God doesn’t give you only that which you remember to thank him for? …

God’s goodness is spurred by his nature, not by our worthiness.

Someone asked an associate of mine, “What biblical precedent do we have to help the poor who have no desire to become Christians?”

My friend responded with one word: “God.”

God does it daily, for millions of people.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## Nehemiah 9:38—11:36

### *The People’s Agreement*

38 “Because of all this, we are making an agreement in
writing, and our leaders, Levites, and priests are putting their
seals on it.”
10 These are the men who sealed the agreement:

Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah.

Zedekiah, 2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3 Pashhur, Amariah,
Malkijah, 4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5 Harim, Meremoth,
Obadiah, 6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7 Meshullam, Abijah,
Mijamin, 8 Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These are the priests.

9 These are the Levites who sealed it: Jeshua son of Azaniah,
Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel, 10 and their fellow

Levites: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, [11]Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, [12]Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, [13]Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

[14]These are the leaders of the people who sealed the agreement: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, [15]Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, [16]Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, [17]Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, [18]Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, [19]Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, [20]Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, [21]Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, [22]Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, [23]Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, [24]Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, [25]Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, [26]Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, [27]Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

[28]The rest of the people took an oath. They were the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, Temple servants, all those who separated themselves from foreigners to keep the Teachings of God, and also their wives and their sons and daughters who could understand. [29]They joined their fellow Israelites and their leading men in taking an oath, which was tied to a curse in case they broke the oath. They promised to follow the Teachings of God, which they had been given through Moses the servant of God, and to obey all the commands, rules, and laws of the LORD our God.

[30]They said:

We promise not to let our daughters marry foreigners nor to let our sons marry their daughters. [31]Foreigners may bring goods or grain to sell on the Sabbath, but we will not buy on the Sabbath or any holy day. Every seventh year we will not plant, and that year we will forget all that people owe us.

[32]We will be responsible for the commands to pay for the service of the Temple of our God. We will give an eighth of an ounce of silver each year. [33]It is for the bread that is set out on the table; the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals, and special feasts; the holy offerings; the offerings to remove the sins of the Israelites so they will belong to God; and for the work of the Temple of our God.

[34]We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have thrown lots to decide at what time of year each family must bring wood to the Temple. The wood is for burning on the altar of the LORD our God, and we will do this as it is written in the Teachings.

[35]We also will bring the firstfruits from our crops and the firstfruits of every tree to the Temple each year.

[36]We will bring to the Temple our firstborn sons and cattle and the firstborn of our herds and flocks, as it is written in the Teachings. We will bring them to the priests who are serving in the Temple.

[37]We will bring to the priests at the storerooms of the Temple the first of our ground meal, our offerings, the fruit from all our trees, and our new wine and oil. And we will bring a tenth of

our crops to the Levites, who will collect these things in all the towns where we work. 38A priest of Aaron's family must be with the Levites when they receive the tenth of the people's crops. The Levites must bring a tenth of all they receive to the Temple of our God to put in the storerooms of the treasury. 39The people of Israel and the Levites are to bring to the storerooms the gifts of grain, new wine, and oil. That is where the utensils for the Temple are kept and where the priests who are serving, the gatekeepers, and singers stay.

We will not ignore the Temple of our God.

## *New People Move into Jerusalem*

11 The leaders of Israel lived in Jerusalem. But the rest of the people threw lots to choose one person out of every ten to come and live in Jerusalem, the holy city. The other nine could stay in their own cities. 2The people blessed those who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

3These are the area leaders who lived in Jerusalem. (Some people lived on their own land in the cities of Judah. These included Israelites, priests, Levites, Temple servants, and descendants of Solomon's servants. 4Others from the families of Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem.)

These are the descendants of Judah who moved into Jerusalem. There was Athaiah son of Uzziah. (Uzziah was the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah. Amariah was the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel. Mahalalel was a descendant of Perez.) 5There was also Maaseiah son of Baruch. (Baruch was the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah. Hazaiah was the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib. Joiarib was the son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah.) 6All the descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem totaled 468 men. They were soldiers.

7These are descendants of Benjamin who moved into Jerusalem. There was Sallu son of Meshullam. (Meshullam was the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah. Pedaiah was the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah. Maaseiah was the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiah.) 8Following him were Gabbai and Sallai, for a total of 928 men. 9Joel son of Zicri was appointed over them, and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in charge of the new area of the city.

10These are the priests who moved into Jerusalem. There was Jedaiah son of Joiarib, Jakin, 11and Seraiah son of Hilkiah, the supervisor in the Temple. (Hilkiah was the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok. Zadok was the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub.) 12And there were others with them who did the work for the Temple. All together there were 822 men. Also there was Adaiah son of Jeroham. (Jeroham was the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi. Amzi was the son of Zechariah, the

son of Pashhur. Pashhur was the son of Malkijah.) [13]And there were family heads with him. All together there were 242 men. Also there was Amashsai son of Azarel. (Azarel was the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth. Meshillemoth was the son of Immer.) [14]And there were brave men with Amashsai. All together there were 128 men. Zabdiel son of Haggedolim was appointed over them.

[15]These are the Levites who moved into Jerusalem. There was Shemaiah son of Hasshub. (Hasshub was the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah. Hashabiah was the son of Bunni.) [16]And there were Shabbethai and Jozabad, two of the leaders of the Levites who were in charge of the work outside the Temple. [17]There was Mattaniah son of Mica. (Mica was the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph.) Mattaniah was the director who led the people in thanksgiving and prayer. There was Bakbukiah, who was second in charge over his fellow Levites. And there was Abda son of Shammua. (Shammua was the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun.) [18]All together 284 Levites lived in the holy city of Jerusalem.

[19]The gatekeepers who moved into Jerusalem were Akkub, Talmon, and others with them. There was a total of 172 men who guarded the city gates.

[20]The other Israelites, priests, and Levites lived on their own land in all the cities of Judah.

[21]The Temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them.

[22]Uzzi son of Bani was appointed over the Levites in Jerusalem. (Bani was the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah. Mattaniah was the son of Mica.) Uzzi was one of Asaph's descendants, who were the singers responsible for the service of the Temple. [23]The singers were under the king's orders, which regulated them day by day.

[24]Pethahiah son of Meshezabel was the king's spokesman. (Meshezabel was a descendant of Zerah, the son of Judah.)

[25]Some of the people of Judah lived in villages with their surrounding fields. They lived in Kiriath Arba and its surroundings, in Dibon and its surroundings, in Jekabzeel and its surroundings, [26]in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet, [27]Hazar Shual, Beersheba and its surroundings, [28]in Ziklag and Meconah and its surroundings, [29]in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, [30]Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, in Lachish and the fields around it, and in Azekah and its surroundings. So they settled from Beersheba all the way to the Valley of Hinnom.

[31]The descendants of the Benjaminites from Geba lived in Micmash, Aija, Bethel and its surroundings, [32]in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, [33]Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, [34]Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, [35]Lod, Ono, and in the Valley of the Craftsmen.

[36]Some groups of the Levites from Judah settled in the land

of Benjamin.

## Psalm 89:19–29

19 Once, in a vision, you spoke
to those who worship you.

You said, “I have given strength to a warrior;
I have raised up a young man from my people.

20 I have found my servant David;
I appointed him by pouring holy oil on him.

21 I will steady him with my hand
and strengthen him with my arm.

22 No enemy will make him give forced payments,
and wicked people will not defeat him.

23 I will crush his enemies in front of him;
I will defeat those who hate him.

24 My loyalty and love will be with him.
Through me he will be strong.

25 I will give him power over the sea
and control over the rivers.

26 He will say to me, ‘You are my father,
my God, the Rock, my Savior.’

27 I will make him my firstborn son,
the greatest king on earth.

28 My love will watch over him forever,
and my agreement with him will never end.

29 I will make his family continue,
and his kingdom will last as long as the skies.

## Proverbs 22:1–2

22 Being respected is more important than
having great riches.
To be well thought of is better than silver or gold.

2 The rich and the poor are alike
in that the LORD made them all.

## Acts 28:1–31

### *Paul on the Island of Malta*

28 When we were safe on land, we learned that the island was called Malta. 2 The people who lived there were very good to us. Because it was raining and very cold, they made a fire and welcomed all of us. 3 Paul gathered a pile of sticks and was putting them on the fire when a poisonous snake came out because of the heat and bit him on the hand. 4 The people living on the island saw the snake hanging from Paul's hand and said to each other, "This man must be a murderer! He did not die in the sea, but Justice[n] does not want him to live." 5 But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and was not hurt. 6 The people thought that Paul would swell up or fall down dead. They waited and watched him for a long time, but nothing bad happened to him. So they changed their minds and said, "He is a god!"

7 There were some fields around there owned by Publius, an important man on the island. He welcomed us into his home and was very good to us for three days. 8 Publius' father was sick with a fever and dysentery.[n] Paul went to him, prayed, and put his hands on the man and healed him. 9 After this, all the other sick people on the island came to Paul, and he healed them, too.

10–11The people on the island gave us many honors. When we were ready to leave, three months later, they gave us the things we needed.

## *Paul Goes to Rome*

We got on a ship from Alexandria that had stayed on the island during the winter. On the front of the ship was the sign of the twin gods.[n] 12We stopped at Syracuse for three days. 13From there we sailed to Rhegium. The next day a wind began to blow from the south, and a day later we came to Puteoli. 14We found some believers there who asked us to stay with them for a week. Finally, we came to Rome. 15The believers in Rome heard that we were there and came out as far as the Market of Appius[n] and the Three Inns[n] to meet us. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God.

## *Paul in Rome*

16When we arrived at Rome, Paul was allowed to live alone, with the soldier who guarded him.

17Three days later Paul sent for the leaders there. When they came together, he said, “Brothers, I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. But I was arrested in Jerusalem and given to the Romans. 18After they asked me many questions, they could find no reason why I should be killed. They wanted to let me go free, 19but the evil people there argued against that. So I had to ask to come to Rome to have my trial before Caesar. But I have no charge to bring against my own people. 20That is why I wanted to see you and talk with you. I am bound with this chain because I believe in the hope of Israel.”

21They answered Paul, “We have received no letters from Judea about you. None of our Jewish brothers who have come from there brought news or told us anything bad about you. 22But we want to hear your ideas, because we know that people everywhere are speaking against this religious group.”

23Paul and the people chose a day for a meeting and on that day many more of the Jews met with Paul at the place he was staying. He spoke to them all day long. Using the law of Moses and the prophets’ writings, he explained the kingdom of God, and he tried to persuade them to believe these things about Jesus. 24Some believed what Paul said, but others did not. 25So they argued and began leaving after Paul said one more thing to them: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet, saying,

[26]‘Go to this people and say:

You will listen and listen, but you will not understand.
You will look and look, but you will not learn,

[27]because these people have become stubborn.
They don’t hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise, they might really understand
what they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears.

They might really understand in their minds
and come back to me and be healed.’

Isaiah 6:9–10

[28]“I want you to know that God has also sent his salvation to all nations, and they will listen!” [[29]After Paul said this, the Jews left. They were arguing very much with each other.][n]

[30]Paul stayed two full years in his own rented house and welcomed all people who came to visit him. [31]He boldly preached about the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, and no one stopped him.

# July 30

## Something Deep Within

*There are things about him that people cannot see ... But since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand by what God has made.*

Romans 1:20

God's judgment [on the day Christ returns] is based upon humanity's response to the message received. He will never hold us accountable for what he doesn't tell us. At the same time, he will never let us die without telling us something. Even those who never heard of Christ are given a message about the character of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1) ...

Nature is God's first missionary. Where there is no Bible, there are sparkling stars. Where there are no preachers, there are springtimes ... If a person has nothing but nature, then nature is enough to reveal something about God. As Paul says ... : "They show that in their hearts they know what is right and wrong, just as the law commands. And they show this by their consciences. Sometimes their thoughts tell them they did wrong, and sometimes their thoughts tell them they did right. All these things will happen on the day when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge people's secret thoughts" (Romans 2:15–16).

from *When Christ Comes*

### Nehemiah 12:1—13:31

#### *Priests and Levites*

12 These are the priests and Levites who returned with
Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Jeshua. There were
Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,
3Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah,

[5]Mijamin, Moadiah, Bilgah, [6]Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, [7]Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, and Jedaiah. They were the leaders of the priests and their relatives in the days of Jeshua.

[8]The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah. Mattaniah and his relatives were in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. [9]Bakbukiah and Unni, their relatives, stood across from them in the services.

[10]Jeshua was the father of Joiakim. Joiakim was the father of Eliashib. Eliashib was the father of Joiada. [11]Joiada was the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

[12]In the days of Joiakim, these priests were the leaders of the families of priests: Meraiah, from Seraiah's family; Hananiah, from Jeremiah's family; [13]Meshullam, from Ezra's family; Jehohanan, from Amariah's family; [14]Jonathan, from Malluch's family; Joseph, from Shecaniah's family; [15]Adna, from Harim's family; Helkai, from Meremoth's family; [16]Zechariah, from Iddo's family; Meshullam, from Ginnethon's family; [17]Zicri, from Abijah's family; Piltai, from Miniamin's and Moadiah's families; [18]Shammua, from Bilgah's family; Jehonathan, from Shemaiah's family; [19]Mattenai, from Joiarib's family; Uzzi, from Jedaiah's family; [20]Kallai, from Sallu's family; Eber, from Amok's family; [21]Hashabiah, from Hilkiah's family; and Nethanel, from Jedaiah's family.

[22]The leaders of the families of the Levites and the priests were written down in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, while Darius the Persian was king. [23]The family leaders among the Levites were written down in the history book, but only up to the time of Johanan son of Eliashib. [24]The leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua son of Kadmiel, and their relatives. Their relatives stood across from them and gave praise and thanksgiving to God. One group answered the other group, as David, the man of God, had commanded.

[25]These were the gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms next to the gates: Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub. [26]They served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak. They also served in the days of Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest and teacher.

## *The Wall of Jerusalem*

[27]When the wall of Jerusalem was offered as a gift to God, they asked the Levites to come from wherever they lived to Jerusalem to celebrate with joy the gift of the wall. They were to celebrate with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres. [28]They also brought together singers from all around Jerusalem, from the Netophathite villages, [29]from Beth Gilgal, and from the areas of Geba and Azmaveth.

The singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem.
30 The priests and Levites made themselves pure, and they also
made the people, the gates, and the wall of Jerusalem pure.

31 I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall, and I
appointed two large choruses to give thanks. One chorus went
to the right on top of the wall, toward the Trash Gate. 32 Behind
them went Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah. 33 Azariah,
Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah
also went. 35 Some priests with trumpets also went, along with
Zechariah son of Jonathan. (Jonathan was the son of Shemaiah,
the son of Mattaniah. Mattaniah was the son of Micaiah, the son
of Zaccur. Zaccur was the son of Asaph.) 36 Zechariah's relatives
also went. They were Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai,
Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani. These men played the musical
instruments of David, the man of God, and Ezra the teacher
walked in front of them. 37 They went from the Fountain Gate
straight up the steps to the highest part of the wall by the older
part of the city. They went on above the house of David to the
Water Gate on the east.

38 The second chorus went to the left, while I followed them
on top of the wall with half the people. We went from the Tower
of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, 39 over the Gate of Ephraim to
the Old Gate and the Fish Gate, to the Tower of Hananel and
the Tower of the Hundred. We went as far as the Sheep Gate
and stopped at the Gate of the Guard.

40 The two choruses took their places at the Temple. Half of
the leaders and I did also. 41 These priests were there with their
trumpets: Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai,
Zechariah, and Hananiah. 42 These people were also there:
Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam,
and Ezer. The choruses sang, led by Jezrahiah. 43 The people
offered many sacrifices that day and were happy because God
had given them great joy. The women and children were happy.
The sound of happiness in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

44 At that time the leaders appointed men to be in charge of
the storerooms. These rooms were for the gifts, the firstfruits,
and the ten percent that the people brought. The Teachings said
they should bring a share for the priests and Levites from the
fields around the towns. The people of Judah were happy to do
this for the priests and Levites who served. 45 They performed
the service of their God in making things pure. The singers and
gatekeepers also did their jobs, as David had commanded his
son Solomon. 46 Earlier, in the time of David and Asaph, there
was a leader of the singers and of the songs of praise and
thanksgiving to God. 47 So it was in the days of Zerubbabel and
Nehemiah. All the people of Israel gave something to the
singers and gatekeepers, and they also set aside part for the
Levites. Then the Levites set aside part for the descendants of

Aaron.

## *Foreign People Are Sent Away*

13 On that day they read the Book of Moses to the people, and they found that it said no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be allowed in the meeting to worship. 2The Ammonites and Moabites had not welcomed the Israelites with food and water. Instead, they had hired Balaam to put a curse on Israel. (But our God turned the curse into a blessing.) 3When the people heard this teaching, they separated all foreigners from Israel.

## *Nehemiah Returns to Jerusalem*

4Before that happened, Eliashib the priest, who was in charge of the Temple storerooms, was friendly with Tobiah. 5Eliashib let Tobiah use one of the large storerooms. Earlier it had been used for grain offerings, incense, the utensils, and the tenth offerings of grain, new wine, and olive oil that belonged to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers. It had also been used for gifts for the priests.

6I was not in Jerusalem when this happened. I had gone back to Artaxerxes king of Babylon in the thirty-second year he was king. Finally I asked the king to let me leave. 7When I returned to Jerusalem, I found out the evil Eliashib had done by letting Tobiah have a room in the Temple courtyard. 8I was very upset at this, so I threw all of Tobiah's goods out of the room. 9I ordered the rooms to be purified, and I brought back the utensils for God's Temple, the grain offerings, and the incense.

10Then I found out the people were not giving the Levites their shares. So the Levites and singers who served had gone back to their own farms. 11I argued with the officers, saying, "Why haven't you taken care of the Temple?" Then I gathered the Levites and singers and put them back at their places.

12All the people of Judah then brought to the storerooms a tenth of their crops, new wine, and olive oil. 13I put these men in charge of the storerooms: Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the teacher, and Pedaiah a Levite. I made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their helper. Everyone knew they were honest. They gave out the portions that went to their relatives.

14Remember me, my God, for this. Do not ignore my love for the Temple and its service.

15In those days I saw people in Judah working in the winepresses on the Sabbath day. They were bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys. And they were bringing loads of wine, grapes, and figs into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I warned them about selling food on that day. 16People from the city of Tyre who were living in Jerusalem brought in fish and

other things and sold them there on the Sabbath day to the people of Judah. 17I argued with the important men of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing you are doing? You are ruining the Sabbath day. 18This is just what your ancestors did. So our God did terrible things to us and this city. Now you are making him even more angry at Israel by ruining the Sabbath day.”

19So I ordered that the doors be shut at sunset before the Sabbath and not be opened until the Sabbath was over. I put my servants at the gates so no load could come in on the Sabbath. 20Once or twice traders and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. 21So I warned them, “Why are you spending the night by the wall? If you do it again, I will force you away.” After that, they did not come back on the Sabbath. 22Then I ordered the Levites to purify themselves and to guard the city gates to make sure the Sabbath remained holy.

Remember me, my God, for this. Have mercy on me because of your great love.

23In those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24Half their children were speaking the language of Ashdod or some other place, and they couldn’t speak the language of Judah. 25I argued with those people, put curses on them, hit some of them, and pulled out their hair. I forced them to make a promise to God, saying, “Do not let your daughters marry the sons of foreigners, and do not take the daughters of foreigners as wives for your sons or yourselves. 26Foreign women made King Solomon of Israel sin. There was never a king like him in any of the nations. God loved Solomon and made him king over all Israel, but foreign women made him sin. 27And now you are not obedient when you do this evil thing. You are unfaithful to our God when you marry foreign wives.”

28Joiada was the son of Eliashib the high priest. One of Joiada’s sons married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, so I sent him away from me.

29Remember them, my God, because they made the priesthood unclean and the agreement of the priests and Levites unclean.

30So I purified them of everything that was foreign. I appointed duties for the priests and Levites, giving each man his own job. 31I also made sure wood was brought for the altar at regular times and that the firstfruits were brought.

Remember me, my God; be kind to me.

## Psalm 89:30–37

30 “If his descendants reject my teachings
and do not follow my laws,

31 if they ignore my demands
and disobey my commands,

32 then I will punish their sins with a rod
and their wrongs with a whip.

33 But I will not hold back my love from David,
nor will I stop being loyal.

34 I will not break my agreement
nor change what I have said.

35 I have promised by my holiness,
I will not lie to David.

36 His family will go on forever.
His kingdom will last before me like the sun.

37 It will continue forever, like the moon,
like a dependable witness in the sky.” *Selah*

## Proverbs 22:3–4

3 The wise see danger ahead and avoid it,
but fools keep going and get into trouble.

4 Respecting the LORD and not being proud
will bring you wealth, honor, and life.

## Romans 1:1–32

[1] From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus. God called me to be an apostle and chose me to tell the Good News.

[2]God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets, as it is written in the Holy Scriptures. [3–4]The Good News is about God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. As a man, he was born from the family of David. But through the Spirit of holiness he was declared to be God's Son with great power by rising from the dead. [5]Through Christ, God gave me the special work of an apostle, which was to lead people of all nations to believe and obey. I do this work for him. [6]And you who are in Rome are also called to belong to Jesus Christ.

[7]To all of you in Rome whom God loves and has called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## *A Prayer of Thanks*

[8]First I want to say that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because people everywhere in the world are talking about your faith. [9]God, whom I serve with my whole heart by telling the Good News about his Son, knows that I always mention you [10]every time I pray. I pray that I will be allowed to come to you, and this will happen if God wants it. [11]I want very much to see you, to give you some spiritual gift to make you strong. [12]I mean that I want us to help each other with the faith we have. Your faith will help me, and my faith will help you. [13]Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that I planned many times to come to you, but this has not been possible. I wanted to come so that I could help you grow spiritually as I have helped the other non-Jewish people.

[14]I have a duty to all people—Greeks and those who are not Greeks, the wise and the foolish. [15]That is why I want so much to preach the Good News to you in Rome.

[16]I am not ashamed of the Good News, because it is the power God uses to save everyone who believes—to save the Jews first, and then to save non-Jews. [17]The Good News shows how God makes people right with himself—that it begins and ends with faith. As the Scripture says, "But those who are right with God will live by faith."[n]

## *All People Have Done Wrong*

[18]God's anger is shown from heaven against all the evil and wrong things people do. By their own evil lives they hide the truth. [19]God shows his anger because some knowledge of him

has been made clear to them. Yes, God has shown himself to them. [20]There are things about him that people cannot see—his eternal power and all the things that make him God. But since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand by what God has made. So people have no excuse for the bad things they do. [21]They knew God, but they did not give glory to God or thank him. Their thinking became useless. Their foolish minds were filled with darkness. [22]They said they were wise, but they became fools. [23]They traded the glory of God who lives forever for the worship of idols made to look like earthly people, birds, animals, and snakes.

[24]Because they did these things, God left them and let them go their sinful way, wanting only to do evil. As a result, they became full of sexual sin, using their bodies wrongly with each other. [25]They traded the truth of God for a lie. They worshiped and served what had been created instead of the God who created those things, who should be praised forever. Amen.

[26]Because people did those things, God left them and let them do the shameful things they wanted to do. Women stopped having natural sex and started having sex with other women. [27]In the same way, men stopped having natural sex and began wanting each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and in their bodies they received the punishment for those wrongs.

[28]People did not think it was important to have a true knowledge of God. So God left them and allowed them to have their own worthless thinking and to do things they should not do. [29]They are filled with every kind of sin, evil, selfishness, and hatred. They are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, lying, and thinking the worst about each other. They gossip [30]and say evil things about each other. They hate God. They are rude and conceited and brag about themselves. They invent ways of doing evil. They do not obey their parents. [31]They are foolish, they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness or mercy to others. [32]They know God’s law says that those who live like this should die. But they themselves not only continue to do these evil things, they applaud others who do them.

# July 31

## The Thorns of Sin

*Evil people's lives are like paths covered with thorns and traps.*

Proverbs 22:5

The fruit of sin is thorns—spiny, prickly, cutting thorns. I emphasize the "point" of the thorns to suggest a point you may have never considered: If the fruit of sin is thorns, isn't the thorny crown on Christ's brow a picture of the fruit of our sin that pierced his heart?

What is the fruit of sin? Step into the briar patch of humanity and feel a few thistles. Shame. Fear. Disgrace. Discouragement. Anxiety. Haven't our hearts been caught in these brambles?

The heart of Jesus, however, had not. He had never been cut by the thorns of sin. What you and I face daily, he never knew. Anxiety? He never worried! Guilt? He was never guilty! Fear? He never left the presence of God! Jesus never knew the fruits of sin … until he became sin for us.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### Esther 1:1—2:23

### *Queen Vashti Disobeys the King*

1 This is what happened during the time of King Xerxes, the
king who ruled the one hundred twenty-seven states from India
to Cush. 2In those days King Xerxes ruled from his capital city
of Susa. 3In the third year of his rule, he gave a banquet for all
his important men and royal officers. The army leaders from the
countries of Persia and Media and the important men from all
Xerxes' empire were there.
4The banquet lasted one hundred eighty days. All during that
time King Xerxes was showing off the great wealth of his
kingdom and his own great riches and glory. 5When the one
hundred eighty days were over, the king gave another banquet.

It was held in the courtyard of the palace garden for seven days, and it was for everybody in the palace at Susa, from the greatest to the least. 6The courtyard had fine white curtains and purple drapes that were tied to silver rings on marble pillars by white and purple cords. And there were gold and silver couches on a floor set with tiles of white marble, shells, and gems. 7Wine was served in gold cups of various kinds. And there was plenty of the king's wine, because he was very generous. 8The king commanded that the guests be permitted to drink as much as they wished. He told the wine servers to serve each man what he wanted.

9Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

10On the seventh day of the banquet, King Xerxes was very happy, because he had been drinking much wine. He gave a command to the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas. 11He commanded them to bring him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown. She was to come to show her beauty to the people and important men, because she was very beautiful. 12The eunuchs told Queen Vashti about the king's command, but she refused to come. Then the king became very angry; his anger was like a burning fire.

13It was a custom for the king to ask advice from experts about law and order. So King Xerxes spoke with the wise men who would know the right thing to do. 14The wise men the king usually talked to were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, seven of the important men of Persia and Media. These seven had special privileges to see the king and had the highest rank in the kingdom. 15The king asked them, "What does the law say must be done to Queen Vashti? She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes, which the eunuchs took to her."

16Then Memucan said to the king and the other important men, "Queen Vashti has not done wrong to the king alone. She has also done wrong to all the important men and all the people in all the empire of King Xerxes. 17All the wives of the important men of Persia and Media will hear about the queen's actions. Then they will no longer honor their husbands. They will say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought to him, but she refused to come.' 18Today the wives of the important men of Persia and Media have heard about the queen's actions. So they will speak in the same way to their husbands, and there will be no end to disrespect and anger.

19"So, our king, if it pleases you, give a royal order, and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be changed. The law should say Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her place as queen to someone who is better than she is. 20And let the king's

order be announced everywhere in his enormous kingdom. Then all the women will respect their husbands, from the greatest to the least.”

21The king and his important men were happy with this advice, so King Xerxes did as Memucan suggested. 22He sent letters to all the states of the kingdom in the writing of each state and in the language of each group of people. These letters announced that each man was to be the ruler of his own family.

## *Esther Is Made Queen*

2 Later, when King Xerxes was not so angry, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and his order about her. 2Then the king’s personal servants suggested, “Let a search be made for beautiful young girls for the king. 3Let the king choose supervisors in every state of his kingdom to bring every beautiful young girl to the palace at Susa. They should be taken to the women’s quarters and put under the care of Hegai, the king’s eunuch in charge of the women. And let beauty treatments be given to them. 4Then let the girl who most pleases the king become queen in place of Vashti.” The king liked this idea, so he did as they said.

5Now there was a Jewish man in the palace of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. Jair was the son of Shimei, the son of Kish. Mordecai was from the tribe of Benjamin, 6which had been taken captive from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. They were part of the group taken into captivity with Jehoiachin king of Judah. 7Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, who had no father or mother, so Mordecai took care of her. Hadassah was also called Esther, and she had a very pretty figure and face. Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

8When the king’s command and order had been heard, many girls had been brought to the palace in Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther was also taken to the king’s palace and put under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the women. 9Esther pleased Hegai, and he liked her. So Hegai quickly began giving Esther her beauty treatments and special food. He gave her seven servant girls chosen from the king’s palace. Then he moved her and her seven servant girls to the best part of the women’s quarters.

10Esther did not tell anyone about her family or who her people were, because Mordecai had told her not to. 11Every day Mordecai walked back and forth near the courtyard where the king’s women lived to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

12Before a girl could take her turn with King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments that were

ordered for the women. For six months she was treated with oil and myrrh and for six months with perfumes and cosmetics. [13]Then she was ready to go to the king. Anything she asked for was given to her to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. [14]In the evening she would go to the king's palace, and in the morning she would return to another part of the women's quarters. There she would be placed under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the slave women. The girl would not go back to the king again unless he was pleased with her and asked for her by name.

[15]The time came for Esther daughter of Abihail, Mordecai's uncle, who had been adopted by Mordecai, to go to the king. She asked for only what Hegai suggested she should take. (Hegai was the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women.) Everyone who saw Esther liked her. [16]So Esther was taken to King Xerxes in the royal palace in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, during Xerxes' seventh year as king.

[17]And the king was pleased with Esther more than with any of the other virgins. He liked her more than any of the others, so he put a royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti. [18]Then the king gave a great banquet for Esther and invited all his important men and royal officers. He announced a holiday for all the empire and had the government give away gifts.

### *Mordecai Discovers an Evil Plan*

[19]Now Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate when the girls were gathered the second time. [20]Esther still had not told anyone about her family or who her people were, just as Mordecai had commanded her. She obeyed Mordecai just as she had done when she was under his care.

[21]Now Bigthana and Teresh were two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the doorway. While Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, they became angry and began to make plans to kill King Xerxes. [22]But Mordecai found out about their plans and told Queen Esther. Then Esther told the king how Mordecai had discovered the evil plan. [23]When the report was investigated, it was found to be true, and the two officers who had planned to kill the king were hanged. All this was written down in the daily court record in the king's presence.

## Psalm 89:38–45

38 But now you have refused and rejected your appointed
king.
You have been angry with him.

39 You have abandoned the agreement with your servant
and thrown his crown to the ground.

40 You have torn down all his city walls;
you have turned his strong cities into ruins.

41 Everyone who passes by steals from him.
His neighbors insult him.

42 You have given strength to his enemies
and have made them all happy.

43 You have made his sword useless;
you did not help him stand in battle.

44 You have kept him from winning
and have thrown his throne to the ground.

45 You have cut his life short
and covered him with shame. *Selah*

## Proverbs 22:5–6

5 Evil people's lives are like paths covered with thorns and
traps.
People who guard themselves don't have such problems.

6 Train children to live the right way,
and when they are old, they will not stray from it.

# Romans 2:1–29

## *You People Also Are Sinful*

2 If you think you can judge others, you are wrong. When you
judge them, you are really judging yourself guilty, because you
do the same things they do. 2God judges those who do wrong
things, and we know that his judging is right. 3You judge those
who do wrong, but you do wrong yourselves. Do you think you
will be able to escape the judgment of God? 4He has been very
kind and patient, waiting for you to change, but you think
nothing of his kindness. Perhaps you do not understand that
God is kind to you so you will change your hearts and lives. 5But
you are stubborn and refuse to change, so you are making your
own punishment even greater on the day he shows his anger.
On that day everyone will see God's right judgments. 6God will
reward or punish every person for what that person has done.
7Some people, by always continuing to do good, live for God's
glory, for honor, and for life that has no end. God will give them
life forever. 8But other people are selfish. They refuse to follow
truth and, instead, follow evil. God will give them his
punishment and anger. 9He will give trouble and suffering to
everyone who does evil—to the Jews first and also to those who
are not Jews. 10But he will give glory, honor, and peace to
everyone who does good—to the Jews first and also to those
who are not Jews. 11For God judges all people in the same way.

12People who do not have the law and who are sinners will
be lost, although they do not have the law. And, in the same
way, those who have the law and are sinners will be judged by
the law. 13Hearing the law does not make people right with God.
It is those who obey the law who will be right with him.
14(Those who are not Jews do not have the law, but when they
freely do what the law commands, they are the law for
themselves. This is true even though they do not have the law.
15They show that in their hearts they know what is right and
wrong, just as the law commands. And they show this by their
consciences. Sometimes their thoughts tell them they did
wrong, and sometimes their thoughts tell them they did right.)
16All these things will happen on the day when God, through
Christ Jesus, will judge people's secret thoughts. The Good
News that I preach says this.

## *The Jews and the Law*

17What about you? You call yourself a Jew. You trust in the

law of Moses and brag that you are close to God. 18You know what he wants you to do and what is important, because you have learned the law. 19You think you are a guide for the blind and a light for those who are in darkness. 20You think you can show foolish people what is right and teach those who know nothing. You have the law; so you think you know everything and have all truth. 21You teach others, so why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but you steal. 22You say that others must not take part in adultery, but you are guilty of that sin. You hate idols, but you steal from temples. 23You brag about having God's law, but you bring shame to God by breaking his law, 24just as the Scriptures say: "Those who are not Jews speak against God's name because of you."[n]

25If you follow the law, your circumcision has meaning. But if you break the law, it is as if you were never circumcised. 26People who are not Jews are not circumcised, but if they do what the law says, it is as if they were circumcised. 27You Jews have the written law and circumcision, but you break the law. So those who are not circumcised in their bodies, but still obey the law, will show that you are guilty. 28They can do this because a person is not a true Jew if he is only a Jew in his physical body; true circumcision is not only on the outside of the body. 29A person is a Jew only if he is a Jew inside; true circumcision is done in the heart by the Spirit, not by the written law. Such a person gets praise from God rather than from people.

# August 1

## Who Does the Saving?

*A person is made right with God through faith, not through obeying the law.*

Romans 3:28

If we are saved by good works, we don't need God—weekly reminders of the do's and don'ts will get us to heaven. If we are saved by suffering, we certainly don't need God. All we need is a whip and a chain and the gospel of guilt. If we are saved by doctrine then, for heaven's sake, let's study! We don't need God, we need a lexicon.

But be careful, student. For if you are saved by having exact doctrine, then one mistake would be fatal. That goes for those who believe we are made right with God through deeds. I hope the temptation is never greater than the strength. If it is, a bad fall could be a bad omen. And those who think we are saved by suffering, take caution as well, for you never know how much suffering is required.

It took Paul decades to discover what he wrote in only one sentence: "A person is made right with God through faith." Not through good works, suffering, or study.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Esther 3:1—4:17

3 After these things happened, King Xerxes honored Haman son
of Hammedatha the Agagite. He gave him a new rank that was
higher than all the important men. 2All the royal officers at the
king's gate would bow down and kneel before Haman, as the
king had ordered. But Mordecai would not bow down or show
him honor.

3Then the royal officers at the king's gate asked Mordecai,
"Why don't you obey the king's command?" 4And they said this
to him every day. When he did not listen to them, they told
Haman about it. They wanted to see if Haman would accept

Mordecai's behavior because Mordecai had told them he was Jewish.

5When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down to him or honor him, he became very angry. 6He thought of himself as too important to try to kill only Mordecai. He had been told who the people of Mordecai were, so he looked for a way to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, in all of Xerxes' kingdom.

7It was in the first month of the twelfth year of King Xerxes' rule—the month of Nisan. Pur (that is, the lot) was thrown before Haman to choose a day and a month. So the twelfth month, the month of Adar, was chosen.

8Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain group of people scattered among the other people in all the states of your kingdom. Their customs are different from those of all the other people, and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not right for you to allow them to continue living in your kingdom. 9If it pleases the king, let an order be given to destroy those people. Then I will pay seven hundred fifty thousand pounds of silver to those who do the king's business, and they will put it into the royal treasury."

10So the king took his signet ring off and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jewish people. 11Then the king said to Haman, "The money and the people are yours. Do with them as you please."

12On the thirteenth day of the first month, the royal secretaries were called, and they wrote out all of Haman's orders. They wrote to the king's governors and to the captains of the soldiers in each state and to the important men of each group of people. The orders were written in the writing of each state and in the language of each people. They were written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with his signet ring. 13Letters were sent by messengers to all the king's empire ordering them to destroy, kill, and completely wipe out all the Jewish people. That meant young and old, women and little children, too. It was to happen on a single day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which was Adar. And they could take everything the Jewish people owned. 14A copy of the order was given out as a law in every state so all the people would be ready for that day.

15The messengers set out, hurried by the king's command, as soon as the order was given in the palace at Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was in confusion.

## *Mordecai Asks Esther to Help*

4 When Mordecai heard about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on rough cloth and ashes, and went out into the city crying loudly and painfully. 2But Mordecai went only as far

as the king's gate, because no one was allowed to enter that gate dressed in rough cloth. 3As the king's order reached every area, there was great sadness and loud crying among the Jewish people. They fasted and cried out loud, and many of them lay down on rough cloth and ashes to show how sad they were.

4When Esther's servant girls and eunuchs came to her and told her about Mordecai, she was very upset and afraid. She sent clothes for Mordecai to put on instead of the rough cloth, but he would not wear them. 5Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs chosen by the king to serve her. Esther ordered him to find out what was bothering Mordecai and why.

6So Hathach went to Mordecai, who was in the city square in front of the king's gate. 7Mordecai told Hathach everything that had happened to him, and he told Hathach about the amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasury for the killing of the Jewish people. 8Mordecai also gave him a copy of the order to kill the Jewish people, which had been given in Susa. He wanted Hathach to show it to Esther and to tell her about it. And Mordecai told him to order Esther to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and to plead with him for her people.

9Hathach went back and reported to Esther everything Mordecai had said. 10Then Esther told Hathach to tell Mordecai, 11"All the royal officers and people of the royal states know that no man or woman may go to the king in the inner courtyard without being called. There is only one law about this: Anyone who enters must be put to death unless the king holds out his gold scepter. Then that person may live. And I have not been called to go to the king for thirty days."

12Esther's message was given to Mordecai. 13Then Mordecai sent back word to Esther: "Just because you live in the king's palace, don't think that out of all the Jewish people you alone will escape. 14If you keep quiet at this time, someone else will help and save the Jewish people, but you and your father's family will all die. And who knows, you may have been chosen queen for just such a time as this."

15Then Esther sent this answer to Mordecai: 16"Go and get all the Jewish people in Susa together. For my sake, fast; do not eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my servant girls will also fast. Then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law, and if I die, I die."

17So Mordecai went away and did everything Esther had told him to do.

## Psalm 89:46–52

46 LORD, how long will this go on?
Will you ignore us forever?
How long will your anger burn like a fire?

47 Remember how short my life is.
Why did you create us? For nothing?

48 What person alive will not die?
Who can escape the grave? *Selah*

49 Lord, where is your love from times past,
which in your loyalty you promised to David?

50 Lord, remember how they insulted your servant;
remember how I have suffered the insults of the nations.

51 LORD, remember how your enemies insulted you
and how they insulted your appointed king wherever he went.

52 Praise the LORD forever!
Amen and amen.

## Proverbs 22:7–8

7 The rich rule over the poor,
and borrowers are servants to lenders.

8 Those who plan evil will receive trouble.
Their cruel anger will come to an end.

## Romans 3:1–31

3 So, do Jews have anything that other people do not have? Is there anything special about being circumcised? 2Yes, of course, there is in every way. The most important thing is this: God trusted the Jews with his teachings. 3If some Jews were not faithful to him, will that stop God from doing what he promised? 4No! God will continue to be true even when every person is false. As the Scriptures say:

"So you will be shown to be right when you speak,
and you will win your case."

Psalm 51:4

5When we do wrong, that shows more clearly that God is right. So can we say that God is wrong to punish us? (I am talking as people might talk.) 6No! If God could not punish us, he could not judge the world.

7A person might say, "When I lie, it really gives him glory, because my lie shows God's truth. So why am I judged a sinner?" 8It would be the same to say, "We should do evil so that good will come." Some people find fault with us and say we teach this, but they are wrong and deserve the punishment they will receive.

## *All People Are Guilty*

9So are we Jews better than others? No! We have already said that Jews and those who are not Jews are all guilty of sin. 10As the Scriptures say:

"There is no one who always does what is right,
not even one.

11There is no one who understands.
There is no one who looks to God for help.

12All have turned away.
Together, everyone has become useless.

There is no one who does anything good;
there is not even one."

Psalm 14:1–3

13 “Their throats are like open graves;
they use their tongues for telling lies.”

Psalm 5:9

“Their words are like snake poison.”

Psalm 140:3

14 “Their mouths are full of cursing and hate.”

Psalm 10:7

15 “They are always ready to kill people.
16 Everywhere they go they cause ruin and misery.

17 They don’t know how to live in peace.”

Isaiah 59:7–8

18 “They have no fear of God.”

Psalm 36:1

19 We know that the law’s commands are for those who have the law. This stops all excuses and brings the whole world under God’s judgment, 20 because no one can be made right with God by following the law. The law only shows us our sin.

## *How God Makes People Right*

21 But God has a way to make people right with him without the law, and he has now shown us that way which the law and the prophets told us about. 22 God makes people right with himself through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because all people are the same: 23 Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s glorious standard, 24 and all need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ. 25 God sent him to die in our place to take away our sins. We receive forgiveness through faith in the blood of Jesus’ death. This showed that God always does what is right and fair, as in the past when he was patient and did not punish people for their sins. 26 And God gave Jesus to show today that he does what is right. God did this so he could judge rightly and so he could make right any person who has faith in Jesus.

27 So do we have a reason to brag about ourselves? No! And

why not? It is the way of faith that stops all bragging, not the way of trying to obey the law. [28]A person is made right with God through faith, not through obeying the law. [29]Is God only the God of the Jews? Is he not also the God of those who are not Jews? [30]Of course he is, because there is only one God. He will make Jews right with him by their faith, and he will also make those who are not Jews right with him through their faith. [31]So do we destroy the law by following the way of faith? No! Faith causes us to be what the law truly wants.

# August 2

## Insufficient Funds

*People cannot do any work that will make them right with God.*

Romans 4:5

If Christ had not covered us with his grace, each of us would be overdrawn on [our heavenly bank] account. When it comes to goodness we would have insufficient funds. Inadequate holiness. God requires a certain balance of virtue in our account, and it's more than any of us has alone. Our holiness account shows insufficient funds, and only the holy will see the Lord; what can we do?

We could try making a few deposits. Maybe if I wave at my neighbor or compliment my husband or go to church next Sunday, I'll get caught up. But how do you know when you've made enough? …

If you are trying to justify your own statement, forget ever having peace … You are trying to justify an account you can't justify … "God is the One who makes them right" (Romans 8:33).

from *The Great House of God*

### Esther 5:1—6:14

#### *Esther Speaks to the King*

5 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in
the inner courtyard of the king's palace, facing the king's hall.
The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the
doorway. 2When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the
courtyard, he was pleased. He held out to her the gold scepter
that was in his hand, so Esther went forward and touched the
end of it.

3The king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What do you
want to ask me? I will give you as much as half of my kingdom."

4 Esther answered, “My king, if it pleases you, come today
with Haman to a banquet that I have prepared for you.”
5 Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly so we may do
what Esther asks.”
So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had
prepared for them. 6 As they were drinking wine, the king said
to Esther, “Now, what are you asking for? I will give it to you.
What is it you want? I will give you as much as half of my
kingdom.”
7 Esther answered, “This is what I want and what I ask for.
8 My king, if you are pleased with me and if it pleases you, give
me what I ask for and do what I want. Come with Haman
tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for you. Then I will
answer your question about what I want.”

## *Haman’s Plans Against Mordecai*

9 Haman left the king’s palace that day happy and content.
But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and saw that
Mordecai did not stand up or tremble with fear before him,
Haman became very angry with Mordecai. 10 But he controlled
his anger and went home.
Then Haman called together his friends and his wife, Zeresh.
11 He told them how wealthy he was and how many sons he had.
He also told them all the ways the king had honored him and
how the king had placed him higher than his important men and
his royal officers. 12 He also said, “I’m the only person Queen
Esther invited to come with the king to the banquet she gave.
And tomorrow also the queen has asked me to be her guest with
the king. 13 But all this does not really make me happy when I
see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.”
14 Then Haman’s wife, Zeresh, and all his friends said, “Have
a seventy-five foot platform built, and in the morning ask the
king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go to the banquet
with the king and be happy.” Haman liked this suggestion, so he
ordered the platform to be built.

## *Mordecai Is Honored*

6 That same night the king could not sleep. So he gave an order
for the daily court record to be brought in and read to him. 2 It
was found recorded that Mordecai had warned the king about
Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s officers who guarded the
doorway and who had planned to kill the king.
3 The king asked, “What honor and reward have been given
to Mordecai for this?”
The king’s personal servants answered, “Nothing has been
done for Mordecai.”

4The king said, “Who is in the courtyard?” Now Haman had
just entered the outer court of the king’s palace. He had come
to ask the king about hanging Mordecai on the platform he had
prepared.
5The king’s personal servants said, “Haman is standing in
the courtyard.”
The king said, “Bring him in.”
6So Haman came in. And the king asked him, “What should
be done for a man whom the king wants very much to honor?”
And Haman thought to himself, “Whom would the king want
to honor more than me?” 7So he answered the king, “This is
what you could do for the man you want very much to honor.
8Have the servants bring a royal robe that the king himself has
worn. And also bring a horse with a royal crown on its head, a
horse that the king himself has ridden. 9Let the robe and the
horse be given to one of the king’s most important men. Let the
servants put the robe on the man the king wants to honor, and
let them lead him on the horse through the city streets. As they
are leading him, let them announce: ‘This is what is done for the
man whom the king wants to honor!’”
10The king commanded Haman, “Go quickly. Take the robe
and the horse just as you have said, and do all this for Mordecai
the Jew who sits at the king’s gate. Do not leave out anything
you have suggested.”
11So Haman took the robe and the horse, and he put the robe
on Mordecai. Then he led him on horseback through the city
streets, announcing before Mordecai: “This is what is done for
the man whom the king wants to honor!”
12Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate, but Haman
hurried home with his head covered, because he was
embarrassed and ashamed. 13He told his wife, Zeresh, and all
his friends everything that had happened to him.
Haman’s wife and the men who gave him advice said, “You
are starting to lose power to Mordecai. Since he is a Jew, you
cannot win against him. You will surely be ruined.” 14While they
were still talking, the king’s eunuchs came to Haman’s house
and made him hurry to the banquet Esther had prepared.

## Psalm 90:1–6

## Book 4

### *God Is Eternal, and We Are Not*

**A prayer of Moses, the man of God.**

90 Lord, you have been our home
since the beginning.

2Before the mountains were born
and before you created the earth and the world,

you are God.
You have always been, and you will always be.

3You turn people back into dust.
You say, “Go back into dust, human beings.”

4To you, a thousand years
is like the passing of a day,
or like a few hours in the night.

5While people sleep, you take their lives.
They are like grass that grows up in the morning.

6In the morning they are fresh and new,
but by evening they dry up and die.

## Proverbs 22:9

9Generous people will be blessed,
because they share their food with the poor.

## Romans 4:1–25

### *The Example of Abraham*

4 So what can we say that Abraham,[n] the father of our people,
learned about faith? 2If Abraham was made right by the things
he did, he had a reason to brag. But this is not God's view,
3because the Scripture says, "Abraham believed God, and God
accepted Abraham's faith, and that faith made him right with
God."[n]

4When people work, their pay is not given as a gift, but as
something earned. 5But people cannot do any work that will
make them right with God. So they must trust in him, who
makes even evil people right in his sight. Then God accepts
their faith, and that makes them right with him. 6David said the
same thing. He said that people are truly blessed when God,
without paying attention to their deeds, makes people right with
himself.

7"Blessed are they
whose sins are forgiven,
whose wrongs are pardoned.

8Blessed is the person
whom the Lord does not consider guilty."

Psalm 32:1–2

9Is this blessing only for those who are circumcised or also for
those who are not circumcised? We have already said that God
accepted Abraham's faith and that faith made him right with
God. 10So how did this happen? Did God accept Abraham before
or after he was circumcised? It was before his circumcision.
11Abraham was circumcised to show that he was right with God
through faith before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the
father of all those who believe but are not circumcised; he is the
father of all believers who are accepted as being right with God.
12And Abraham is also the father of those who have been
circumcised and who live following the faith that our father
Abraham had before he was circumcised.

## *God Keeps His Promise*

13Abraham[n] and his descendants received the promise that
they would get the whole world. He did not receive that promise
through the law, but through being right with God by his faith.
14If people could receive what God promised by following the
law, then faith is worthless. And God's promise to Abraham is
worthless, 15because the law can only bring God's anger. But if
there is no law, there is nothing to disobey.

16So people receive God's promise by having faith. This
happens so the promise can be a free gift. Then all of
Abraham's children can have that promise. It is not only for
those who live under the law of Moses but for anyone who lives
with faith like that of Abraham, who is the father of us all. 17As
it is written in the Scriptures: "I am making you a father of
many nations."[n] This is true before God, the God Abraham
believed, the God who gives life to the dead and who creates
something out of nothing.

18There was no hope that Abraham would have children. But
Abraham believed God and continued hoping, and so he became
the father of many nations. As God told him, "Your descendants
also will be too many to count."[n] 19Abraham was almost a
hundred years old, much past the age for having children, and
Sarah could not have children. Abraham thought about all this,
but his faith in God did not become weak. 20He never doubted
that God would keep his promise, and he never stopped
believing. He grew stronger in his faith and gave praise to God.
21Abraham felt sure that God was able to do what he had
promised. 22So, "God accepted Abraham's faith, and that faith
made him right with God."[n] 23Those words ("God accepted
Abraham's faith") were written not only for Abraham 24but also
for us. God will accept us also because we believe in the One
who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25Jesus was given to
die for our sins, and he was raised from the dead to make us
right with God.

# August 3

## The Strength of God's Love

*God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners.*

Romans 5:8

"can anything make me stop loving you?" God asks. "Watch me speak your language, sleep on your earth, and feel your hurts. Behold the maker of sight and sound as he sneezes, coughs, and blows his nose. You wonder if I understand how you feel? Look into the dancing eyes of the kid in Nazareth; that's God walking to school. Ponder the toddler at Mary's table; that's God spilling his milk.

"You wonder how long my love will last? Find your answer on a splintered cross, on a craggy hill. That's me you see up there, your maker, your God, nail-stabbed and bleeding. Covered in spit and sin-soaked.

That's your sin I'm feeling. That's your death I'm dying. That's your resurrection I'm living. That's how much I love you."

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### Esther 7:1—8:17

#### *Haman Is Hanged*

7 So the king and Haman went in to eat with Queen Esther. 2As they were drinking wine on the second day, the king asked Esther again, "What are you asking for? I will give it to you. What is it you want? I will give you as much as half of my kingdom."

3Then Queen Esther answered, "My king, if you are pleased with me, and if it pleases you, let me live. This is what I ask. And let my people live, too. This is what I want. 4My people and I have been sold to be destroyed, to be killed and completely

wiped out. If we had been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because that would not be enough of a problem to bother the king."

5Then King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he? Who has done such a thing?"

6Esther said, "Our enemy and foe is this wicked Haman!"

Then Haman was filled with terror before the king and queen. 7The king was very angry, so he got up, left his wine, and went out into the palace garden. But Haman stayed inside to beg Queen Esther to save his life. He could see that the king had already decided to kill him.

8When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, he saw Haman falling on the couch where Esther was lying. The king said, "Will he even attack the queen while I am in the house?"

As soon as the king said that, servants came in and covered Haman's face. 9Harbona, one of the eunuchs there serving the king, said, "Look, a seventy-five foot platform stands near Haman's house. This is the one Haman had prepared for Mordecai, who gave the warning that saved the king."

The king said, "Hang Haman on it!" 10So they hanged Haman on the platform he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king was not so angry anymore.

## *The King Helps the Jewish People*

8 That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther everything Haman, the enemy of the Jewish people, had left when he died. And Mordecai came in to see the king, because Esther had told the king how he was related to her. 2Then the king took off his signet ring that he had taken back from Haman, and he gave it to Mordecai. Esther put Mordecai in charge of everything Haman left when he died.

3Once again Esther spoke to the king. She fell at the king's feet and cried and begged him to stop the evil plan that Haman the Agagite had planned against the Jews. 4The king held out the gold scepter to Esther. So Esther got up and stood in front of him.

5She said, "My king, if you are pleased with me, and if it pleases you to do this, if you think it is the right thing to do, and if you are happy with me, let an order be written to cancel the letters Haman wrote. Haman the Agagite sent messages to destroy all the Jewish people in all of your kingdom. 6I could not stand to see that terrible thing happen to my people. I could not stand to see my family killed."

7King Xerxes answered Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman was against the Jewish people, I have given his things to Esther, and my soldiers have hanged him. 8Now, in

the king’s name, write another order to the Jewish people as it seems best to you. Then seal the order with the king’s signet ring, because no letter written in the king’s name and sealed with his signet ring can be canceled.”

9At that time the king’s secretaries were called. This was the twenty-third day of the third month, which is Sivan. The secretaries wrote out all of Mordecai’s orders to the Jews, to the governors, to the captains of the soldiers in each state, and to the important men of the one hundred twenty-seven states that reached from India to Cush. They wrote in the writing of each state and in the language of each people. They also wrote to the Jewish people in their own writing and language. 10Mordecai wrote orders in the name of King Xerxes and sealed the letters with the king’s signet ring. Then he sent the king’s orders by messengers on fast horses, horses that were raised just for the king.

11These were the king’s orders: The Jewish people in every city have the right to gather together to protect themselves. They may destroy, kill, and completely wipe out the army of any state or people who attack them. And they are to do the same to the women and children of that army. They may also take by force the property of their enemies. 12The one day set for the Jewish people to do this in all the empire of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. 13A copy of the king’s order was to be sent out as a law in every state. It was to be made known to the people of every nation living in the kingdom so the Jewish people would be ready on that set day to strike back at their enemies.

14The messengers hurried out, riding on the royal horses, because the king commanded those messengers to hurry. And the order was also given in the palace at Susa.

15Mordecai left the king’s presence wearing royal clothes of blue and white and a large gold crown. He also had a purple robe made of the best linen. And the people of Susa shouted for joy. 16It was a time of happiness, joy, gladness, and honor for the Jewish people. 17As the king’s order went to every state and city, there was joy and gladness among the Jewish people. In every state and city to which the king’s order went, they were having feasts and celebrating. And many people through all the empire became Jews, because they were afraid of the Jewish people.

## Psalm 90:7–17

7We are destroyed by your anger;

we are terrified by your hot anger.

8 You have put the evil we have done right in front of you;
you clearly see our secret sins.

9 All our days pass while you are angry.
Our years end with a moan.

10 Our lifetime is seventy years
or, if we are strong, eighty years.

But the years are full of hard work and pain.
They pass quickly, and then we are gone.

11 Who knows the full power of your anger?
Your anger is as great as our fear of you should be.

12 Teach us how short our lives really are
so that we may be wise.

13 LORD, how long before you return
and show kindness to your servants?

14 Fill us with your love every morning.
Then we will sing and rejoice all our lives.

15 We have seen years of trouble.
Now give us as much joy as you gave us sorrow.

16 Show your servants the wonderful things you do;
show your greatness to their children.

17 Lord our God, treat us well.
Give us success in what we do;
yes, give us success in what we do.

## Proverbs 22:10–11

10 Get rid of the one who makes fun of wisdom.
Then fighting, quarrels, and insults will stop.

11 Whoever loves pure thoughts and kind words
will have even the king as a friend.

## Romans 5:1–21

### *Right with God*

5 Since we have been made right with God by our faith, we have[n] peace with God. This happened through our Lord Jesus
Christ, 2 who through our faith[n] has brought us into that
blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy. And we are happy
because of the hope we have of sharing God's glory. 3 We also
have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles
produce patience. 4 And patience produces character, and
character produces hope. 5 And this hope will never disappoint
us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts. He
gave us his love through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to
us.
6 When we were unable to help ourselves, at the right time,
Christ died for us, although we were living against God. 7 Very
few people will die to save the life of someone else. Although
perhaps for a good person someone might possibly die. 8 But
God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us
while we were still sinners.
9 So through Christ we will surely be saved from God's anger,
because we have been made right with God by the blood of
Christ's death. 10 While we were God's enemies, he made us his
friends through the death of his Son. Surely, now that we are
his friends, he will save us through his Son's life. 11 And not only
that, but now we are also very happy in God through our Lord
Jesus Christ. Through him we are now God's friends again.

### *Adam and Christ Compared*

[12]Sin came into the world because of what one man did, and with sin came death. This is why everyone must die—because everyone sinned. [13]Sin was in the world before the law of Moses, but sin is not counted against us as breaking a command when there is no law. [14]But from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, everyone had to die, even those who had not sinned by breaking a command, as Adam had.

Adam was like the One who was coming in the future. [15]But God's free gift is not like Adam's sin. Many people died because of the sin of that one man. But the grace from God was much greater; many people received God's gift of life by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. [16]After Adam sinned once, he was judged guilty. But the gift of God is different. God's free gift came after many sins, and it makes people right with God. [17]One man sinned, and so death ruled all people because of that one man. But now those people who accept God's full grace and the great gift of being made right with him will surely have true life and rule through the one man, Jesus Christ.

[18]So as one sin of Adam brought the punishment of death to all people, one good act that Christ did makes all people right with God. And that brings true life for all. [19]One man disobeyed God, and many became sinners. In the same way, one man obeyed God, and many will be made right. [20]The law came to make sin worse. But when sin grew worse, God's grace increased. [21]Sin once used death to rule us, but God gave people more of his grace so that grace could rule by making people right with him. And this brings life forever through Jesus Christ our Lord.

# August 4

## The Soul Killer

*The payment for sin is death.*

Romans 6:23

sin does to a life what shears do to a flower. A cut at the stem separates a flower from the source of life. Initially the flower is attractive, still colorful and strong. But watch that flower over a period of time, and the leaves will wilt and the petals will drop. No matter what you do, the flower will never live again. Surround it with water. Stick the stem in soil. Baptize it with fertilizer. Glue the flower back on the stem. Do what you wish. The flower is dead …

A dead soul has no life.

Cut off from God, the soul withers and dies. The consequence of sin is not a bad day or a bad mood but a dead soul. The sign of a dead soul is clear: poisoned lips and cursing mouths, feet that lead to violence and eyes that don't see God …

The finished work of sin is to kill the soul.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

## Esther 9:1—10:3

### *Victory for the Jewish People*

9 The order the king had commanded was to be done on the
thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. That
was the day the enemies of the Jewish people had hoped to
defeat them, but that was changed. So the Jewish people
themselves defeated those who hated them. 2The Jews met in
their cities in all the empire of King Xerxes in order to attack
those who wanted to harm them. No one was strong enough to
fight against them, because all the other people living in the
empire were afraid of them. 3All the important men of the
states, the governors, captains of the soldiers, and the king's

officers helped the Jewish people, because they were afraid of Mordecai. [4]Mordecai was very important in the king's palace. He was famous in all the empire, because he was becoming a leader of more and more people.

[5]And, with their swords, the Jewish people defeated all their enemies, killing and destroying them. And they did what they wanted with those people who hated them. [6]In the palace at Susa, they killed and destroyed five hundred men. [7]They also killed: Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, [8]Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, [9]Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, [10]the ten sons of Haman, son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jewish people. But the Jewish people did not take their belongings.

[11]On that day the number killed in the palace at Susa was reported to the king. [12]The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jewish people have killed and destroyed five hundred people in the palace at Susa, and they have also killed Haman's ten sons. What have they done in the rest of the king's empire! Now what else are you asking? I will do it! What else do you want? It will be done!"

[13]Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, give the Jewish people who are in Susa permission to do again tomorrow what the king ordered for today. And let the bodies of Haman's ten sons be hanged on the platform."

[14]So the king ordered that it be done. A law was given in Susa, and the bodies of the ten sons of Haman were hanged. [15]The Jewish people in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar. They killed three hundred people in Susa, but they did not take their belongings.

[16]At that same time, all the Jewish people in the king's empire also met to protect themselves and get rid of their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but they did not take their belongings. [17]This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. On the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of joyful feasting.

## *The Feast of Purim*

[18]But the Jewish people in Susa met on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the month of Adar. Then they rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of joyful feasting.

[19]This is why the Jewish people who live in the country and small villages celebrate on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar. It is a day of joyful feasting and a day for exchanging gifts.

[20]Mordecai wrote down everything that had happened. Then he sent letters to all the Jewish people in all the empire of King Xerxes, far and near. [21]He told them to celebrate every year on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, [22]because that was when the Jewish people got rid of their

enemies. They were also to celebrate it as the month their sadness was turned to joy and their crying for the dead was turned into celebration. He told them to celebrate those days as days of joyful feasting and as a time for giving food to each other and presents to the poor.

23So the Jewish people agreed to do what Mordecai had written to them, and they agreed to hold the celebration every year. 24Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, was the enemy of all the Jewish people. He had made an evil plan against the Jewish people to destroy them, and he had thrown the Pur (that is, the lot) to choose a day to ruin and destroy them. 25But when the king learned of the evil plan, he sent out written orders that the evil plans Haman had made against the Jewish people would be used against him. And those orders said that Haman and his sons should be hanged on the platform. 26So these days were called Purim, which comes from the word “Pur” (the lot). Because of everything written in this letter and what they had seen and what happened to them, 27the Jewish people set up this custom. They and their descendants and all those who join them are always to celebrate these two days every year. They should do it in the right way and at the time Mordecai had ordered them in the letter. 28These two days should be remembered and celebrated from now on in every family, in every state, and in every city. These days of Purim should always be celebrated by the Jewish people, and their descendants should always remember to celebrate them, too.

29So Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote this second letter about Purim. Using the power they had, they wrote to prove the first letter was true. 30And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jewish people in the one hundred twenty-seven states of the kingdom of Xerxes, writing them a message of peace and truth. 31He wrote to set up these days of Purim at the chosen times. Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had sent out the order for the Jewish people, just as they had set up things for themselves and their descendants: On these two days the people should fast and cry loudly. 32Esther’s letter set up the rules for Purim, and they were written down in the records.

## *The Greatness of Mordecai*

10 King Xerxes demanded taxes everywhere, even from the cities on the seacoast. 2And all the great things Xerxes did by his power and strength are written in the record books of the kings of Media and Persia. Also written in those record books are all the things done by Mordecai, whom the king made great. 3Mordecai the Jew was second in importance to King Xerxes, and he was the most important man among the Jewish people. His fellow Jews respected him very much, because he worked

for the good of his people and spoke up for the safety of all the Jewish people.

## Psalm 91:1–8

### *Safe in the Lord*

91 Those who go to God Most High for safety
will be protected by the Almighty.

2I will say to the LORD, “You are my place of safety and protection.
You are my God and I trust you.”

3God will save you from hidden traps
and from deadly diseases.

4He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you can hide.
His truth will be your shield and protection.

5You will not fear any danger by night
or an arrow during the day.

6You will not be afraid of diseases that come in the dark
or sickness that strikes at noon.

7At your side one thousand people may die,
or even ten thousand right beside you,
but you will not be hurt.

8You will only watch
and see the wicked punished.

## Proverbs 22:12

12 The LORD guards knowledge,
but he destroys false words.

## Romans 6:1–23

### *Dead to Sin but Alive in Christ*

6 So do you think we should continue sinning so that God will
give us even more grace? 2 No! We died to our old sinful lives, so
how can we continue living with sin? 3 Did you forget that all of
us became part of Christ when we were baptized? We shared
his death in our baptism. 4 When we were baptized, we were
buried with Christ and shared his death. So, just as Christ was
raised from the dead by the wonderful power of the Father, we
also can live a new life.

5 Christ died, and we have been joined with him by dying too.
So we will also be joined with him by rising from the dead as he
did. 6 We know that our old life died with Christ on the cross so
that our sinful selves would have no power over us and we
would not be slaves to sin. 7 Anyone who has died is made free
from sin's control.

8 If we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him.
9 Christ was raised from the dead, and we know that he cannot
die again. Death has no power over him now. 10 Yes, when Christ
died, he died to defeat the power of sin one time—enough for all
time. He now has a new life, and his new life is with God. 11 In
the same way, you should see yourselves as being dead to the
power of sin and alive with God through Christ Jesus.

12 So, do not let sin control your life here on earth so that you
do what your sinful self wants to do. 13 Do not offer the parts of
your body to serve sin, as things to be used in doing evil.
Instead, offer yourselves to God as people who have died and
now live. Offer the parts of your body to God to be used in doing
good. 14 Sin will not be your master, because you are not under
law but under God's grace.

### *Be Slaves of Righteousness*

[15]So what should we do? Should we sin because we are under grace and not under law? No! [16]Surely you know that when you give yourselves like slaves to obey someone, then you are really slaves of that person. The person you obey is your master. You can follow sin, which brings spiritual death, or you can obey God, which makes you right with him. [17]In the past you were slaves to sin—sin controlled you. But thank God, you fully obeyed the things that you were taught. [18]You were made free from sin, and now you are slaves to goodness. [19]I use this example because this is hard for you to understand. In the past you offered the parts of your body to be slaves to sin and evil; you lived only for evil. In the same way now you must give yourselves to be slaves of goodness. Then you will live only for God.

[20]In the past you were slaves to sin, and goodness did not control you. [21]You did evil things, and now you are ashamed of them. Those things only bring death. [22]But now you are free from sin and have become slaves of God. This brings you a life that is only for God, and this gives you life forever. [23]The payment for sin is death. But God gives us the free gift of life forever in Christ Jesus our Lord.

# August 5

## Heaven Knows Your Heart

*"I was naked when I was born, and I will be naked when I die."*

Job 1:21

Think for just a moment about the things you own. Think about the house you have, the car you drive, the money you've saved. Think about the stocks you've traded and the clothes you've purchased. Envision all your stuff, and let me remind you of two biblical truths.

*Your stuff isn't yours.* Ask any coroner … No one takes anything with him. When one of the wealthiest men in history, John D. Rockefeller, died, his accountant was asked, "How much did John D. leave?" The accountant's reply? "All of it."

All that stuff—it's not yours. And you know what else about all that stuff? *It's not you*. Who you are has nothing to do with the clothes you wear or the car you drive. Jesus said, "Life is not measured by how much one owns" (Luke 12:15). Heaven does not know you as the fellow with the nice suit or the woman with the big house or the kid with the new bike. Heaven knows your heart.

from *Traveling Light*

### Job 1:1—2:13

### *Job, the Good Man*

1 A man named Job lived in the land of Uz. He was an honest
and innocent man; he honored God and stayed away from evil.
2Job had seven sons and three daughters. 3He owned seven
thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred teams of
oxen, and five hundred female donkeys. He also had a large
number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the
people of the East.
4Job's sons took turns holding feasts in their homes and

invited their sisters to eat and drink with them. 5After a feast was over, Job would send and have them made clean. Early in the morning Job would offer a burnt offering for each of them, because he thought, “My children may have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” Job did this every time.

## *Satan Appears Before the Lord*

6One day the angels came to show themselves before the LORD, and Satan[n] was with them. 7The LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?”

Satan answered the LORD, “I have been wandering around the earth, going back and forth in it.”

8Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you noticed my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him. He is an honest and innocent man, honoring God and staying away from evil.”

9But Satan answered the LORD, “Job honors God for a good reason. 10You have put a wall around him, his family, and everything he owns. You have blessed the things he has done. His flocks and herds are so large they almost cover the land. 11But reach out your hand and destroy everything he has, and he will curse you to your face.”

12The LORD said to Satan, “All right, then. Everything Job has is in your power, but you must not touch Job himself.” Then Satan left the LORD’s presence.

13One day Job’s sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine together at the oldest brother’s house. 14A messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were eating grass nearby, 15when the Sabeans attacked and carried them away. They killed the servants with swords, and I am the only one who escaped to tell you!”

16The messenger was still speaking when another messenger arrived and said, “Lightning from God fell from the sky. It burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who escaped to tell you!”

17The second messenger was still speaking when another messenger arrived and said, “The Babylonians sent three groups of attackers that swept down and stole your camels and killed the servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you!”

18The third messenger was still speaking when another messenger arrived and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine together at the oldest brother’s house. 19Suddenly a great wind came from the desert, hitting all four corners of the house at once. The house fell in on the young people, and they are all dead. I am the only one who escaped to tell you!”

20When Job heard this, he got up and tore his robe and shaved his head to show how sad he was. Then he bowed down

to the ground to worship God. 21He said:

"I was naked when I was born,
and I will be naked when I die.

The LORD gave these things to me,
and he has taken them away.
Praise the name of the LORD."

22In all this Job did not sin or blame God.

## *Satan Appears Before the LORD Again*

2 On another day the angels came to show themselves before the LORD, and Satan was with them again. 2The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the LORD, "I have been wandering around the earth, going back and forth in it."

3Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him. He is an honest and innocent man, honoring God and staying away from evil. You caused me to ruin him for no good reason, but he continues to be without blame."

4"One skin for another!" Satan answered. "A man will give all he has to save his own life. 5But reach out your hand and destroy his flesh and bones, and he will curse you to your face."

6The LORD said to Satan, "All right, then. Job is in your power, but you may not take his life."

7So Satan left the LORD's presence. He put painful sores on Job's body, from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. 8Job took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself, and he sat in ashes in misery.

9Job's wife said to him, "Why are you trying to stay innocent? Curse God and die!"

10Job answered, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Should we take only good things from God and not trouble?" In spite of all this Job did not sin in what he said.

## *Job's Three Friends Come to Help*

11Now Job had three friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. When these friends heard about Job's troubles, they agreed to meet and visit him. They wanted to show their concern and to comfort him. 12They saw Job from far away, but he looked so different they almost didn't recognize him. They began to cry loudly and tore their

robes and put dirt on their heads to show how sad they were.
13 Then they sat on the ground with Job seven days and seven
nights. No one said a word to him because they saw how much
he was suffering.

## Psalm 91:9–13

9 The LORD is your protection;
you have made God Most High your place of safety.

10 Nothing bad will happen to you;
no disaster will come to your home.

11 He has put his angels in charge of you
to watch over you wherever you go.

12 They will catch you in their hands
so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.

13 You will walk on lions and cobras;
you will step on strong lions and snakes.

## Proverbs 22:13–14

13 The lazy person says, “There’s a lion outside!
I might get killed out in the street!”

14 The words of an unfaithful wife are like a deep trap.
Those who make the LORD angry will get caught by them.

## Romans 7:1–25

## *An Example from Marriage*

7 Brothers and sisters, all of you understand the law of Moses.
So surely you know that the law rules over people only while
they are alive. 2For example, a woman must stay married to her
husband as long as he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is
free from the law of marriage. 3But if she marries another man
while her husband is still alive, the law says she is guilty of
adultery. But if her husband dies, she is free from the law of
marriage. Then if she marries another man, she is not guilty of
adultery.

4In the same way, my brothers and sisters, your old selves
died, and you became free from the law through the body of
Christ. This happened so that you might belong to someone else
—the One who was raised from the dead—and so that we might
be used in service to God. 5In the past, we were ruled by our
sinful selves. The law made us want to do sinful things that
controlled our bodies, so the things we did were bringing us
death. 6In the past, the law held us like prisoners, but our old
selves died, and we were made free from the law. So now we
serve God in a new way with the Spirit, and not in the old way
with written rules.

## *Our Fight Against Sin*

7You might think I am saying that sin and the law are the
same thing. That is not true. But the law was the only way I
could learn what sin meant. I would never have known what it
means to want to take something belonging to someone else if
the law had not said, “You must not want to take your
neighbor’s things.”[n] 8And sin found a way to use that command
and cause me to want all kinds of things I should not want. But
without the law, sin has no power. 9I was alive before I knew the
law. But when the law’s command came to me, then sin began
to live, 10and I died. The command was meant to bring life, but
for me it brought death. 11Sin found a way to fool me by using
the command to make me die.

12So the law is holy, and the command is holy and right and
good. 13Does this mean that something that is good brought
death to me? No! Sin used something that is good to bring
death to me. This happened so that I could see what sin is really
like; the command was used to show that sin is very evil.

## *The War Within Us*

14We know that the law is spiritual, but I am not spiritual

since sin rules me as if I were its slave. [15]I do not understand
the things I do. I do not do what I want to do, and I do the
things I hate. [16]And if I do not want to do the hated things I do,
that means I agree that the law is good. [17]But I am not really
the one who is doing these hated things; it is sin living in me
that does them. [18]Yes, I know that nothing good lives in me—I
mean nothing good lives in the part of me that is earthly and
sinful. I want to do the things that are good, but I do not do
them. [19]I do not do the good things I want to do, but I do the
bad things I do not want to do. [20]So if I do things I do not want
to do, then I am not the one doing them. It is sin living in me
that does those things.

[21]So I have learned this rule: When I want to do good, evil is
there with me. [22]In my mind, I am happy with God's law. [23]But I
see another law working in my body, which makes war against
the law that my mind accepts. That other law working in my
body is the law of sin, and it makes me its prisoner. [24]What a
miserable man I am! Who will save me from this body that
brings me death? [25]I thank God for saving me through Jesus
Christ our Lord!

So in my mind I am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful self
I am a slave to the law of sin.

# August 6

## The Spirit's Work

*If Christ is in you, then the Spirit gives you life.*

Romans 8:10

Receiving the unseen is not easy. Most Christians find the Cross of Christ easier to accept than the Spirit of Christ. Good Friday makes more sense than Pentecost. Christ, our substitute. Jesus taking our place. The Savior paying for our sins. These are astounding, yet embraceable, concepts. They fall in the arena of transaction and substitution, familiar territory for us. But Holy Spirit discussions lead us into the realm of the supernatural and unseen. We grow quickly quiet and cautious, fearing what we can't see or explain.

It helps to consider the Spirit's work from this angle. What Jesus did in Galilee is what the Holy Spirit does in us. Jesus dwelt among the people, teaching, comforting, and convicting. The Holy Spirit dwells within us, teaching, comforting, and convicting.

from *Come Thirsty*

## Job 3:1—4:21

### *Job Curses His Birth*

3 After seven days Job cried out and cursed the day he had been
born, 2saying:

3"Let the day I was born be destroyed,
and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!'

4Let that day turn to darkness.
Don't let God care about it.

Don’t let light shine on it.

5 Let darkness and gloom have that day.
Let a cloud hide it.
Let thick darkness cover its light.

6 Let thick darkness capture that night.
Don’t count it among the days of the year
or put it in any of the months.

7 Let that night be empty,
with no shout of joy to be heard.

8 Let those who curse days curse that day.
Let them prepare to wake up the sea monster Leviathan.

9 Let that day’s morning stars never appear;
let it wait for daylight that never comes.
Don’t let it see the first light of dawn,

10 because it allowed me to be born
and did not hide trouble from my eyes.

11 “Why didn’t I die as soon as I was born?
Why didn’t I die when I came out of the womb?

12 Why did my mother’s knees receive me,
and my mother’s breasts feed me?

13 If they had not been there,
I would be lying dead in peace;
I would be asleep and at rest

14 with kings and wise men of the earth
who built places for themselves that are now ruined.

15 I would be asleep with rulers
who filled their houses with gold and silver.

16 Why was I not buried like a child born dead,
like a baby who never saw the light of day?

17 In the grave the wicked stop making trouble,
and the weary workers are at rest.

18 In the grave there is rest for the captives
who no longer hear the shout of the slave driver.

19 People great and small are in the grave,
and the slave is freed from his master.

20 "Why is light given to those in misery?
Why is life given to those who are so unhappy?

21 They want to die, but death does not come.
They search for death more than for hidden treasure.

22 They are very happy
when they get to the grave.

23 They cannot see where they are going.
God has hidden the road ahead.

24 I make sad sounds as I eat;
my groans pour out like water.

25 Everything I feared and dreaded
has happened to me.

26 I have no peace or quietness.
I have no rest, only trouble."

## *Eliphaz Speaks*

4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:2“If someone tried to speak with you,
would you be upset?
I cannot keep from speaking.

3Think about the many people you have taught
and the weak hands you have made strong.

4Your words have comforted those who fell,
and you have strengthened those who could not stand.

5But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged;
trouble hits you, and you are terrified.

6You should have confidence because you respect God;
you should have hope because you are innocent.

7“Remember that the innocent will not die;
honest people will never be destroyed.

8I have noticed that people who plow evil
and plant trouble, harvest it.

9God’s breath destroys them,
and a blast of his anger kills them.

10Lions may roar and growl,
but when the teeth of a strong lion are broken,

11that lion dies of hunger.
The cubs of the mother lion are scattered.

12“A word was brought to me in secret,

and my ears heard a whisper of it.

13 It was during a nightmare
when people are in deep sleep.

14 I was trembling with fear;
all my bones were shaking.

15 A spirit glided past my face,
and the hair on my body stood on end.

16 The spirit stopped,
but I could not see what it was.

A shape stood before my eyes,
and I heard a quiet voice.

17 It said, ‘Can a human be more right than God?
Can a person be pure before his maker?

18 God does not trust his angels;
he blames them for mistakes.

19 So he puts even more blame on people who live in clay houses,[n]
whose foundations are made of dust,
who can be crushed like a moth.

20 Between dawn and sunset many people are broken to pieces;
without being noticed, they die and are gone forever.

21 The ropes of their tents are pulled up,
and they die without wisdom.’

## Psalm 91:14–16

14 The LORD says, “Whoever loves me, I will save.
I will protect those who know me.

15 They will call to me, and I will answer them.
I will be with them in trouble;
I will rescue them and honor them.

16 I will give them a long, full life,
and they will see how I can save.”

## Proverbs 22:15

15 Every child is full of foolishness,
but punishment can get rid of it.

## Romans 8:1–17

### *Be Ruled by the Spirit*

8 So now, those who are in Christ Jesus are not judged guilty.[n]
2 Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit that brings life made you[n] free from the law that brings sin and death. 3 The law was without power, because the law was made weak by our sinful selves. But God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son to earth with the same human life that others use for sin. By sending his Son to be an offering for sin, God used a human life to destroy sin. 4 He did this so that we could be the kind of people the law correctly wants us to be. Now we do not live following our sinful selves, but we live following the Spirit.

5 Those who live following their sinful selves think only about things that their sinful selves want. But those who live following the Spirit are thinking about the things the Spirit wants them to do. 6 If people’s thinking is controlled by the sinful self, there is

death. But if their thinking is controlled by the Spirit, there is life and peace. 7When people's thinking is controlled by the sinful self, they are against God, because they refuse to obey God's law and really are not even able to obey God's law. 8Those people who are ruled by their sinful selves cannot please God.

9But you are not ruled by your sinful selves. You are ruled by the Spirit, if that Spirit of God really lives in you. But the person who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. 10Your body will always be dead because of sin. But if Christ is in you, then the Spirit gives you life, because Christ made you right with God. 11God raised Jesus from the dead, and if God's Spirit is living in you, he will also give life to your bodies that die. God is the One who raised Christ from the dead, and he will give life through[n] his Spirit that lives in you.

12So, my brothers and sisters, we must not be ruled by our sinful selves or live the way our sinful selves want. 13If you use your lives to do the wrong things your sinful selves want, you will die spiritually. But if you use the Spirit's help to stop doing the wrong things you do with your body, you will have true life.

14The true children of God are those who let God's Spirit lead them. 15The Spirit we received does not make us slaves again to fear; it makes us children of God. With that Spirit we cry out, "Father."[n] 16And the Spirit himself joins with our spirits to say we are God's children. 17If we are God's children, we will receive blessings from God together with Christ. But we must suffer as Christ suffered so that we will have glory as Christ has glory.

# August 7

## Not Guilty

*Who can accuse the people God has chosen? No one, because God is the One who makes them right.*

Romans 8:33

Every moment of your life, your accuser is filing charges against you. He has noticed every error and marked each slip … Try to forget your past; he'll remind you. Try to undo your mistakes; he will thwart you.

This expert witness has no higher goal than to take you to court and press charges … Who is he? The devil …

He rails: "This one you call your child, God. He is not worthy …"

As he speaks, you hang your head. You have no defense. His charges are fair. "I plead guilty, your honor," you mumble.

"The sentence?" Satan asks.

"The wages of sin is death," explains the judge, "but in this case the death has already occurred. For this one died with Christ."

Satan is suddenly silent. And you are suddenly jubilant … You have stood before the judge and heard him declare, "Not guilty."

from *In the Grip of Grace*

## Job 5:1—6:30

5 "Call if you want to, Job, but no one will
answer you.
You can't turn to any of the holy ones.

2 Anger kills the fool,
and jealousy slays the stupid.

3 I have seen a fool succeed,
but I cursed his home immediately.

4 His children are far from safety
and are crushed in court with no defense.

5 The hungry eat his harvest,
even taking what grew among the thorns,
and thirsty people want his wealth.

6 Hard times do not come up from the ground,
and trouble does not grow from the earth.

7 People produce trouble
as surely as sparks fly upward.

8 “But if I were you, I would call on God
and bring my problem before him.

9 God does wonders that cannot be understood;
he does so many miracles they cannot be counted.

10 He gives rain to the earth
and sends water on the fields.

11 He makes the humble person important
and lifts the sad to places of safety.

12 He ruins the plans of those who trick others
so they have no success.

13 He catches the wise in their own clever traps
and sweeps away the plans of those who try to trick others.

14 Darkness covers them up in the daytime;

even at noon they feel around in the dark.

15 God saves the needy from their lies
and from the harm done by powerful people.

16 So the poor have hope,
while those who are unfair are silenced.

17 "The one whom God corrects is happy,
so do not hate being corrected by the Almighty.

18 God hurts, but he also bandages up;
he injures, but his hands also heal.

19 He will save you from six troubles;
even seven troubles will not harm you.

20 God will buy you back from death in times of hunger,
and in battle he will save you from the sword.

21 You will be protected from the tongue that strikes like a whip,
and you will not be afraid when destruction comes.

22 You will laugh at destruction and hunger,
and you will not fear the wild animals,

23 because you will have an agreement with the stones in the field,
and the wild animals will be at peace with you.

24 You will know that your tent is safe,
because you will check the things you own and find nothing missing.

25 You will know that you will have many children,

and your descendants will be like the grass on the earth.

26 You will come to the grave with all your strength,
like bundles of grain gathered at the right time.

27 “We have checked this, and it is true,
so hear it and decide what it means to you.”

## *Job Answers Eliphaz*

6 Then Job answered: 2 “I wish my suffering could be weighed
and my misery put on scales.

3 My sadness would be heavier than the sand of the seas.
No wonder my words seem careless.

4 The arrows of the Almighty are in me;
my spirit drinks in their poison;
God’s terrors are gathered against me.

5 A wild donkey does not bray when it has grass to eat,
and an ox is quiet when it has feed.

6 Tasteless food is not eaten without salt,
and there is no flavor in the white of an egg.

7 I refuse to touch it;
such food makes me sick.

8 “How I wish that I might have what I ask for
and that God would give me what I hope for.

9 How I wish God would crush me
and reach out his hand to destroy me.

10 Then I would have this comfort
and be glad even in this unending pain,
because I would know I did not reject the words of the Holy One.

11 “I do not have the strength to wait.
There is nothing to hope for,
so why should I be patient?

12 I do not have the strength of stone;
my flesh is not bronze.

13 I have no power to help myself,
because success has been taken away from me.

14 “They say, ‘A person’s friends should be kind to him when he is in trouble,
even if he stops fearing the Almighty.’

15 But my brothers cannot be counted on.
They are like streams that do not always flow,
streams that sometimes run over.

16 They are made dark by melting ice
and rise with melting snow.

17 But they stop flowing in the dry season;
they disappear when it is hot.

18 Travelers turn away from their paths
and go into the desert and die.

19 The groups of travelers from Tema look for water,
and the traders of Sheba look hopefully.

20 They are upset because they had been sure;
when they arrive, they are disappointed.

21 You also have been no help.
You see something terrible, and you are afraid.

22 I have never said, ‘Give me a gift.
Use your wealth to pay my debt.

23 Save me from the enemy’s power.
Buy me back from the clutches of cruel people.’

24 “Teach me, and I will be quiet.
Show me where I have been wrong.

25 Honest words are painful,
but your arguments prove nothing.

26 Do you mean to correct what I say?
Will you treat the words of a troubled man as if they were only wind?

27 You would even gamble for orphans
and would trade away your friend.

28 “But now please look at me.
I would not lie to your face.

29 Change your mind; do not be unfair;
think again, because my innocence is being questioned.

30 What I am saying is not wicked;
I can tell the difference between right and wrong.

## Psalm 92:1–8

### *Thanksgiving for God’s Goodness*

**A psalm. A song for the Sabbath day.**

92 It is good to praise you, LORD,
to sing praises to God Most High.

2It is good to tell of your love in the morning
and of your loyalty at night.

3It is good to praise you with the ten-stringed lyre
and with the soft-sounding harp.

4LORD, you have made me happy by what you have done;
I will sing for joy about what your hands have done.

5LORD, you have done such great things!
How deep are your thoughts!

6Stupid people don't know these things,
and fools don't understand.

7Wicked people grow like the grass.
Evil people seem to do well,
but they will be destroyed forever.

8But, LORD, you will be honored forever.

## Proverbs 22:16

16Whoever gets rich by mistreating the poor,
and gives presents to the wealthy, will become poor.

## Romans 8:18–39

## *Our Future Glory*

18 The sufferings we have now are nothing compared to the
great glory that will be shown to us. 19 Everything God made is
waiting with excitement for God to show his children's glory
completely. 20 Everything God made was changed to become
useless, not by its own wish but because God wanted it and
because all along there was this hope: 21 that everything God
made would be set free from ruin to have the freedom and glory
that belong to God's children.
22 We know that everything God made has been waiting until
now in pain, like a woman ready to give birth. 23 Not only the
world, but we also have been waiting with pain inside us. We
have the Spirit as the first part of God's promise. So we are
waiting for God to finish making us his own children, which
means our bodies will be made free. 24 We were saved, and we
have this hope. If we see what we are waiting for, that is not
really hope. People do not hope for something they already
have. 25 But we are hoping for something we do not have yet,
and we are waiting for it patiently.
26 Also, the Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not
know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to
God for us, even begs God for us with deep feelings that words
cannot explain. 27 God can see what is in people's hearts. And he
knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit
speaks to God for his people in the way God wants.
28 We know that in everything God works for the good of
those who love him.[n] They are the people he called, because
that was his plan. 29 God knew them before he made the world,
and he chose them to be like his Son so that Jesus would be the
firstborn[n] of many brothers and sisters. 30 God planned for them
to be like his Son; and those he planned to be like his Son, he
also called; and those he called, he also made right with him;
and those he made right, he also glorified.

## *God's Love in Christ Jesus*

31 So what should we say about this? If God is for us, no one
can defeat us. 32 He did not spare his own Son but gave him for
us all. So with Jesus, God will surely give us all things. 33 Who
can accuse the people God has chosen? No one, because God is
the One who makes them right. 34 Who can say God's people are
guilty? No one, because Christ Jesus died, but he was also
raised from the dead, and now he is on God's right side,
appealing to God for us. 35 Can anything separate us from the

love Christ has for us? Can troubles or problems or sufferings or hunger or nakedness or danger or violent death? [36]As it is written in the Scriptures:

"For you we are in danger of death all the time.
People think we are worth no more than sheep to be killed."

Psalm 44:22

[37]But in all these things we are completely victorious through God who showed his love for us. [38]Yes, I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, [39]nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

# August 8

## God Knows What's Best

*Put your trust in the* LORD.

Proverbs 22:19

The problem with this world is that it doesn't fit. Oh, it will do for now, but it isn't tailor-made. We were made to live with God, but on earth we live by faith. We were made to live forever, but on this earth we live but for a moment ...

We must trust God. We must trust not only that he does what is best but that he knows what is ahead. Ponder the words of Isaiah 57:1–2: "Those who are right with God may die, but no one pays attention. Good people are taken away, but no one understands. Those who do right are being taken away from evil and are given peace. Those who live as God wants find rest in death."

My, what a thought. God is taking them away from the evil days ahead. Could death be God's grace? Could the funeral wreath be God's safety ring? As horrible as the grave may be, could it be God's protection from the future?

Trust in God, Jesus urges, and trust in me.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

### Job 7:1—8:22

7 "People have a hard task on earth,
and their days are like those of a laborer.

2 They are like a slave wishing for the evening shadows,
like a laborer waiting to be paid.

3 But I am given months that are empty,

and nights of misery have been given to me.

4When I lie down, I think, ‘How long until I get up?’
The night is long, and I toss until dawn.

5My body is covered with worms and scabs,
and my skin is broken and full of sores.

6“My days go by faster than a weaver’s tool,
and they come to an end without hope.

7Remember, God, that my life is only a breath.
My eyes will never see happy times again.

8Those who see me now will see me no more;
you will look for me, but I will be gone.

9As a cloud disappears and is gone,
people go to the grave and never return.

10They will never come back to their houses again,
and their places will not know them anymore.

11“So I will not stay quiet;
I will speak out in the suffering of my spirit.
I will complain because I am so unhappy.

12I am not the sea or the sea monster.
So why have you set a guard over me?

13Sometimes I think my bed will comfort me
or that my couch will stop my complaint.

14Then you frighten me with dreams
and terrify me with visions.

15 My throat prefers to be choked;
my bones welcome death.

16 I hate my life; I don't want to live forever.
Leave me alone, because my days have no meaning.

17 "Why do you make people so important
and give them so much attention?

18 You examine them every morning
and test them every moment.

19 Will you never look away from me
or leave me alone even long enough to swallow?

20 If I have sinned, what have I done to you,
you watcher of humans?

Why have you made me your target?
Have I become a heavy load for you?

21 Why don't you pardon my wrongs
and forgive my sins?

I will soon lie down in the dust of death.
Then you will search for me, but I will be no more."

## *Bildad Speaks to Job*

8 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: 2 "How long will you say such things?
Your words are no more than wind.

3 God does not twist justice;
the Almighty does not make wrong what is right.

4 Your children sinned against God,
and he punished them for their sins.

5 But you should ask God for help
and pray to the Almighty for mercy.

6 If you are good and honest,
he will stand up for you
and bring you back where you belong.

7 Where you began will seem unimportant,
because your future will be so successful.

8 “Ask old people;
find out what their ancestors learned,

9 because we were only born yesterday and know nothing.
Our days on earth are only a shadow.

10 Those people will teach you and tell you
and speak about what they know.

11 Papyrus plants cannot grow where there is no swamp,
and reeds cannot grow tall without water.

12 While they are still growing and not yet cut,
they will dry up quicker than grass.

13 That is what will happen to those who forget God;
the hope of the wicked will be gone.

14 What they hope in is easily broken;
what they trust is like a spider’s web.

15 They lean on the spider’s web, but it breaks.
They grab it, but it does not hold up.

16 They are like well-watered plants in the sunshine
that spread their roots all through the garden.

17 They wrap their roots around a pile of rocks
and look for a place among the stones.

18 But if a plant is torn from its place,
then that place rejects it and says, ‘I never saw you.’

19 Now joy has gone away;
other plants grow up from the same dirt.

20 “Surely God does not reject the innocent
or give strength to those who do evil.

21 God will yet fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy.

22 Your enemies will be covered with shame,
and the tents of the wicked will be gone.”

## Psalm 92:9–15

9 LORD, surely your enemies,
surely your enemies will be destroyed,
and all who do evil will be scattered.

10 But you have made me as strong as an ox.
You have poured fine oils on me.

11 When I looked, I saw my enemies;
I heard the cries of those who are against me.

12 But good people will grow like palm trees;

they will be tall like the cedars of Lebanon.

13 Like trees planted in the Temple of the LORD,
they will grow strong in the courtyards of our God.

14 When they are old, they will still produce fruit;
they will be healthy and fresh.

15 They will say that the LORD is good.
He is my Rock, and there is no wrong in him.

## Proverbs 22:17–21

### *Other Wise Sayings*

17 Listen carefully to what wise people say;
pay attention to what I am teaching you.

18 It will be good to keep these things in mind
so that you are ready to repeat them.

19 I am teaching them to you now
so that you will put your trust in the LORD.

20 I have written thirty sayings for you,
which give knowledge and good advice.

21 I am teaching you true and reliable words
so that you can give true answers to anyone who asks.

## Romans 9:1–18

## *God and the Jewish People*

9 I am in Christ, and I am telling you the truth; I do not lie. My
conscience is ruled by the Holy Spirit, and it tells me I am not
lying. 2I have great sorrow and always feel much sadness. 3I
wish I could help my Jewish brothers and sisters, my people. I
would even wish that I were cursed and cut off from Christ if
that would help them. 4They are the people of Israel, God's
chosen children. They have seen the glory of God, and they
have the agreements that God made between himself and his
people. God gave them the law of Moses and the right way of
worship and his promises. 5They are the descendants of our
great ancestors, and they are the earthly family into which
Christ was born, who is God over all. Praise him forever![n]
Amen.

6It is not that God failed to keep his promise to them. But
only some of the people of Israel are truly God's people,[n] 7and
only some of Abraham's[n] descendants are true children of
Abraham. But God said to Abraham: "The descendants I
promised you will be from Isaac."[n] 8This means that not all of
Abraham's descendants are God's true children. Abraham's true
children are those who become God's children because of the
promise God made to Abraham. 9God's promise to Abraham was
this: "At the right time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."[n]
10And that is not all. Rebekah's sons had the same father, our
father Isaac. 11–12But before the two boys were born, God told
Rebekah, "The older will serve the younger."[n] This was before
the boys had done anything good or bad. God said this so that
the one chosen would be chosen because of God's own plan. He
was chosen because he was the one God wanted to call, not
because of anything he did. 13As the Scripture says, "I loved
Jacob, but I hated Esau."[n]

14So what should we say about this? Is God unfair? In no
way. 15God said to Moses, "I will show kindness to anyone to
whom I want to show kindness, and I will show mercy to anyone
to whom I want to show mercy."[n] 16So God will choose the one
to whom he decides to show mercy; his choice does not depend
on what people want or try to do. 17The Scripture says to the
king of Egypt: "I made you king for this reason: to show my
power in you so that my name will be talked about in all the
earth."[n] 18So God shows mercy where he wants to show mercy,
and he makes stubborn the people he wants to make stubborn.

# August 9

## Finding God's Grace

*"You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your care you watched over my life."*

Job 10:12

Discipline is easy for me to swallow. Logical to assimilate. Manageable and appropriate. But God's grace? Anything but. Examples? How much time do you have? David the psalmist becomes David the voyeur, but by God's grace becomes David the psalmist again.

Peter denied Christ before he preached Christ.

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

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

Story after story. Prayer after prayer. Surprise after surprise. Seems that God is looking more for ways to get us home than for ways to keep us out. I challenge you to find one soul who came to God seeking grace and did not find it.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

### Job 9:1—10:22

### *Job Answers Bildad*

9 Then Job answered: 2"Yes, I know that this is true,
but how can anyone be right in the presence of God?

3Someone might want to argue with God,
but no one could answer God,
not one time out of a thousand.

[4]God’s wisdom is deep, and his power is great;
no one can fight him without getting hurt.

[5]God moves mountains without anyone knowing it
and turns them over when he is angry.

[6]He shakes the earth out of its place
and makes its foundations tremble.

[7]He commands the sun not to shine
and shuts off the light of the stars.

[8]He alone stretches out the skies
and walks on the waves of the sea.

[9]It is God who made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades[n]
and the groups of stars in the southern sky.

[10]He does wonders that cannot be understood;
he does so many miracles they cannot be counted.

[11]When he passes me, I cannot see him;
when he goes by me, I do not recognize him.

[12]If he snatches something away, no one can stop him
or say to him, ‘What are you doing?’

[13]God will not hold back his anger.
Even the helpers of the monster Rahab lie at his feet in fear.

[14]So how can I argue with God,
or even find words to argue with him?

[15]Even if I were right, I could not answer him;
I could only beg God, my Judge, for mercy.

16 If I called to him and he answered,
I still don’t believe he would listen to me.

17 He would crush me with a storm
and multiply my wounds for no reason.

18 He would not let me catch my breath
but would overwhelm me with misery.

19 When it comes to strength, God is stronger than I;
when it comes to justice, no one can accuse him.

20 Even if I were right, my own mouth would say I was wrong;
if I were innocent, my mouth would say I was guilty.

21 “I am innocent,
but I don’t care about myself.
I hate my own life.

22 It is all the same. That is why I say,
‘God destroys both the innocent and the guilty.’

23 If the whip brings sudden death,
God will laugh at the suffering of the innocent.

24 When the land falls into the hands of evil people,
he covers the judges’ faces so they can’t see it.
If it is not God who does this, then who is it?

25 “My days go by faster than a runner;
they fly away without my seeing any joy.

26 They glide past like paper boats.
They attack like eagles swooping down to feed.

27 Even though I say, ‘I will forget my complaint;
I will change the look on my face and smile,’

28 I still dread all my suffering.
I know you will hold me guilty.

29 I have already been found guilty,
so why should I struggle for no reason?

30 I might wash myself with soap
and scrub my hands with strong soap,

31 but you would push me into a dirty pit,
and even my clothes would hate me.

32 “God is not human like me, so I cannot answer him.
We cannot meet each other in court.

33 I wish there were someone to make peace between us,
someone to decide our case.

34 Maybe he could remove God’s punishment
so his terror would no longer frighten me.

35 Then I could speak without being afraid,
but I am not able to do that.

10 “I hate my life, so I will complain without holding back;
I will speak because I am so unhappy.

2 I will say to God: Do not hold me guilty,
but tell me what you have against me.

3 Does it make you happy to trouble me?
Don’t you care about me, the work of your hands?
Are you happy with the plans of evil people?

4 Do you have human eyes
that see as we see?

5 Are your days like the days of humans,
and your years like our years?

6 You look for the evil I have done
and search for my sin.

7 You know I am not guilty,
but no one can save me from your power.

8 “Your hands shaped and made me.
Do you now turn around and destroy me?

9 Remember that you molded me like a piece of clay.
Will you now turn me back into dust?

10 You formed me inside my mother
like cheese formed from milk.

11 You dressed me with skin and flesh;
you sewed me together with bones and muscles.

12 You gave me life and showed me kindness,
and in your care you watched over my life.

13 “But in your heart you hid other plans.
I know this was in your mind.

14 If I sinned, you would watch me
and would not let my sin go unpunished.

15 How terrible it will be for me if I am guilty!
Even if I am right, I cannot lift my head.

I am full of shame
and experience only pain.

16 If I hold up my head, you hunt me like a lion
and again show your terrible power against me.

17 You bring new witnesses against me
and increase your anger against me.
Your armies come against me.

18 “So why did you allow me to be born?
I wish I had died before anyone saw me.

19 I wish I had never lived,
but had been carried straight from birth to the grave.

20 The few days of my life are almost over.
Leave me alone so I can have a moment of joy.

21 Soon I will leave; I will not return
from the land of darkness and gloom,

22 the land of darkest night,
from the land of gloom and confusion,
where even the light is darkness.”

## Psalm 93:1–5

### *The Majesty of the* LORD

93 The LORD is king. He is clothed in majesty.
The LORD is clothed in majesty
and armed with strength.

The world is set,
and it cannot be moved.

2 LORD, your kingdom was set up long ago;
you are everlasting.

3 LORD, the seas raise,
the seas raise their voice.
The seas raise up their pounding waves.

4 The sound of the water is loud;
the ocean waves are powerful,
but the LORD above is much greater.

5 LORD, your laws will stand forever.
Your Temple will be holy forevermore.

## Proverbs 22:22–23

22 Do not abuse poor people because they are poor,
and do not take away the rights of the needy in court.

23 The LORD will defend them in court
and will take the life of those who take away their rights.

## Romans 9:19–33

19 So one of you will ask me: "Then why does God blame us
for our sins? Who can fight his will?" 20 You are only human, and
human beings have no right to question God. An object should
not ask the person who made it, "Why did you make me like
this?" 21 The potter can make anything he wants to make. He
can use the same clay to make one thing for special use and
another thing for daily use.

22 It is the same way with God. He wanted to show his anger
and to let people see his power. But he patiently stayed with

those people he was angry with—people who were made ready to be destroyed. [23]He waited with patience so that he could make known his rich glory to the people who receive his mercy. He has prepared these people to have his glory, [24]and we are those people whom God called. He called us not from the Jews only but also from those who are not Jews. [25]As the Scripture says in Hosea:

"I will say, 'You are my people'
to those I had called 'not my people.'

And I will show my love
to those people I did not love."

Hosea 2:1, 23

[26]"They were called,
'You are not my people,'

but later they will be called
'children of the living God.'"

Hosea 1:10

[27]And Isaiah cries out about Israel:

"The people of Israel are many,
like the grains of sand by the sea.

But only a few of them will be saved,
[28] because the Lord will quickly and completely punish the people on the earth."

Isaiah 10:22–23

[29]It is as Isaiah said:

"The Lord All-Powerful
allowed a few of our descendants to live.

Otherwise we would have been completely destroyed
like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah."[n]

Isaiah 1:9

[30]So what does all this mean? Those who are not Jews were not trying to make themselves right with God, but they were made right with God because of their faith. [31]The people of Israel tried to follow a law to make themselves right with God. But they did not succeed, [32]because they tried to make themselves right by the things they did instead of trusting in God to make them right. They stumbled over the stone that causes people to stumble. [33]As it is written in the Scripture:

"I will put in Jerusalem a stone that causes people to stumble,
a rock that makes them fall.

Anyone who trusts in him will never be disappointed."

Isaiah 8:14; 28:16

# August 10

## Faith Meets Grace

*Because they did not know the way that God makes people right with him, they tried to make themselves right in their own way.*

Romans 10:3

"Let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience… ." (Hebrews 10:22). Faith is not born at the negotiating table where we barter our gifts in exchange for God's goodness. Faith is not an award given to the most learned. It's not a prize given to the most disciplined. It's not a title bequeathed to the most religious.

Faith is a desperate dive out of the sinking boat of human effort and a prayer that God will be there to pull us out of the water. The apostle Paul wrote about this kind of faith:

"You have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

The supreme force in salvation is God's grace.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

### Job 11:1—12:25

### *Zophar Speaks to Job*

11 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered:
2 "Should these words go unanswered?
Is this talker in the right?

3 Your lies do not make people quiet;

people should correct you when you make fun of God.

4You say, ‘My teachings are right,
and I am clean in God’s sight.’

5I wish God would speak
and open his lips against you

6and tell you the secrets of wisdom,
because wisdom has two sides.

Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.

7“Can you understand the secrets of God?
Can you search the limits of the Almighty?

8His limits are higher than the heavens; you cannot reach them!
They are deeper than the grave; you cannot understand them!

9His limits are longer than the earth
and wider than the sea.

10“If God comes along and puts you in prison
or calls you into court, no one can stop him.

11God knows who is evil,
and when he sees evil, he takes note of it.

12A fool cannot become wise
any more than a wild donkey can be born tame.

13“You must give your whole heart to him
and hold out your hands to him for help.

14 Put away the sin that is in your hand;
let no evil remain in your tent.

15 Then you can lift up your face without shame,
and you can stand strong without fear.

16 You will forget your trouble
and remember it only as water gone by.

17 Your life will be as bright as the noonday sun,
and darkness will seem like morning.

18 You will feel safe because there is hope;
you will look around and rest in safety.

19 You will lie down, and no one will scare you.
Many people will want favors from you.

20 But the wicked will not be able to see,
so they will not escape.
Their only hope will be to die."

## *Job Answers Zophar*

12 Then Job answered: 2 "You really think you are the only wise
people
and that when you die, wisdom will die with you!

3 But my mind is as good as yours;
you are not better than I am.
Everyone knows all these things.

4 My friends all laugh at me
when I call on God and expect him to answer me;
they laugh at me even though I am right and innocent!

5 Those who are comfortable don't care that others have trouble;
they think it right that those people should have troubles.

6 The tents of robbers are not bothered,
and those who make God angry are safe.
They have their god in their pocket.

7 "But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or ask the birds of the air, and they will tell you.

8 Speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish of the sea tell you.

9 Every one of these knows
that the hand of the LORD has done this.

10 The life of every creature
and the breath of all people are in God's hand.

11 The ear tests words
as the tongue tastes food.

12 Older people are wise,
and long life brings understanding.

13 "But only God has wisdom and power,
good advice and understanding.

14 What he tears down cannot be rebuilt;
anyone he puts in prison cannot be let out.

15 If God holds back the waters, there is no rain;
if he lets the waters go, they flood the land.

16 He is strong and victorious;

both the one who fools others and the one who is fooled belong to him.

17 God leads the wise away as captives
and turns judges into fools.

18 He takes off chains that kings put on
and puts a garment on their bodies.

19 He leads priests away naked
and destroys the powerful.

20 He makes trusted people be silent
and takes away the wisdom of elders.

21 He brings disgrace on important people
and takes away the weapons of the strong.

22 He uncovers the deep things of darkness
and brings dark shadows into the light.

23 He makes nations great and then destroys them;
he makes nations large and then scatters them.

24 He takes understanding away from the leaders of the earth
and makes them wander through a pathless desert.

25 They feel around in darkness with no light;
he makes them stumble like drunks.

## Psalm 94:1–11

### *God Will Pay Back His Enemies*

94 The LORD is a God who punishes. God, show your greatness
and punish!

2 Rise up, Judge of the earth,
and give the proud what they deserve.

3 How long will the wicked be happy?
How long, LORD?

4 They are full of proud words;
those who do evil brag about what they have done.

5 LORD, they crush your people
and make your children suffer.

6 They kill widows and foreigners
and murder orphans.

7 They say, “The LORD doesn’t see;
the God of Jacob doesn’t notice.”

8 You stupid ones among the people, pay attention.
You fools, when will you understand?

9 Can’t the creator of ears hear?
Can’t the maker of eyes see?

10 Won’t the one who corrects nations punish you?
Doesn’t the teacher of people know everything?

11 The LORD knows what people think.
He knows their thoughts are just a puff of wind.

## Proverbs 22:24–25

24 Don’t make friends with quick-tempered people
or spend time with those who have bad tempers.

25 If you do, you will be like them.
Then you will be in real danger.

## Romans 10:1–21

10 Brothers and sisters, the thing I want most is for all the Jews to be saved. That is my prayer to God. 2 I can say this about them: They really try to follow God, but they do not know the right way. 3 Because they did not know the way that God makes people right with him, they tried to make themselves right in their own way. So they did not accept God’s way of making people right. 4 Christ ended the law so that everyone who believes in him may be right with God.

5 Moses writes about being made right by following the law. He says, “A person who obeys these things will live because of them.”[n] 6 But this is what the Scripture says about being made right through faith: “Don’t say to yourself, ‘Who will go up into heaven?’” (That means, “Who will go up to heaven and bring Christ down to earth?”) 7 “And do not say, ‘Who will go down into the world below?’” (That means, “Who will go down and bring Christ up from the dead?”) 8 This is what the Scripture says: “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart.”[n] That is the teaching of faith that we are telling. 9 If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved. 10 We believe with our hearts, and so we are made right with God. And we declare with our mouths that we believe, and so we are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disappointed.”[n] 12 That Scripture says “anyone” because there is no difference between those who are Jews and those who are not. The same Lord is the Lord of all and gives many blessings to all who trust in him, 13 as the Scripture says, “Anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved.”[n]

14 But before people can ask the Lord for help, they must believe in him; and before they can believe in him, they must hear about him; and for them to hear about the Lord, someone must tell them; 15 and before someone can go and tell them, that person must be sent. It is written, “How beautiful is the person who comes to bring good news.”[n] 16 But not all the Jews accepted the good news. Isaiah said, “Lord, who believed what we told them?”[n] 17 So faith comes from hearing the Good News,

and people hear the Good News when someone tells them about Christ.

[18]But I ask: Didn't people hear the Good News? Yes, they heard—as the Scripture says:

"Their message went out through all the world;
their words go everywhere on earth."

Psalm 19:4

[19]Again I ask: Didn't the people of Israel understand? Yes, they did understand. First, Moses says:

"I will use those who are not a nation to make you jealous.
I will use a nation that does not understand to make you angry."

Deuteronomy 32:21

[20]Then Isaiah is bold enough to say:

"I was found by those who were not asking me for help.
I made myself known to people who were not looking for me."

Isaiah 65:1

[21]But about Israel God says,

"All day long I stood ready to accept
people who disobey and are stubborn."

Isaiah 65:2

# August 11

## All God's Children

*If they could be made God's people by what they did, God's gift of grace would not really be a gift.*

Romans 11:6

To whom does God offer his gift? To the brightest? The most beautiful or the most charming? No. His gift is for us all—beggars and bankers, clergy and clerks, judges and janitors. All God's children.

And he wants us so badly, he'll take us in any condition—"as is" reads the tag on our collars. He's not about to wait for us to reach perfection (he knows we'll never get there!). Do you think he's waiting for us to overcome all temptations? Hardly. When we master the Christian walk? Far from it. Remember, Christ died for us when we were still sinners. His sacrifice, then, was not dependent on our performance.

He wants us *now.*

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Job 13:1—14:22

13 "Now my eyes have seen all this;
my ears have heard and understood it.

2 What you know, I also know.
You are not better than I am.

3 But I want to speak to the Almighty
and to argue my case with God.

[4]But you smear me with lies.
You are worthless doctors, all of you!

[5]I wish you would just stop talking;
then you would really be wise!

[6]Listen to my argument,
and hear the pleading of my lips.

[7]You should not speak evil in the name of God;
you cannot speak God’s truth by telling lies.

[8]You should not unfairly choose his side against mine;
you should not argue the case for God.

[9]You will not do well if he examines you;
you cannot fool God as you might fool humans.

[10]God would surely scold you
if you unfairly took one person’s side.

[11]His bright glory would scare you,
and you would be very much afraid of him.

[12]Your wise sayings are worth no more than ashes,
and your arguments are as weak as clay.

[13]“Be quiet and let me speak.
Let things happen to me as they will.

[14]Why should I put myself in danger
and take my life in my own hands?

[15]Even if God kills me, I have hope in him;
I will still defend my ways to his face.

16 This is my salvation.
The wicked cannot come before him.

17 Listen carefully to my words;
let your ears hear what I say.

18 See, I have prepared my case,
and I know I will be proved right.

19 No one can accuse me of doing wrong.
If someone can, I will be quiet and die.

20 "God, please just give me these two things,
and then I will not hide from you:

21 Take your punishment away from me,
and stop frightening me with your terrors.

22 Then call me, and I will answer,
or let me speak, and you answer.

23 How many evil things and sins have I done?
Show me my wrong and my sin.

24 Don't hide your face from me;
don't think of me as your enemy.

25 Don't punish a leaf that is blown by the wind;
don't chase after straw.

26 You write down cruel things against me
and make me suffer for my boyhood sins.

27 You put my feet in chains
and keep close watch wherever I go.
You even mark the soles of my feet.

28 “Everyone wears out like something rotten,
like clothing eaten by moths.

14 “All of us born to women live only a few days and have lots of trouble.

2 We grow up like flowers and then dry up and die.
We are like a passing shadow that does not last.

3 Lord, do you need to watch me like this?
Must you bring me before you to be judged?

4 No one can bring something clean from something dirty.
5 Our time is limited.
You have given us only so many months to live
and have set limits we cannot go beyond.

6 So look away from us and leave us alone
until we put in our time like a laborer.

7 “If a tree is cut down,
there is hope that it will grow again
and will send out new branches.

8 Even if its roots grow old in the ground,
and its stump dies in the dirt,

9 at the smell of water it will bud
and put out new shoots like a plant.

10 But we die, and our bodies are laid in the ground;
we take our last breath and are gone.

11 Water disappears from a lake,
and a river loses its water and dries up.

12 In the same way, we lie down and do not rise again;
we will not get up or be awakened
until the heavens disappear.

13 "I wish you would hide me in the grave;
hide me until your anger is gone.

I wish you would set a time
and then remember me!

14 Will the dead live again?
All my days are a struggle;
I will wait until my change comes.

15 You will call, and I will answer you;
you will desire the creature your hands have made.

16 Then you will count my steps,
but you will not keep track of my sin.

17 My wrongs will be closed up in a bag,
and you will cover up my sin.

18 "A mountain washes away and crumbles;
and a rock can be moved from its place.

19 Water washes over stones and wears them down,
and rushing waters wash away the dirt.
In the same way, you destroy hope.

20 You defeat people forever, and they are gone;
you change their appearance and send them away.

21 Their children are honored, but they do not know it;
their children are disgraced, but they do not see it.

22 They only feel the pain of their body
and feel sorry for themselves.”

## Psalm 94:12–19

12 LORD, those you correct are happy;
you teach them from your law.

13 You give them rest from times of trouble
until a pit is dug for the wicked.

14 The LORD won’t leave his people
nor give up his children.

15 Judgment will again be fair,
and all who are honest will follow it.

16 Who will help me fight against the wicked?
Who will stand with me against those who do evil?

17 If the LORD had not helped me,
I would have died in a minute.

18 I said, “I am about to fall,”
but, LORD, your love kept me safe.

19 I was very worried,
but you comforted me and made me happy.

## Proverbs 22:26–27

[26]Don’t promise to pay what someone else owes,
and don’t guarantee anyone’s loan.

[27]If you cannot pay the loan,
your own bed may be taken right out from under you.

## Romans 11:1–21

### *God Shows Mercy to All People*

[11] So I ask: Did God throw out his people? No! I myself am an Israelite from the family of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. [2]God chose the Israelites to be his people before they were born, and he has not thrown his people out. Surely you know what the Scripture says about Elijah, how he prayed to God against the people of Israel. [3]“Lord,” he said, “they have killed your prophets, and they have destroyed your altars. I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”[n] [4]But what answer did God give Elijah? He said, “But I have left seven thousand people in Israel who have never bowed down before Baal.”[n] [5]It is the same now. There are a few people that God has chosen by his grace. [6]And if he chose them by grace, it is not for the things they have done. If they could be made God’s people by what they did, God’s gift of grace would not really be a gift.

[7]So this is what has happened: Although the Israelites tried to be right with God, they did not succeed, but the ones God chose did become right with him. The others were made stubborn and refused to listen to God. [8]As it is written in the Scriptures:

“God gave the people a dull mind so they could not understand.”

Isaiah 29:10

“He closed their eyes so they could not see
and their ears so they could not hear.

This continues until today.”

Deuteronomy 29:4

[9]And David says:

“Let their own feasts trap them and cause their ruin;
let their feasts cause them to stumble and be paid back.

10 Let their eyes be closed so they cannot see
and their backs be forever weak from troubles.”

Psalm 69:22–23

11 So I ask: When the Jews fell, did that fall destroy them? No! But their failure brought salvation to those who are not Jews, in order to make the Jews jealous. 12 The Jews’ failure brought rich blessings for the world, and the Jews’ loss brought rich blessings for the non-Jewish people. So surely the world will receive much richer blessings when enough Jews become the kind of people God wants.

13 Now I am speaking to you who are not Jews. I am an apostle to those who are not Jews, and since I have that work, I will make the most of it. 14 I hope I can make my own people jealous and, in that way, help some of them to be saved. 15 When God turned away from the Jews, he became friends with other people in the world. So when God accepts the Jews, surely that will bring them life after death.

16 If the first piece of bread is offered to God, then the whole loaf is made holy. If the roots of a tree are holy, then the tree’s branches are holy too.

17 It is as if some of the branches from an olive tree have been broken off. You non-Jewish people are like the branch of a wild olive tree that has been joined to that first tree. You now share the strength and life of the first tree, the Jews. 18 So do not brag about those branches that were broken off. If you brag, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say, “Branches were broken off so that I could be joined to their tree.” 20 That is true. But those branches were broken off because they did not believe, and you continue to be part of the tree only because you believe. Do not be proud, but be afraid. 21 If God did not let the natural branches of that tree stay, then he will not let you stay if you don’t believe.

# August 12

## Go First to God

*“I will make this agreement with those people when I take away their sins.”*

Romans 11:27

God does more than forgive our mistakes; he removes them! We simply have to take them to him. He not only wants the mistakes we’ve made. He wants the ones we are making! Are you making some? Are you drinking too much? Are you cheating at work or cheating at marriage? Are you mismanaging money? Are you mismanaging your life?

If so, don’t pretend nothing is wrong. Don’t pretend you don’t fall. Don’t try to get back in the game. Go first to God. The first step after a stumble must be in the direction of the Cross.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### Job 15:1—17:2

### *Eliphaz Answers Job*

15 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered: 2“A wise person would not answer with
empty words
or fill his stomach with the hot east wind.

3He would not argue with useless words
or make speeches that have no value.

4But you even destroy respect for God

and limit the worship of him.

5 Your sin teaches your mouth what to say;
you use words to trick others.

6 It is your own mouth, not mine, that shows you are wicked;
your own lips testify against you.

7 “You are not the first man ever born;
you are not older than the hills.

8 You did not listen in on God’s secret council.
But you limit wisdom to yourself.

9 You don’t know any more than we know.
You don’t understand any more than we understand.

10 Old people with gray hair are on our side;
they are even older than your father.

11 Is the comfort God gives you not enough for you,
even when words are spoken gently to you?

12 Has your heart carried you away from God?
Why do your eyes flash with anger?

13 Why do you speak out your anger against God?
Why do these words pour out of your mouth?

14 “How can anyone be pure?
How can someone born to a woman be good?

15 God places no trust in his holy ones,
and even the heavens are not pure in his eyes.

16 How much less pure is one who is terrible and rotten
and drinks up evil as if it were water!

17 “Listen to me, and I will tell you about it;
I will tell you what I have seen.

18 These are things wise men have told;
their ancestors told them, and they have hidden nothing.

19 (The land was given to their fathers only,
and no foreigner lived among them.)

20 The wicked suffer pain all their lives;
the cruel suffer during all the years saved up for them.

21 Terrible sounds fill their ears,
and when things seem to be going well, robbers attack them.

22 Evil people give up trying to escape from the darkness;
it has been decided that they will die by the sword.

23 They wander around and will become food for vultures.
They know darkness will soon come.

24 Worry and suffering terrify them;
they overwhelm them, like a king ready to attack,

25 because they shake their fists at God
and try to get their own way against the Almighty.

26 They stubbornly charge at God
with thick, strong shields.

27 “Although the faces of the wicked are thick with fat,
and their bellies are fat with flesh,

28 they will live in towns that are ruined,
in houses where no one lives,
which are crumbling into ruins.

29 The wicked will no longer get rich,
and the riches they have will not last;
the things they own will no longer spread over the land.

30 They will not escape the darkness.
A flame will dry up their branches;
God's breath will carry the wicked away.

31 The wicked should not fool themselves by trusting what is useless.
If they do, they will get nothing in return.

32 Their branches will dry up before they finish growing
and will never turn green.

33 They will be like a vine whose grapes are pulled off before they are ripe,
like an olive tree that loses its blossoms.

34 People without God can produce nothing.
Fire will destroy the tents of those who take money to do evil,

35 who plan trouble and give birth to evil,
whose hearts plan ways to trick others."

## *Job Answers Eliphaz*

16 Then Job answered: 2 "I have heard many things like these.
You are all painful comforters!

3 Will your long-winded speeches never end?
What makes you keep on arguing?

4 I also could speak as you do
if you were in my place.

I could make great speeches against you
and shake my head at you.

5 But, instead, I would encourage you,
and my words would bring you relief.

6 “Even if I speak, my pain is not less,
and if I don’t speak, it still does not go away.

7 God, you have surely taken away my strength
and destroyed my whole family.

8 You have made me thin and weak,
and this shows I have done wrong.

9 God attacks me and tears me with anger;
he grinds his teeth at me;
my enemy stares at me with his angry eyes.

10 People open their mouths to make fun of me
and hit my cheeks to insult me.
They join together against me.

11 God has turned me over to evil people
and has handed me over to the wicked.

12 Everything was fine with me,
but God broke me into pieces;
he held me by the neck and crushed me.

He has made me his target;
13 his archers surround me.

He stabs my kidneys without mercy;
he spills my blood on the ground.

14 Again and again God attacks me;
he runs at me like a soldier.

15 “I have sewed rough cloth over my skin to show my sadness
and have buried my face in the dust.

16 My face is red from crying;
I have dark circles around my eyes.

17 Yet my hands have never done anything cruel,
and my prayer is pure.

18 “Earth, please do not cover up my blood.
Don’t let my cry ever stop being heard!

19 Even now I have one who speaks for me in heaven;
the one who is on my side is high above.

20 The one who speaks for me is my friend.
My eyes pour out tears to God.

21 He begs God on behalf of a human
as a person begs for his friend.

22 “Only a few years will pass
before I go on the journey of no return.

17 My spirit is broken;
the days of my life are almost gone.
The grave is waiting for me.

2 Those who laugh at me surround me;

I watch them insult me.

## Psalm 94:20–23

20 Crooked leaders cannot be your friends.
They use the law to cause suffering.

21 They join forces against people who do right
and sentence to death the innocent.

22 But the LORD is my defender;
my God is the rock of my protection.

23 God will pay them back for their sins
and will destroy them for their evil.
The LORD our God will destroy them.

## Proverbs 22:28–29

28 Don't move an old stone that marks a border,
because those stones were set up by your ancestors.

29 Do you see people skilled in their work?
They will work for kings, not for ordinary people.

## Romans 11:22–36

22 So you see that God is kind and also very strict. He punishes those who stop following him. But God is kind to you, if you continue following in his kindness. If you do not, you will be cut off from the tree. 23 And if the Jews will believe in God again, he will accept them back. God is able to put them back where they were. 24 It is not natural for a wild branch to be part

of a good tree. And you who are not Jews are like a branch cut from a wild olive tree and joined to a good olive tree. But since those Jews are like a branch that grew from the good tree, surely they can be joined to their own tree again.

25 I want you to understand this secret, brothers and sisters, so you will understand that you do not know everything: Part of Israel has been made stubborn, but that will change when many who are not Jews have come to God. 26 And that is how all Israel will be saved. It is written in the Scriptures:

"The Savior will come from Jerusalem;
he will take away all evil from the family of Jacob.[n]

27 And I will make this agreement with those people
when I take away their sins."

Isaiah 59:20–21; 27:9

28 The Jews refuse to accept the Good News, so they are God's enemies. This has happened to help you who are not Jews. But the Jews are still God's chosen people, and he loves them very much because of the promises he made to their ancestors. 29 God never changes his mind about the people he calls and the things he gives them. 30 At one time you refused to obey God. But now you have received mercy, because those people refused to obey. 31 And now the Jews refuse to obey, because God showed mercy to you. But this happened so that they also can[n] receive mercy from him. 32 God has given all people over to their stubborn ways so that he can show mercy to all.

## *Praise to God*

33 Yes, God's riches are very great, and his wisdom and knowledge have no end! No one can explain the things God decides or understand his ways. 34 As the Scripture says,

"Who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been able to give him advice?"

Isaiah 40:13

35 "No one has ever given God anything
that he must pay back."

Job 41:11

[36]Yes, God made all things, and everything continues through him and for him. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

# August 13

## A Life of Service

*We are many, but in Christ we are all one body. Each one is a part of that body.*

Romans 12:5

God has enlisted us in his navy and placed us on his ship. The boat has one purpose—to carry us safely to the other shore. This is no cruise ship; it's a battleship. We aren't called to a life of leisure; we are called to a life of service. Each of us has a different task. Some, concerned with those who are drowning, are snatching people from the water. Others are occupied with the enemy, so they man the cannons of prayer and worship. Still others devote themselves to the crew, feeding and training the crew members.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call …

We each followed him across the gangplank of his grace onto the same boat. There is one captain and one destination. Though the battle is fierce, the boat is safe, for our captain is God. The ship will not sink. For that, there is no concern.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### Job 17:3—18:21

3 "God, make me a promise.
No one will make a pledge for me.

4 You have closed their minds to understanding.
Do not let them win over me.

5 People might speak against their friends for money,
but if they do, the eyes of their children go blind.

6 “God has made my name a curse word;
people spit in my face.

7 My sight has grown weak because of my sadness,
and my body is as thin as a shadow.

8 Honest people are upset about this;
innocent people are upset with those who do wrong.

9 But those who do right will continue to do right,
and those whose hands are not dirty with sin will grow stronger.

10 “But, all of you, come and try again!
I do not find a wise person among you.

11 My days are gone, and my plans have been destroyed,
along with the desires of my heart.

12 These men think night is day;
when it is dark, they say, ‘Light is near.’

13 If the only home I hope for is the grave,
if I spread out my bed in darkness,

14 if I say to the grave, ‘You are my father,’
and to the worm, ‘You are my mother’ or ‘You are my sister,’

15 where, then, is my hope?
Who can see any hope for me?

16 Will hope go down to the gates of death?

Will we go down together into the dust?”

## *Bildad Answers Job*

18 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:2“When will you stop
these speeches?
Be sensible, and then we can talk.

3You think of us as cattle,
as if we are stupid.

4You tear yourself to pieces in your anger.
Should the earth be vacant just for you?
Should the rocks move from their places?

5“The lamp of the wicked will be put out,
and the flame in their lamps will stop burning.

6The light in their tents will grow dark,
and the lamps by their sides will go out.

7Their strong steps will grow weak;
they will fall into their own evil traps.

8Their feet will be caught in a net
when they walk into its web.

9A trap will catch them by the heel
and hold them tight.

10A trap for them is hidden on the ground,
right in their path.

11Terrible things startle them from every side
and chase them at every step.

12 Hunger takes away their strength,
and disaster is at their side.

13 Disease eats away parts of their skin;
death gnaws at their arms and legs.

14 They are torn from the safety of their tents
and dragged off to Death, the King of Terrors.

15 Their tents are set on fire,
and sulfur is scattered over their homes.

16 Their roots dry up below ground,
and their branches die above ground.

17 People on earth will not remember them;
their names will be forgotten in the land.

18 They will be driven from light into darkness
and chased out of the world.

19 They have no children or descendants among their people,
and no one will be left alive where they once lived.

20 People of the west will be shocked at what has happened to them,
and people of the east will be very frightened.

21 Surely this is what will happen to the wicked;
such is the place of one who does not know God.”

## Psalm 95:1–5

### *A Call to Praise and Obedience*

95 Come, let’s sing for joy to the LORD.Let’s shout praises to the Rock who
saves us.

2Let’s come to him with thanksgiving.
Let’s sing songs to him,

3because the LORD is the great God,
the great King over all gods.

4The deepest places on earth are his,
and the highest mountains belong to him.

5The sea is his because he made it,
and he created the land with his own hands.

## Proverbs 23:1–3

23 If you sit down to eat with a ruler,
notice the food that is in front of you.

2Control yourself
if you have a big appetite.

3Don’t be greedy for his fine foods,
because that food might be a trick.

## Romans 12:1–21

### *Give Your Lives to God*

12 So brothers and sisters, since God has shown us great mercy,
I beg you to offer your lives as a living sacrifice to him. Your
offering must be only for God and pleasing to him, which is the
spiritual way for you to worship. 2Do not be shaped by this
world; instead be changed within by a new way of thinking.
Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will
know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect.
3Because God has given me a special gift, I have something to
say to everyone among you. Do not think you are better than
you are. You must decide what you really are by the amount of
faith God has given you. 4Each one of us has a body with many
parts, and these parts all have different uses. 5In the same way,
we are many, but in Christ we are all one body. Each one is a
part of that body, and each part belongs to all the other parts.
6We all have different gifts, each of which came because of the
grace God gave us. The person who has the gift of prophecy
should use that gift in agreement with the faith. 7Anyone who
has the gift of serving should serve. Anyone who has the gift of
teaching should teach. 8Whoever has the gift of encouraging
others should encourage. Whoever has the gift of giving to
others should give freely. Anyone who has the gift of being a
leader should try hard when he leads. Whoever has the gift of
showing mercy to others should do so with joy.

9Your love must be real. Hate what is evil, and hold on to
what is good. 10Love each other like brothers and sisters. Give
each other more honor than you want for yourselves. 11Do not
be lazy but work hard, serving the Lord with all your heart. 12Be
joyful because you have hope. Be patient when trouble comes,
and pray at all times. 13Share with God's people who need help.
Bring strangers in need into your homes.

14Wish good for those who harm you; wish them well and do
not curse them. 15Be happy with those who are happy, and be
sad with those who are sad. 16Live in peace with each other. Do
not be proud, but make friends with those who seem
unimportant. Do not think how smart you are.

17If someone does wrong to you, do not pay him back by
doing wrong to him. Try to do what everyone thinks is right.
18Do your best to live in peace with everyone. 19My friends, do
not try to punish others when they wrong you, but wait for God
to punish them with his anger. It is written: "I will punish those
who do wrong; I will repay them,"[n] says the Lord. 20But you
should do this:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him a drink.

Doing this will be like pouring burning coals on his head.”

Proverbs 25:21–22

[21]Do not let evil defeat you, but defeat evil by doing good.

# August 14

## What Is Your Price?

*Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich … Wealth can vanish in the wink of an eye.*

Proverbs 23:4–5

Jesus had a definition for *greed*. He called it the practice of measuring life by possessions. Greed equates a person's worth with a person's purse.

1. You got a lot = you are a lot.
2. You got a little = you are little.

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

Greed is not defined by what something costs; it is measured by what it costs you.

If anything costs you your faith or your family, the price is too high.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## Job 19:1—20:29

### *Job Answers Bildad*

19 Then Job answered:2 "How long will you hurt me
and crush me with your words?

3 You have insulted me ten times now
and attacked me without shame.

4 Even if I have sinned,
it is my worry alone.

5 If you want to make yourselves look better than I,
you can blame me for my suffering.

6 Then know that God has wronged me
and pulled his net around me.

7 “I shout, ‘I have been wronged!’
But I get no answer.

I scream for help
but I get no justice.

8 God has blocked my way so I cannot pass;
he has covered my paths with darkness.

9 He has taken away my honor
and removed the crown from my head.

10 He beats me down on every side until I am gone;
he destroys my hope like a fallen tree.

11 His anger burns against me,
and he treats me like an enemy.

12 His armies gather;
they prepare to attack me.
They camp around my tent.

13 “God has made my brothers my enemies,
and my friends have become strangers.

14 My relatives have gone away,
and my friends have forgotten me.

15 My guests and my female servants treat me like a stranger;
they look at me as if I were a foreigner.

16 I call for my servant, but he does not answer,
even when I beg him with my own mouth.

17 My wife can’t stand my breath,
and my own family dislikes me.

18 Even the little boys hate me
and talk about me when I leave.

19 All my close friends hate me;
even those I love have turned against me.

20 I am nothing but skin and bones;
I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

21 Pity me, my friends, pity me,
because the hand of God has hit me.

22 Why do you chase me as God does?
Haven’t you hurt me enough?

23 “How I wish my words were written down,
written on a scroll.

24 I wish they were carved with an iron pen into lead,
or carved into stone forever.

25 I know that my Defender lives,
and in the end he will stand upon the earth.

26 Even after my skin has been destroyed,
in my flesh I will see God.

27 I will see him myself;
I will see him with my very own eyes.
How my heart wants that to happen!

28 "If you say, 'We will continue to trouble Job,
because the problem lies with him,'

29 you should be afraid of the sword yourselves.
God's anger will bring punishment by the sword.
Then you will know there is judgment."

## *Zophar Answers*

20 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered: 2 "My troubled thoughts cause me to answer,
because I am very upset.

3 You correct me and I am insulted,
but I understand how to answer you.

4 "You know how it has been for a long time,
ever since people were first put on the earth.

5 The happiness of evil people is brief,
and the joy of the wicked lasts only a moment.

6 Their pride may be as high as the heavens,
and their heads may touch the clouds,

7 but they will be gone forever, like their own dung.
People who knew them will say, 'Where are they?'

8 They will fly away like a dream
and not be found again;
they will be chased away like a vision in the night.

9 Those who saw them will not see them again;
the places where they lived will see them no more.

10 Their children will have to pay back the poor,
and they will have to give up their wealth.

11 They had the strength of their youth in their bones,
but it will lie with them in the dust of death.

12 “Evil may taste sweet in their mouths,
and they may hide it under their tongues.

13 They cannot stand to let go of it;
they keep it in their mouths.

14 But their food will turn sour in their stomachs,
like the poison of a snake inside them.

15 They have swallowed riches, but they will spit them out;
God will make them vomit their riches up.

16 They will suck the poison of snakes,
and the snake’s fangs will kill them.

17 They will not admire the sparkling streams
or the rivers flowing with honey and cream.

18 They must give back what they worked for without eating it;
they will not enjoy the money they made from their trading,

19 because they troubled the poor and left them with nothing.
They have taken houses they did not build.

20 “Evil people never lack an appetite,

and nothing escapes their selfishness.

21 But nothing will be left for them to eat;
their riches will not continue.

22 When they still have plenty, trouble will catch up to them,
and great misery will come down on them.

23 When the wicked fill their stomachs,
God will send his burning anger against them,
and blows of punishment will fall on them like rain.

24 The wicked may run away from an iron weapon,
but a bronze arrow will stab them.

25 They will pull the arrows out of their backs
and pull the points out of their livers.

Terrors will come over them;
26 total darkness waits for their treasure.

A fire not fanned by people will destroy them
and burn up what is left of their tents.

27 The heavens will show their guilt,
and the earth will rise up against them.

28 A flood will carry their houses away,
swept away on the day of God's anger.

29 This is what God plans for evil people;
this is what he has decided they will receive."

## Psalm 95:6–11

6 Come, let’s worship him and bow down.
Let’s kneel before the LORD who made us,

7 because he is our God
and we are the people he takes care of,
the sheep that he tends.

Today listen to what he says:
8 “Do not be stubborn, as your ancestors were at Meribah,
as they were that day at Massah in the desert.

9 There your ancestors tested me
and tried me even though they saw what I did.

10 I was angry with those people for forty years.
I said, ‘They are not loyal to me
and have not understood my ways.’

11 I was angry and made a promise,
‘They will never enter my rest.’”

## Proverbs 23:4–5

4 Don’t wear yourself out trying to get rich;
be wise enough to control yourself.

5 Wealth can vanish in the wink of an eye.
It can seem to grow wings
and fly away like an eagle.

## Romans 13:1–14

### *Christians Should Obey the Law*

13 All of you must yield to the government rulers. No one rules
unless God has given him the power to rule, and no one rules
now without that power from God. 2So those who are against
the government are really against what God has commanded.
And they will bring punishment on themselves. 3Those who do
right do not have to fear the rulers; only those who do wrong
fear them. Do you want to be unafraid of the rulers? Then do
what is right, and they will praise you. 4The ruler is God's
servant to help you. But if you do wrong, then be afraid. He has
the power to punish; he is God's servant to punish those who do
wrong. 5So you must yield to the government, not only because
you might be punished, but because you know it is right.
6This is also why you pay taxes. Rulers are working for God
and give their time to their work. 7Pay everyone, then, what you
owe. If you owe any kind of tax, pay it. Show respect and honor
to them all.

## *Loving Others*

8Do not owe people anything, except always owe love to each
other, because the person who loves others has obeyed all the
law. 9The law says, "You must not be guilty of adultery. You must
not murder anyone. You must not steal. You must not want to
take your neighbor's things."[n] All these commands and all
others are really only one rule: "Love your neighbor as you love
yourself."[n] 10Love never hurts a neighbor, so loving is obeying
all the law.
11Do this because we live in an important time. It is now time
for you to wake up from your sleep, because our salvation is
nearer now than when we first believed. 12The "night"[n] is
almost finished, and the "day"[n] is almost here. So we should
stop doing things that belong to darkness and take up the
weapons used for fighting in the light. 13Let us live in a right
way, like people who belong to the day. We should not have wild
parties or get drunk. There should be no sexual sins of any kind,
no fighting or jealousy. 14But clothe yourselves with the Lord
Jesus Christ and forget about satisfying your sinful self.

# August 15

## Run to Jesus

*If we live, we are living for the Lord, and if we die, we are dying for the Lord.*

Romans 14:8

Do you wonder where you can go for encouragement and motivation? Go back to that moment when you first saw the love of Jesus Christ. Remember the day when you were separated from Christ? You knew only guilt and confusion and then—a light. Someone opened a door and light came into your darkness, and you said in your heart, "I am redeemed!"

Run to Jesus. Jesus wants you to go to him. He wants to become the most important person in your life, the greatest love you'll ever know. He wants you to love him so much that there's no room in your heart and in your life for sin. Invite him to take up residence in your heart.

from *Walking with the Savior*

## Job 21:1—22:30

### *Job Answers Zophar*

21 Then Job answered: 2"Listen carefully to my words,
and let this be the way you comfort me.

3Be patient while I speak.
After I have finished, you may continue to make fun of me.

4 “My complaint is not just against people;
I have reason to be impatient.

5 Look at me and be shocked;
put your hand over your mouth in shock.

6 When I think about this, I am terribly afraid
and my body shakes.

7 Why do evil people live a long time?
They grow old and become more powerful.

8 They see their children around them;
they watch them grow up.

9 Their homes are safe and without fear;
God does not punish them.

10 Their bulls never fail to mate;
their cows have healthy calves.

11 They send out their children like a flock;
their little ones dance about.

12 They sing to the music of tambourines and harps,
and the sound of the flute makes them happy.

13 Evil people enjoy successful lives
and then go peacefully to the grave.

14 They say to God, ‘Leave us alone!
We don’t want to know your ways.

15 Who is the Almighty that we should serve him?
What would we gain by praying to him?’

16 The success of the wicked is not their own doing.
Their way of thinking is different from mine.

17 Yet how often are the lamps of evil people turned off?
How often does trouble come to them?
How often do they suffer God's angry punishment?

18 How often are they like straw in the wind
or like chaff that is blown away by a storm?

19 It is said, 'God saves up a person's punishment for his children.'
But God should punish the wicked themselves so they will know it.

20 Their eyes should see their own destruction,
and they should suffer the anger of the Almighty.

21 They do not care about the families they leave behind
when their lives have come to an end.

22 "No one can teach knowledge to God;
he is the one who judges even the most important people.

23 One person dies while he still has all his strength,
feeling completely safe and comfortable.

24 His body was well fed,
and his bones were strong and healthy.

25 But another person dies with an unhappy heart,
never enjoying any happiness.

26 They are buried next to each other,
and worms cover them both.

27 “I know very well your thoughts
and your plans to wrong me.

28 You ask about me, ‘Where is this great man’s house?
Where are the tents where the wicked live?’

29 Have you never asked those who travel?
Have you never listened to their stories?

30 On the day of God’s anger and punishment,
it is the wicked who are spared.

31 Who will accuse them to their faces?
Who will pay them back for the evil they have done?

32 They are carried to their graves,
and someone keeps watch over their tombs.

33 The dirt in the valley seems sweet to them.
Everybody follows after them,
and many people go before them.

34 “So how can you comfort me with this nonsense?
Your answers are only lies!”

## *Eliphaz Answers*

22 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered: 2 “Can anyone be of real use to God?
Can even a wise person do him good?

3 Does it help the Almighty for you to be good?
Does he gain anything if you are innocent?

4 Does God punish you for respecting him?
Does he bring you into court for this?

5 No! It is because your evil is without limits
and your sins have no end.

6 You took your brothers' things for a debt they didn't owe;
you took clothes from people and left them naked.

7 You did not give water to tired people,
and you kept food from the hungry.

8 You were a powerful man who owned land;
you were honored and lived in the land.

9 But you sent widows away empty-handed,
and you mistreated orphans.

10 That is why traps are all around you
and sudden danger frightens you.

11 That is why it is so dark you cannot see
and a flood of water covers you.

12 "God is in the highest part of heaven.
See how high the highest stars are!

13 But you ask, 'What does God know?
Can he judge us through the dark clouds?

14 Thick clouds cover him so he cannot see us
as he walks around high up in the sky.'

15 Are you going to stay on the old path
where evil people walk?

16 They were carried away before their time was up,
and their foundations were washed away by a flood.

17 They said to God, ‘Leave us alone!
The Almighty can do nothing to us.’

18 But it was God who filled their houses with good things.
Their way of thinking is different from mine.

19 “Good people can watch and be glad;
the innocent can laugh at them and say,

20 ‘Surely our enemies are destroyed,
and fire burns up their wealth.’

21 “Obey God and be at peace with him;
this is the way to happiness.

22 Accept teaching from his mouth,
and keep his words in your heart.

23 If you return to the Almighty, you will be blessed again.
So remove evil from your house.

24 Throw your gold nuggets into the dust
and your fine gold among the rocks in the ravines.

25 Then the Almighty will be your gold
and the best silver for you.

26 You will find pleasure in the Almighty,
and you will look up to him.

27 You will pray to him, and he will hear you,
and you will keep your promises to him.

28 Anything you decide will be done,
and light will shine on your ways.

29 When people are made humble and you say, ‘Have courage,’
then the humble will be saved.

30 Even a guilty person will escape
and be saved because your hands are clean.”

## Psalm 96:1–6

### *Praise for the LORD’s Glory*

96 Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.

2 Sing to the LORD and praise his name;
every day tell how he saves us.

3 Tell the nations of his glory;
tell all peoples the miracles he does,

4 because the LORD is great; he should be praised at all times.
He should be honored more than all the gods,

5 because all the gods of the nations are only idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.

6 The LORD has glory and majesty;
he has power and beauty in his Temple.

## Proverbs 23:6–8

6 Don’t eat the food of selfish people;
don’t be greedy for their fine foods.

7 Selfish people are always worrying
about how much the food costs.

They tell you, “Eat and drink,”
but they don’t really mean it.

8 You will throw up the little you have eaten,
and you will have wasted your kind words.

## Romans 14:1–23

### *Do Not Criticize Other People*

14 Accept into your group someone who is weak in faith, and do
not argue about opinions. 2 One person believes it is right to eat
all kinds of food.[n] But another, who is weak, believes it is right
to eat only vegetables. 3 The one who knows that it is right to
eat any kind of food must not reject the one who eats only
vegetables. And the person who eats only vegetables must not
think that the one who eats all foods is wrong, because God has
accepted that person. 4 You cannot judge another person’s
servant. The master decides if the servant is doing well or not.
And the Lord’s servant will do well because the Lord helps him
do well.

5 Some think that one day is more important than another,
and others think that every day is the same. Let all be sure in
their own mind. 6 Those who think one day is more important
than other days are doing that for the Lord. And those who eat
all kinds of food are doing that for the Lord, and they give
thanks to God. Others who refuse to eat some foods do that for
the Lord, and they give thanks to God. 7 We do not live or die for
ourselves. 8 If we live, we are living for the Lord, and if we die,
we are dying for the Lord. So living or dying, we belong to the
Lord.

9 The reason Christ died and rose from the dead to live again
was so he would be Lord over both the dead and the living. 10 So
why do you judge your brothers or sisters in Christ? And why do
you think you are better than they are? We will all stand before
God to be judged, 11 because it is written in the Scriptures:

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,

‘Everyone will bow before me;
everyone will say that I am God.’”

Isaiah 45:23

12So each of us will have to answer to God.

## *Do Not Cause Others to Sin*

13For that reason we should stop judging each other. We must make up our minds not to do anything that will make another Christian sin. 14I am in the Lord Jesus, and I know that there is no food that is wrong to eat. But if a person believes something is wrong, that thing is wrong for him. 15If you hurt your brother’s or sister’s faith because of something you eat, you are not really following the way of love. Do not destroy someone’s faith by eating food he thinks is wrong, because Christ died for him. 16Do not allow what you think is good to become what others say is evil. 17In the kingdom of God, eating and drinking are not important. The important things are living right with God, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18Anyone who serves Christ by living this way is pleasing God and will be accepted by other people.

19So let us try to do what makes peace and helps one another. 20Do not let the eating of food destroy the work of God. All foods are all right to eat, but it is wrong to eat food that causes someone else to sin. 21It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that will cause your brother or sister to sin.

22Your beliefs about these things should be kept secret between you and God. People are happy if they can do what they think is right without feeling guilty. 23But those who eat something without being sure it is right are wrong because they did not believe it was right. Anything that is done without believing it is right is a sin.

# August 16

## God Gives Hope

*I pray that the God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in him. Then your hope will overflow by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 15:13

Heaven's hope does for your world what the sunlight did for my grandmother's cellar. I owe my love of peach preserves to her. She canned her own and stored them in an underground cellar near her West Texas house. It was a deep hole with wooden steps, plywood walls, and a musty smell. As a youngster I used to climb in, close the door, and see how long I could last in the darkness … I would sit silently, listening to my breath and heartbeats, until I couldn't take it anymore and then would race up the stairs and throw open the door. Light would avalanche into the cellar. What a change! Moments before I couldn't see anything—all of a sudden I could see everything.

Just as light poured into the cellar, God's hope pours into your world. Upon the sick, he shines the ray of healing. To the bereaved, he gives the promise of reunion. To the confused, he offers the light of Scripture.

from *Traveling Light*

### Job 23:1—25:6

### *Job Answers*

23 Then Job answered:2 "My complaint is still bitter today.
I groan because God's heavy hand is on me.

3 I wish I knew where to find God

so I could go to where he lives.

4 I would present my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.

5 I would learn how he would answer me
and would think about what he would say.

6 Would he not argue strongly against me?
No, he would really listen to me.

7 Then an honest person could present his case to God,
and I would be saved forever by my judge.

8 “If I go to the east, God is not there;
if I go to the west, I do not see him.

9 When he is at work in the north, I catch no sight of him;
when he turns to the south, I cannot see him.

10 But God knows the way that I take,
and when he has tested me, I will come out like gold.

11 My feet have closely followed his steps;
I have stayed in his way;
I did not turn aside.

12 I have never left the commands he has spoken;
I have treasured his words more than my own.

13 “But he is the only God.
Who can come against him?
He does anything he wants.

14 He will do to me what he said he would do,
and he has many plans like this.

15 That is why I am frightened of him;
when I think of this, I am afraid of him.

16 God has made me afraid;
the Almighty terrifies me.

17 But I am not hidden by the darkness,
by the thick darkness that covers my face.

24 “I wish the Almighty would set a time for judging.

Those who know God do not see such a day.

2 Wicked people take other people’s land;
they steal flocks and take them to new pastures.

3 They chase away the orphan’s donkey
and take the widow’s ox when she has no money.

4 They push needy people off the path;
all the poor of the land hide from them.

5 The poor become like wild donkeys in the desert
who go about their job of finding food.
The desert gives them food for their children.

6 They gather hay and straw in the fields
and pick up leftover grapes from the vineyard of the wicked.

7 They spend the night naked, because they have no clothes,
nothing to cover themselves in the cold.

8 They are soaked from mountain rains
and stay near the large rocks because they have no shelter.

9 The fatherless child is grabbed from its mother’s breast;
they take a poor mother’s baby to pay for what she owes.

10 So the poor go around naked without any clothes;
they carry bundles of grain but still go hungry;

11 they crush olives to get oil
and grapes to get wine, but they still go thirsty.

12 Dying people groan in the city,
and the injured cry out for help,
but God accuses no one of doing wrong.

13 “Those who fight against the light
do not know God’s ways
or stay in his paths.

14 When the day is over, the murderers get up
to kill the poor and needy.
At night they go about like thieves.

15 Those who are guilty of adultery watch for the night,
thinking, ‘No one will see us,’
and they keep their faces covered.

16 In the dark, evil people break into houses.
In the daytime they shut themselves up in their own houses,
because they want nothing to do with the light.

17 Darkness is like morning to all these evil people
who make friends with the terrors of darkness.

18 “They are like foam floating on the water.
Their part of the land is cursed;
no one uses the road that goes by their vineyards.

19 As heat and dryness quickly melt the snow,
so the grave quickly takes away the sinners.

20 Their mothers forget them,
and worms will eat their bodies.

They will not be remembered,
so wickedness is broken in pieces like a stick.

21 These evil people abuse women who cannot have children
and show no kindness to widows.

22 But God drags away the strong by his power.
Even though they seem strong, they do not know how long they will live.

23 God may let these evil people feel safe,
but he is watching their ways.

24 For a little while they are important, and then they die;
they are laid low and buried like everyone else;
they are cut off like the heads of grain.

25 If this is not true, who can prove I am wrong?
Who can show that my words are worth nothing?”

## *Bildad Answers*

25 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: 2 “God rules and he must be honored;
he set up order in his high heaven.

3 No one can count God’s armies.
His light shines on all people.

4 So no one can be good in the presence of God,

and no one born to a woman can be pure.

5 Even the moon is not bright
and the stars are not pure in his eyes.

6 People are much less! They are like insects.
They are only worms!”

## Psalm 96:7–10

7 Praise the LORD, all nations on earth;
praise the LORD’s glory and power.

8 Praise the glory of the LORD’s name.
Bring an offering and come into his Temple courtyards.

9 Worship the LORD because he is holy.
Tremble before him, everyone on earth.

10 Tell the nations, “The LORD is king.”
The earth is set, and it cannot be moved.
He will judge the people fairly.

## Proverbs 23:9

9 Don’t speak to fools;
they will only ignore your wise words.

## Romans 15:1–13

15 We who are strong in faith should help the weak with their

weaknesses, and not please only ourselves. 2Let each of us
please our neighbors for their good, to help them be stronger in
faith. 3Even Christ did not live to please himself. It was as the
Scriptures said: “When people insult you, it hurts me.”[n]
4Everything that was written in the past was written to teach
us. The Scriptures give us patience and encouragement so that
we can have hope. 5May the patience and encouragement that
come from God allow you to live in harmony with each other the
way Christ Jesus wants. 6Then you will all be joined together,
and you will give glory to God the Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ. 7Christ accepted you, so you should accept each other,
which will bring glory to God. 8I tell you that Christ became a
servant of the Jews to show that God’s promises to the Jewish
ancestors are true. 9And he also did this so that those who are
not Jews could give glory to God for the mercy he gives to them.
It is written in the Scriptures:

“So I will praise you among the non-Jewish people.
I will sing praises to your name.”

Psalm 18:49

10The Scripture also says,

“Be happy, you who are not Jews, together with his people.”

Deuteronomy 32:43

11Again the Scripture says,

“All you who are not Jews, praise the Lord.
All you people, sing praises to him.”

Psalm 117:1

12And Isaiah says,

“A new king will come from the family of Jesse.[n]
He will come to rule over the non-Jewish people,

and they will have hope because of him.”

Isaiah 11:10

13I pray that the God who gives hope will fill you with much

joy and peace while you trust in him. Then your hope will overflow by the power of the Holy Spirit.

# August 17

## “God Is! God Is!”

*“Who could understand God’s thundering power?”*

Job 26:14

It is the normality not the uniqueness of God’s miracles that causes them to be so staggering. Rather than shocking the globe with an occasional demonstration of deity, God has opted to display his power daily. Proverbially. Pounding waves. Prism-cast colors. Birth, death, life. We are surrounded by miracles. God is throwing testimonies at us like fireworks, each one exploding, “God is! God is!”

The psalmist marveled at such holy handiwork. “Where can I go to get away from your Spirit?” he questioned with delight. “Where can I run from you? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I lie down in the grave, you are there” (Psalm 139:7–8).

We wonder, with so many miraculous testimonies around us, how we could escape God.

But somehow we do. We live in an art gallery of divine creativity and yet are content to gaze only at the carpet.

from *God Came Near*

### Job 26:1–14

### *Job Answers Bildad*

26 Then Job answered: 2 “You are no help to the helpless!
You have not aided the weak!

3 Your advice lacks wisdom!
You have shown little understanding!

4 Who has helped you say these words?
And where did you get these ideas?

5 “The spirits of the dead tremble,
those who are beneath and in the waters.

6 Death is naked before God;
destruction is uncovered before him.

7 God stretches the northern sky out over empty space
and hangs the earth on nothing.

8 He wraps up the waters in his thick clouds,
but the clouds do not break under their weight.

9 He covers the face of the moon,
spreading his clouds over it.

10 He draws the horizon like a circle on the water
at the place where light and darkness meet.

11 Heaven’s foundations shake
when he thunders at them.

12 With his power he quiets the sea;
by his wisdom he destroys Rahab, the sea monster.

13 He breathes, and the sky clears.
His hand stabs the fleeing snake.

14 And these are only a small part of God’s works.
We only hear a small whisper of him.
Who could understand God’s thundering power?”

## Psalm 96:11–13

11 Let the skies rejoice and the earth be glad;
let the sea and everything in it shout.
12 Let the fields and everything in them rejoice.

Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy
13 before the LORD, because he is coming.
He is coming to judge the world;

he will judge the world with fairness
and the peoples with truth.

## Proverbs 23:10–12

10 Don't move an old stone that marks a border,
and don't take fields that belong to orphans.

11 God, their defender, is strong;
he will take their side against you.

12 Remember what you are taught,
and listen carefully to words of knowledge.

## Romans 15:14–33

### *Paul Talks About His Work*

14 My brothers and sisters, I am sure that you are full of goodness. I know that you have all the knowledge you need and that you are able to teach each other. 15 But I have written to you very openly about some things I wanted you to remember. I did this because God gave me this special gift: 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to those who are not Jews. I served God by teaching his Good News, so that the non-Jewish people could

be an offering that God would accept—an offering made holy by the Holy Spirit.

17So I am proud of what I have done for God in Christ Jesus. 18I will not talk about anything except what Christ has done through me in leading those who are not Jews to obey God. They have obeyed God because of what I have said and done, 19because of the power of miracles and the great things they saw, and because of the power of the Holy Spirit. I preached the Good News from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, and so I have finished that part of my work. 20I always want to preach the Good News in places where people have never heard of Christ, because I do not want to build on the work someone else has already started. 21But it is written in the Scriptures:

"Those who were not told about him will see,
and those who have not heard about him will understand."

Isaiah 52:15

## *Paul's Plan to Visit Rome*

22This is the reason I was stopped many times from coming to you. 23Now I have finished my work here. Since for many years I have wanted to come to you, 24I hope to visit you on my way to Spain. After I enjoy being with you for a while, I hope you can help me on my trip. 25Now I am going to Jerusalem to help God's people. 26The believers in Macedonia and Southern Greece were happy to give their money to help the poor among God's people at Jerusalem. 27They were happy to do this, and really they owe it to them. These who are not Jews have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, so they should use their material possessions to help the Jews. 28After I am sure the poor in Jerusalem get the money that has been given for them, I will leave for Spain and stop and visit you. 29I know that when I come to you I will bring Christ's full blessing.

30Brothers and sisters, I beg you to help me in my work by praying to God for me. Do this because of our Lord Jesus and the love that the Holy Spirit gives us. 31Pray that I will be saved from the nonbelievers in Judea and that this help I bring to Jerusalem will please God's people there. 32Then, if God wants me to, I will come to you with joy, and together you and I will have a time of rest. 33The God who gives peace be with you all. Amen.

# August 18

## Glimpses of God's Image

*"God's breath of life is in my nose."*

Job 27:3

"Yes, God made all things, and everything continues through him and for him. To him be the glory forever!" (Romans 11:36). The breath you just took? God gave that. The blood that just pulsed through your heart? Credit God. The light by which you read and the brain with which you process? He gave both.

Everything comes from him … and exists for him. We exist to exhibit God, to display his glory. We serve as canvases for his brush stroke, papers for his pen, soil for his seeds, glimpses of his image.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Job 27:1—28:28

27 And Job continued speaking:2"As surely as God lives, who has
taken away my rights,
the Almighty, who has made me unhappy,

3as long as I am alive
and God's breath of life is in my nose,

4my lips will not speak evil,
and my tongue will not tell a lie.

5I will never agree you are right;
until I die, I will never stop saying I am innocent.

6 I will insist that I am right; I will not back down.
My conscience will never bother me.

7 "Let my enemies be like evil people,
my foes like those who are wrong.

8 What hope do the wicked have when they die,
when God takes their life away?

9 God will not listen to their cries
when trouble comes to them.

10 They will not find joy in the Almighty,
even though they call out to God all the time.

11 "I will teach you about the power of God
and will not hide the ways of the Almighty.

12 You have all seen this yourselves.
So why are we having all this talk that means nothing?

13 "Here is what God has planned for evil people,
and what the Almighty will give to cruel people:

14 They may have many children, but the sword will kill them.
Their children who are left will never have enough to eat.

15 Then they will die of disease and be buried,
and the widows will not even cry for them.

16 The wicked may heap up silver like piles of dirt
and have so many clothes they are like piles of clay.

17 But good people will wear what evil people have gathered,
and the innocent will divide up their silver.

18 The houses the wicked build are like a spider’s web,
like a hut that a guard builds.

19 The wicked are rich when they go to bed,
but they are rich for the last time;
when they open their eyes, everything is gone.

20 Fears come over them like a flood,
and a storm snatches them away in the night.

21 The east wind will carry them away, and then they are gone,
because it sweeps them out of their place.

22 The wind will hit them without mercy
as they try to run away from its power.

23 It will be as if the wind is clapping its hands;
it will whistle at them as they run from their place.

28 “There are mines where people dig silver and places where gold is made pure.

2 Iron is taken from the ground,
and copper is melted out of rocks.

3 Miners bring lights
and search deep into the mines
for ore in thick darkness.

4 Miners dig a tunnel far from where people live,
where no one has ever walked;
they work far from people, swinging and swaying from ropes.

5 Food grows on top of the earth,
but below ground things are changed as if by fire.

[6]Sapphires are found in rocks,
and gold dust is also found there.

[7]No hawk knows that path;
the falcon has not seen it.

[8]Proud animals have not walked there,
and no lions cross over it.

[9]Miners hit the rocks of flint
and dig away at the bottom of the mountains.

[10]They cut tunnels through the rock
and see all the treasures there.

[11]They search for places where rivers begin
and bring things hidden out into the light.

[12]“But where can wisdom be found,
and where does understanding live?

[13]People do not understand the value of wisdom;
it cannot be found among those who are alive.

[14]The deep ocean says, ‘It’s not in me;’
the sea says, ‘It’s not in me.’

[15]Wisdom cannot be bought with gold,
and its cost cannot be weighed in silver.

[16]Wisdom cannot be bought with fine gold
or with valuable onyx or sapphire gems.

[17]Gold and crystal are not as valuable as wisdom,
and you cannot buy it with jewels of gold.

18 Coral and jasper are not worth talking about,
and the price of wisdom is much greater than rubies.

19 The topaz from Cush cannot compare to wisdom;
it cannot be bought with the purest gold.

20 “So where does wisdom come from,
and where does understanding live?

21 It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing,
even from the birds of the air.

22 The places of destruction and death say,
‘We have heard reports about it.’

23 Only God understands the way to wisdom,
and he alone knows where it lives,

24 because he looks to the farthest parts of the earth
and sees everything under the sky.

25 When God gave power to the wind
and measured the water,

26 when he made rules for the rain
and set a path for a thunderstorm to follow,

27 then he looked at wisdom and decided its worth;
he set wisdom up and tested it.

28 Then he said to humans,
‘The fear of the Lord is wisdom;
to stay away from evil is understanding.’”

## Psalm 97:1–6

## *A Hymn About the LORD's Power*

97 The LORD is king. Let the earth rejoice;
faraway lands should be glad.

2Thick, dark clouds surround him.
His kingdom is built on what is right and fair.

3A fire goes before him
and burns up his enemies all around.

4His lightning lights up the world;
when the people see it, they tremble.

5The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the Lord of all the earth.

6The heavens tell about his goodness,
and all the people see his glory.

## Proverbs 23:13–14

13Don't fail to punish children.
If you spank them, they won't die.

14If you spank them,
you will save them from death.

## Romans 16:1–27

## *Greetings to the Christians*

16 I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a helper[n] in the
church in Cenchrea. 2I ask you to accept her in the Lord in the
way God's people should. Help her with anything she needs,
because she has helped me and many other people also.

3Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, who work
together with me in Christ Jesus 4and who risked their own lives
to save my life. I am thankful to them, and all the non-Jewish
churches are thankful as well. 5Also, greet for me the church
that meets at their house.

Greetings to my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first
person in Asia to follow Christ. 6Greetings to Mary, who worked
very hard for you. 7Greetings to Andronicus and Junia, my
relatives, who were in prison with me. They are very important
apostles. They were believers in Christ before I was. 8Greetings
to Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. 9Greetings to
Urbanus, a worker together with me for Christ. And greetings
to my dear friend Stachys. 10Greetings to Apelles, who was
tested and proved that he truly loves Christ. Greetings to all
those who are in the family of Aristobulus. 11Greetings to
Herodion, my fellow citizen. Greetings to all those in the family
of Narcissus who belong to the Lord. 12Greetings to Tryphena
and Tryphosa, women who work very hard for the Lord.
Greetings to my dear friend Persis, who also has worked very
hard for the Lord. 13Greetings to Rufus, who is a special person
in the Lord, and to his mother, who has been like a mother to
me also. 14Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas,
Hermas, and all the brothers and sisters who are with them.
15Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and
Olympas, and to all God's people with them. 16Greet each other
with a holy kiss. All of Christ's churches send greetings to you.

17Brothers and sisters, I ask you to look out for those who
cause people to be against each other and who upset other
people's faith. They are against the true teaching you learned,
so stay away from them. 18Such people are not serving our Lord
Christ but are only doing what pleases themselves. They use
fancy talk and fine words to fool the minds of those who do not
know about evil. 19All the believers have heard that you obey, so
I am very happy because of you. But I want you to be wise in
what is good and innocent in what is evil.

20The God who brings peace will soon defeat Satan and give
you power over him.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

21Timothy, a worker together with me, sends greetings, as
well as Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my relatives.

22I am Tertius, and I am writing this letter from Paul. I send
greetings to you in the Lord.

[23]Gaius is letting me and the whole church here use his home. He also sends greetings to you, as do Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus. [[24]The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.][n]

[25]Glory to God who can make you strong in faith by the Good News that I tell people and by the message about Jesus Christ. The message about Christ is the secret that was hidden for long ages past but is now made known. [26]It has been made clear through the writings of the prophets. And by the command of the eternal God it is made known to all nations that they might believe and obey.

[27]To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

# August 19

# A Work in Progress

*Jesus will keep you strong until the end so that there will be no wrong in you on the day our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.*

1 Corinthians 1:8

God is not finished with you yet. Oh, you may think he is. You may think you've peaked. You may think he's got someone else to do the job. If so, think again.

"God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again" (Philippians 1:6).

Did you see what God is doing? *A good work in you.*

Did you see when he will be finished? *When Jesus comes again.*

May I spell out the message? *God ain't finished with you yet.*

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## Job 29:1—30:31

### *Job Continues*

29 Job continued to speak: 2 "How I wish for the months that have passed
and the days when God watched over me.

3 God's lamp shined on my head,
and I walked through darkness by his light.

4 I wish for the days when I was strong,

when God’s close friendship blessed my house.

5 The Almighty was still with me,
and my children were all around me.

6 It was as if my path were covered with cream
and the rocks poured out olive oil for me.

7 I would go to the city gate
and sit in the public square.

8 When the young men saw me, they would step aside,
and the old men would stand up in respect.

9 The leading men stopped speaking
and covered their mouths with their hands.

10 The voices of the important men were quiet,
as if their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths.

11 Anyone who heard me spoke well of me,
and those who saw me praised me,

12 because I saved the poor who called out
and the orphan who had no one to help.

13 The dying person blessed me,
and I made the widow’s heart sing.

14 I put on right living as if it were clothing;
I wore fairness like a robe and a turban.

15 I was eyes for the blind
and feet for the lame.

16 I was like a father to needy people,
and I took the side of strangers who were in trouble.

17 I broke the fangs of evil people
and snatched the captives from their teeth.

18 "I thought, 'I will live for as many days as there are grains of sand,
and I will die in my own house.

19 My roots will reach down to the water.
The dew will lie on the branches all night.

20 New honors will come to me continually,
and I will always have great strength.'

21 "People listened to me carefully
and waited quietly for my advice.

22 After I finished speaking, they spoke no more.
My words fell very gently on their ears.

23 They waited for me as they would for rain
and drank in my words like spring rain.

24 I smiled at them when they doubted,
and my approval was important to them.

25 I chose the way for them and was their leader.
I lived like a king among his army,
like a person who comforts sad people.

30 "But now those who are younger than I make fun of me.

I would not have even let their fathers
sit with my sheep dogs.

2 What use did I have for their strength
since they had lost their strength to work?

3 They were thin from hunger
and wandered the dry and ruined land at night.

4 They gathered desert plants among the brush
and ate the root of the broom tree.

5 They were forced to live away from people;
people shouted at them as if they were thieves.

6 They lived in dried-up streambeds,
in caves, and among the rocks.

7 They howled like animals among the bushes
and huddled together in the brush.

8 They are worthless people without names
and were forced to leave the land.

9 "Now they make fun of me with songs;
my name is a joke among them.

10 They hate me and stay far away from me,
but they do not mind spitting in my face.

11 God has taken away my strength and made me suffer,
so they attack me with all their anger.

12 On my right side they rise up like a mob.
They lay traps for my feet
and prepare to attack me.

13 They break up my road
and work to destroy me,

and no one helps me.

14 They come at me as if through a hole in the wall,
and they roll in among the ruins.

15 Great fears overwhelm me.
They blow my honor away as if by a great wind,
and my safety disappears like a cloud.

16 “Now my life is almost over;
my days are full of suffering.

17 At night my bones ache;
gnawing pains never stop.

18 In his great power God grabs hold of my clothing
and chokes me with the collar of my coat.

19 He throws me into the mud,
and I become like dirt and ashes.

20 “I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer;
I stand up, but you just look at me.

21 You have turned on me without mercy;
with your powerful hand you attacked me.

22 You snatched me up and threw me into the wind
and tossed me about in the storm.

23 I know you will bring me down to death,
to the place where all living people must go.

24 “Surely no one would hurt those who are ruined
when they cry for help in their time of trouble.

25 I cried for those who were in trouble;
I have been very sad for poor people.

26 But when I hoped for good, only evil came to me;
when I looked for light, darkness came.

27 I never stop being upset;
days of suffering are ahead of me.

28 I have turned black, but not by the sun.
I stand up in public and cry for help.

29 I have become a brother to wild dogs
and a friend to ostriches.

30 My skin has become black and peels off,
as my body burns with fever.

31 My harp is tuned to sing a sad song,
and my flute is tuned to moaning.

## Psalm 97:7–12

7 Those who worship idols should be ashamed;
they brag about their gods.
All the gods should worship the LORD.

8 When Jerusalem hears this, she is glad,
and the towns of Judah rejoice.
They are happy because of your judgments, LORD.

9 You are the LORD Most High over all the earth;
you are supreme over all gods.

10 People who love the LORD hate evil.
The LORD watches over those who follow him
and frees them from the power of the wicked.

11 Light shines on those who do right;
joy belongs to those who are honest.

12 Rejoice in the LORD, you who do right.
Praise his holy name.

## Proverbs 23:15–16

15 My child, if you are wise,
then I will be happy.

16 I will be so pleased
if you speak what is right.

## 1 Corinthians 1:1–31

1 From Paul. God called me to be an apostle of Christ Jesus because that is what God wanted. Also from Sosthenes, our brother in Christ.

2 To the church of God in Corinth, to you who have been made holy in Christ Jesus. You were called to be God's holy people with all people everywhere who pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### *Paul Gives Thanks to God*

4 I always thank my God for you because of the grace God has given you in Christ Jesus. 5 I thank God because in Christ you have been made rich in every way, in all your speaking and in all your knowledge. 6 Just as our witness about Christ has been guaranteed to you, 7 so you have every gift from God while you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to come again. 8 Jesus will keep

you strong until the end so that there will be no wrong in you on the day our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. 9God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

## *Problems in the Church*

10I beg you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree with each other and not be split into groups. I beg that you be completely joined together by having the same kind of thinking and the same purpose. 11My brothers and sisters, some people from Chloe's family have told me quite plainly that there are quarrels among you. 12This is what I mean: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another says, "I follow Apollos"; another says, "I follow Peter"; and another says, "I follow Christ." 13Christ has been divided up into different groups! Did Paul die on the cross for you? No! Were you baptized in the name of Paul? No! 14I thank God I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius 15so that now no one can say you were baptized in my name. 16(I also baptized the family of Stephanas, but I do not remember that I baptized anyone else.) 17Christ did not send me to baptize people but to preach the Good News. And he sent me to preach the Good News without using words of human wisdom so that the cross[n] of Christ would not lose its power.

## *Christ Is God's Power and Wisdom*

18The teaching about the cross is foolishness to those who are being lost, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19It is written in the Scriptures:

"I will cause the wise to lose their wisdom;
I will make the wise unable to understand."

Isaiah 29:14

20Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the skilled talker of this world? God has made the wisdom of the world foolish. 21In the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its own wisdom. So God chose to use the message that sounds foolish to save those who believe. 22The Jews ask for miracles, and the Greeks want wisdom. 23But we preach a crucified Christ. This causes the Jews to stumble and is foolishness to non-Jews. 24But Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God to those people God has called—Jews and Greeks. 25Even the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human

strength.

[26]Brothers and sisters, look at what you were when God called you. Not many of you were wise in the way the world judges wisdom. Not many of you had great influence. Not many of you came from important families. [27]But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and he chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. [28]He chose what the world thinks is unimportant and what the world looks down on and thinks is nothing in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. [29]God did this so that no one can brag in his presence. [30]Because of God you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God. In Christ we are put right with God, and have been made holy, and have been set free from sin. [31]So, as the Scripture says, “If people want to brag, they should brag only about the Lord.”[n]

# August 20

## God's Surprises

*"No one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."*

1 Corinthians 2:9

Have you got God figured out? Have you got God captured on a flowchart and frozen on a flannelboard? If so, then listen. Listen to God's surprises. Hear the rocks meant for the body of the adulterous woman drop to the ground.

Listen as the Messiah whispers to the Samaritan woman, "I am he—I, the one talking to you" (John 4:26).

Listen to the widow from Nain eating dinner with her son who is supposed to be dead …

God appearing at the strangest of places. Doing the strangest of things. Stretching smiles where there had hung only frowns. Placing twinkles where there were only tears.

from *Six Hours One Friday*

### Job 31:1—32:22

31 "But I made an agreement with my eyes not to look with
desire at a girl.

2 What has God above promised for people?
What has the Almighty planned from on high?

3 It is ruin for evil people
and disaster for those who do wrong.

4 God sees my ways
and counts every step I take.

5 “If I have been dishonest
or lied to others,

6 then let God weigh me on honest scales.
Then he will know I have done nothing wrong.

7 If I have turned away from doing what is right,
or my heart has been led by my eyes to do wrong,
or my hands have been made unclean,

8 then let other people eat what I have planted,
and let my crops be plowed up.

9 “If I have desired another woman
or have waited at my neighbor’s door for his wife,

10 then let my wife grind another man’s grain,
and let other men have sexual relations with her.

11 That would be shameful,
a sin to be punished.

12 It is like a fire that burns and destroys;
all I have done would be plowed up.

13 “If I have been unfair to my male and female slaves
when they had a complaint against me,

14 how could I tell God what I did?
What will I answer when he asks me to explain what I’ve done?

15 God made me in my mother’s womb, and he also made them;
the same God formed both of us in our mothers’ wombs.

16 “I have never refused the appeals of the poor
or let widows give up hope while looking for help.

17 I have not kept my food to myself
but have given it to the orphans.

18 Since I was young, I have been like a father to the orphans.
From my birth I guided the widows.

19 I have not let anyone die for lack of clothes
or let a needy person go without a coat.

20 That person’s heart blessed me,
because I warmed him with the wool of my sheep.

21 I have never hurt an orphan
even when I knew I could win in court.

22 If I have, then let my arm fall off my shoulder
and be broken at the joint.

23 I fear destruction from God,
and I fear his majesty, so I could not do such things.

24 “I have not put my trust in gold
or said to pure gold, ‘You are my security.’

25 I have not celebrated my great wealth
or the riches my hands had gained.

26 I have not thought about worshiping the sun in its brightness
nor admired the moon moving in glory

27 so that my heart was pulled away from God.

My hand has never offered the sun and moon a kiss of worship.

28 If I had, these also would have been sins to be punished,
because I would have been unfaithful to God.

29 "I have not been happy when my enemies fell
or laughed when they had trouble.

30 I have not let my mouth sin
by cursing my enemies' life.

31 The servants of my house have always said,
'All have eaten what they want of Job's food.'

32 No stranger ever had to spend the night in the street,
because I always let travelers stay in my home.

33 I have not hidden my sin as others do,
secretly keeping my guilt to myself.

34 I was not so afraid of the crowd
that I kept quiet and stayed inside
because I feared being hated by other families.

35 ("How I wish a court would hear my case!
Here I sign my name to show I have told the truth.

Now let the Almighty answer me;
let the one who accuses me write it down.

36 I would wear the writing on my shoulder;
I would put it on like a crown.

37 I would explain to God every step I took,
and I would come near to him like a prince.)

38 “If my land cries out against me
and its plowed rows are not wet with tears,

39 if I have taken the land’s harvest without paying
or have broken the spirit of those who worked the land,

40 then let thorns come up instead of wheat,
and let weeds come up instead of barley.”

The words of Job are finished.

## *Elihu Speaks*

32 These three men stopped trying to answer Job, because he was so sure he was right. 2 But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, from the family of Ram, became very angry with Job, because Job claimed he was right instead of God. 3 Elihu was also angry with Job’s three friends who had no answer to show that Job was wrong, yet continued to blame him. 4 Elihu had waited before speaking to Job, because the three friends were older than he was. 5 But when Elihu saw that the three men had nothing more to say, he became very angry.

6 So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said this:

“I am young,
and you are old.

That is why I was afraid
to tell you what I know.

7 I thought, ‘Older people should speak,
and those who have lived many years should teach wisdom.’

8 But it is the spirit in a person,
the breath of the Almighty, that gives understanding.

9 It is not just older people who are wise;
they are not the only ones who understand what is right.

10 So I say, listen to me.
I too will tell you what I know.

11 I waited while you three spoke,
and listened to your explanations.

While you looked for words to use,
12 I paid close attention to you.

But not one of you has proved Job wrong;
none of you has answered his arguments.

13 Don’t say, ‘We have found wisdom;
only God will show Job to be wrong, not people.’

14 Job has not spoken his words against me,
so I will not use your arguments to answer Job.

15 “These three friends are defeated and have no more to say;
words have failed them.

16 Now they are standing there with no answers for Job.
Now that they are quiet, must I wait to speak?

17 No, I too will speak
and tell what I know.

18 I am full of words,
and the spirit in me causes me to speak.

19 I am like wine that has been bottled up;
I am ready to burst like a new leather wine bag.

20 I must speak so I will feel relief;
I must open my mouth and answer.

21 I will be fair to everyone
and not flatter anyone.

22 I don't know how to flatter,
and if I did, my Maker would quickly take me away.

## Psalm 98:1–3

### *The LORD of Power and Justice*

**A psalm.**

98 Sing to the LORD a new song, because he has done miracles.

By his right hand and holy arm
he has won the victory.

2 The LORD has made known his power to save;
he has shown the other nations his victory for his people.

3 He has remembered his love
and his loyalty to the people of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
God's power to save.

## Proverbs 23:17–18

17 Don't envy sinners,
but always respect the LORD.

18 Then you will have hope for the future,
and your wishes will come true.

# 1 Corinthians 2:1–16

## *The Message of Christ's Death*

2 Dear brothers and sisters, when I came to you, I did not come
preaching God's secret[n] with fancy words or a show of human
wisdom. 2I decided that while I was with you I would forget
about everything except Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.
3So when I came to you, I was weak and fearful and trembling.
4My teaching and preaching were not with words of human
wisdom that persuade people but with proof of the power that
the Spirit gives. 5This was so that your faith would be in God's
power and not in human wisdom.

## *God's Wisdom*

6However, I speak a wisdom to those who are mature. But
this wisdom is not from this world or from the rulers of this
world, who are losing their power. 7I speak God's secret
wisdom, which he has kept hidden. Before the world began, God
planned this wisdom for our glory. 8None of the rulers of this
world understood it. If they had, they would not have crucified
the Lord of glory. 9But as it is written in the Scriptures:

"No one has ever seen this,
and no one has ever heard about it.

No one has ever imagined
what God has prepared for those who love him."

Isaiah 64:4

10But God has shown us these things through the Spirit.
The Spirit searches out all things, even the deep secrets of
God. 11Who knows the thoughts that another person has? Only
a person's spirit that lives within him knows his thoughts. It is
the same with God. No one knows the thoughts of God except
the Spirit of God. 12Now we did not receive the spirit of the
world, but we received the Spirit that is from God so that we
can know all that God has given us. 13And we speak about these
things, not with words taught us by human wisdom but with
words taught us by the Spirit. And so we explain spiritual truths
to spiritual people. 14A person who does not have the Spirit
does not accept the truths that come from the Spirit of God.

That person thinks they are foolish and cannot understand them, because they can only be judged to be true by the Spirit.
15 The spiritual person is able to judge all things, but no one can judge him. The Scripture says:

> 16 “Who has known the mind of the Lord?
> Who has been able to teach him?”
>
> Isaiah 40:13

But we have the mind of Christ.

# August 21

## Taking Inventory

*Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

1 Corinthians 3:16

All believers have God in their heart. But not all believers have given their whole heart to God. Remember, the question is not, how can I have more of the Spirit? But rather, how can the Spirit have more of me? Take inventory. As you look around your life, do you see any resistant pockets? … Go down the list …

Your tongue. Do you tend to stretch the truth? Puff up the facts? Your language? Is your language a sewer of profanities and foul talk? And grudges? Do you keep resentments parked in your "garudge"? Are you unproductive and lazy? Do you live off the system, assuming that the church or the country should take care of you? …

Do your actions interrupt the flow of the Spirit in your life?

from *Come Thirsty*

## Job 33:1—34:37

33 "Now, Job, listen to my words.Pay attention to everything I say.

2 I open my mouth
and am ready to speak.

3 My words come from an honest heart,
and I am sincere in saying what I know.

4 The Spirit of God created me,
and the breath of the Almighty gave me life.

5 Answer me if you can;
get yourself ready and stand before me.

6 I am just like you before God;
I too am made out of clay.

7 Don't be afraid of me;
I will not be hard on you.

8 "But I heard what you have said;
I heard every word.

9 You said, 'I am pure and without sin;
I am innocent and free from guilt.

10 But God has found fault with me;
he considers me his enemy.

11 He locks my feet in chains
and closely watches everywhere I go.'

12 "But I tell you, you are not right in saying this,
because God is greater than we are.

13 Why do you accuse God
of not answering anyone?

14 God does speak—sometimes one way and sometimes another—
even though people may not understand it.

15 He speaks in a dream or a vision of the night
when people are in a deep sleep,

lying on their beds.

16 He speaks in their ears
and frightens them with warnings

17 to turn them away from doing wrong
and to keep them from being proud.

18 God does this to save people from death,
to keep them from dying.

19 People may be corrected while in bed in great pain;
they may have continual pain in their very bones.

20 They may be in such pain that they even hate food,
even the very best meal.

21 Their body becomes so thin there is almost nothing left of it,
and their bones that were hidden now stick out.

22 They are near death,
and their life is almost over.

23 “But there may be an angel to speak for him,
one out of a thousand, who will tell him what to do.

24 The angel will beg for mercy and say:
‘Save him from death.
I have found a way to pay for his life.’

25 Then his body is made new like a child’s.
It will return to the way it was when he was young.

26 That person will pray to God, and God will listen to him.
He will see God’s face and will shout with happiness.

And God will set things right for him again.

27 Then he will say to others,
'I sinned and twisted what was right,
but I did not receive the punishment I should have received.

28 God bought my life back from death,
and I will continue to enjoy life.'

29 "God does all these things to a person
two or even three times

30 so he won't die as punishment for his sins
and so he may still enjoy life.

31 "Job, pay attention and listen to me;
be quiet, and I will speak.

32 If you have anything to say, answer me;
speak up, because I want to prove you right.

33 But if you have nothing to say, then listen to me;
be quiet, and I will teach you wisdom."

34 Then Elihu said: 2 "Hear my words, you wise men;
listen to me, you who know a lot.

3 The ear tests words
as the tongue tastes food.

4 Let's decide for ourselves what is right,
and let's learn together what is good.

5 "Job says, 'I am not guilty,
and God has refused me a fair trial.

6 Instead of getting a fair trial,
I am called a liar.

I have been seriously hurt,
even though I have not sinned.’

7 There is no other man like Job;
he takes insults as if he were drinking water.

8 He keeps company with those who do evil
and spends time with wicked men,

9 because he says, ‘It is no use
to try to please God.’

10 “So listen to me, you who can understand.
God can never do wrong!
It is impossible for the Almighty to do evil.

11 God pays people back for what they have done
and gives them what their actions deserve.

12 Truly God will never do wrong;
the Almighty will never twist what is right.

13 No one chose God to rule over the earth
or put him in charge of the whole world.

14 If God should decide
to take away life and breath,

15 then everyone would die together
and turn back into dust.

16 “If you can understand, hear this;
listen to what I have to say.

17 Can anyone govern who hates what is right?
How can you blame God who is both fair and powerful?

18 God is the one who says to kings, ‘You are worthless,’
or to important people, ‘You are evil.’

19 He is not nicer to princes than other people,
nor kinder to rich people than poor people,
because he made them all with his own hands.

20 They can die in a moment, in the middle of the night.
They are struck down, and then they pass away;
powerful people die without help.

21 “God watches where people go;
he sees every step they take.

22 There is no dark place or deep shadow
where those who do evil can hide from him.

23 He does not set a time
for people to come before him for judging.

24 Without asking questions, God breaks powerful people into pieces
and puts others in their place.

25 Because God knows what people do,
he defeats them in the night, and they are crushed.

26 He punishes them for the evil they do
so that everyone else can watch,

27 because they stopped following God
and did not care about any of his ways.

[28]The cry of the poor comes to God;
he hears the cry of the needy.

[29]But if God keeps quiet, who can blame him?
If he hides his face, who can see him?

God still rules over both nations and persons alike.
[30] He keeps the wicked from ruling
and from trapping others.

[31]"But suppose someone says to God,
'I am guilty, but I will not sin anymore.

[32]Teach me what I cannot see.
If I have done wrong, I will not do it again.'

[33]So, Job, should God reward you as you want
when you refuse to change?

You must decide, not I,
so tell me what you know.

[34]"Those who understand speak,
and the wise who hear me say,

[35]'Job speaks without knowing what is true;
his words show he does not understand.'

[36]I wish Job would be tested completely,
because he answered like an evil man!

[37]Job now adds to his sin by turning against God.
He claps his hands in protest,
speaking more and more against God."

## Psalm 98:4–9

4 Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth;
burst into songs and make music.

5 Make music to the LORD with harps,
with harps and the sound of singing.

6 Blow the trumpets and the sheep's horns;
shout for joy to the LORD the King.

7 Let the sea and everything in it shout;
let the world and everyone in it sing.

8 Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the mountains sing together for joy.

9 Let them sing before the LORD,
because he is coming to judge the world.

He will judge the world fairly;
he will judge the peoples with fairness.

## Proverbs 23:19–21

19 Listen, my child, and be wise.
Keep your mind on what is right.

20 Don't drink too much wine
or eat too much food.

21 Those who drink and eat too much become poor.

They sleep too much and end up wearing rags.

## 1 Corinthians 3:1–23

### *Following People Is Wrong*

3 Brothers and sisters, in the past I could not talk to you as I
talk to spiritual people. I had to talk to you as I would to people
without the Spirit—babies in Christ. 2The teaching I gave you
was like milk, not solid food, because you were not able to take
solid food. And even now you are not ready. 3You are still not
spiritual, because there is jealousy and quarreling among you,
and this shows that you are not spiritual. You are acting like
people of the world. 4One of you says, “I belong to Paul,” and
another says, “I belong to Apollos.” When you say things like
this, you are acting like people of the world.

5Is Apollos important? No! Is Paul important? No! We are
only servants of God who helped you believe. Each one of us did
the work God gave us to do. 6I planted the seed, and Apollos
watered it. But God is the One who made it grow. 7So the one
who plants is not important, and the one who waters is not
important. Only God, who makes things grow, is important. 8The
one who plants and the one who waters have the same purpose,
and each will be rewarded for his own work. 9We are God’s
workers, working together; you are like God’s farm, God’s
house.

10Using the gift God gave me, I laid the foundation of that
house like an expert builder. Others are building on that
foundation, but all people should be careful how they build on
it. 11The foundation that has already been laid is Jesus Christ,
and no one can lay down any other foundation. 12But if people
build on that foundation, using gold, silver, jewels, wood, grass,
or straw, 13their work will be clearly seen, because the Day of
Judgment[n] will make it visible. That Day will appear with fire,
and the fire will test everyone’s work to show what sort of work
it was. 14If the building that has been put on the foundation still
stands, the builder will get a reward. 15But if the building is
burned up, the builder will suffer loss. The builder will be
saved, but it will be as one who escaped from a fire.

16Don’t you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s
Spirit lives in you? 17If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will
destroy that person, because God’s temple is holy and you are
that temple.

18Do not fool yourselves. If you think you are wise in this

world, you should become a fool so that you can become truly wise, [19]because the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. It is written in the Scriptures, “He catches those who are wise in their own clever traps.”[n] [20]It is also written in the Scriptures, “The Lord knows what wise people think. He knows their thoughts are just a puff of wind.”[n] [21]So you should not brag about human leaders. All things belong to you: [22]Paul, Apollos, and Peter; the world, life, death, the present, and the future—all these belong to you. [23]And you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

# August 22

## Your Personal Blessing

*God will praise each one of them.*

1 Corinthians 4:5

what an incredible sentence. *God will praise each one of them*. Not “the best of them” nor “a few of them” nor “the achievers among them,” but “God will praise each one of them.”

You won’t be left out. God will see to that. In fact, God himself will give the praise. When it comes to giving recognition, God does not delegate the job. Michael doesn’t hand out the crowns. Gabriel doesn’t speak on behalf of the throne. God himself does the honors. God himself will praise his children.

And what’s more, the praise is personal! … Awards aren’t given a nation at a time, a church at a time, or a generation at a time. The crowns are given one at a time. God himself will look you in the eye and bless you with the words, “You did well. You are a good and loyal servant” (Matthew 25:23).

from *When Christ Comes*

### Job 35:1—36:33

35 Then Elihu said:2“Do you think this is fair?
You say, ‘God will show that I am right,’

3but you also ask, ‘What’s the use?
I don’t gain anything by not sinning.’

4“I will answer you
and your friends who are with you.

[5]Look up at the sky
and see the clouds so high above you.

[6]If you sin, it does nothing to God;
even if your sins are many, they do nothing to him.

[7]If you are good, you give nothing to God;
he receives nothing from your hand.

[8]Your evil ways only hurt others like yourself,
and the good you do only helps other human beings.

[9]“People cry out when they are in trouble;
they beg for relief from powerful people.

[10]But no one asks, ‘Where is God, my Maker,
who gives us songs in the night,

[11]who makes us smarter than the animals of the earth
and wiser than the birds of the air?’

[12]God does not answer evil people when they cry out,
because the wicked are proud.

[13]God does not listen to their useless begging;
the Almighty pays no attention to them.

[14]He will listen to you even less
when you say that you do not see him,
that your case is before him,
that you must wait for him,

[15] that his anger never punishes,
and that he doesn’t notice evil.

[16]So Job is only speaking nonsense,

saying many words without knowing what is true.”

## *Elihu’s Speech Continues*

36 Elihu continued:2“Listen to me a little longer, and I will
show you
that there is more to be said for God.

3What I know comes from far away.
I will show that my Maker is right.

4You can be sure that my words are not false;
one who really knows is with you.

5“God is powerful, but he does not hate people;
he is powerful and sure of what he wants to do.

6He will not keep evil people alive,
but he gives the poor their rights.

7He always watches over those who do right;
he sets them on thrones with kings
and they are honored forever.

8If people are bound in chains,
or if trouble, like ropes, ties them up,

9God tells them what they have done,
that they have sinned in their pride.

10God makes them listen to his warning
and commands them to change from doing evil.

11If they obey and serve him,
the rest of their lives will be successful,
and the rest of their years will be happy.

12 But if they do not listen,
they will die by the sword,
and they will die without knowing why.

13 “Those who have wicked hearts hold on to anger.
Even when God punishes them, they do not cry for help.

14 They die while they are still young,
and their lives end in disgrace.

15 But God saves those who suffer through their suffering;
he gets them to listen through their pain.

16 “God is gently calling you from the jaws of trouble
to an open place of freedom
where he has set your table full of the best food.

17 But now you are being punished like the wicked;
you are getting justice.

18 Be careful! Don’t be led away from God by riches;
don’t let much money turn you away.

19 Neither your wealth nor all your great strength
will keep you out of trouble.

20 Don’t wish for the night
when people are taken from their homes.

21 Be careful not to turn to evil,
which you seem to want more than suffering.

22 “God is great and powerful;
no other teacher is like him.

23 No one has planned his ways for him;

no one can say to God, ‘You have done wrong.’

24 Remember to praise his work,
about which people have sung.

25 Everybody has seen it;
people look at it from far off.

26 God is so great, greater than we can understand!
No one knows how old he is.

27 “He evaporates the drops of water from the earth
and turns them into rain.

28 The rain then pours down from the clouds,
and showers fall on people.

29 No one understands how God spreads out the clouds
or how he sends thunder from where he lives.

30 Watch how God scatters his lightning around him,
lighting up the deepest parts of the sea.

31 This is the way God governs the nations;
this is how he gives us enough food.

32 God fills his hands with lightning
and commands it to strike its target.

33 His thunder announces the coming storm,
and even the cattle know it is near.

## Psalm 99:1–9

## *The Lord, the Fair and Holy King*

99 The LORD is king.
Let the peoples shake with fear.

He sits between the gold creatures with wings.
Let the earth shake.

2 The LORD in Jerusalem is great;
he is supreme over all the peoples.

3 Let them praise your name;
it is great, holy and to be feared.

4 The King is powerful and loves justice.
LORD, you made things fair;

you have done what is fair and right
for the people of Jacob.

5 Praise the LORD our God,
and worship at the Temple, his footstool.
He is holy.

6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
and Samuel was among his worshipers.

They called to the LORD,
and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud.
They kept the rules and laws he gave them.

8 LORD our God, you answered them.
You showed them that you are a forgiving God,

but you punished them for their wrongs.

[9]Praise the LORD our God,
and worship at his holy mountain,
because the LORD our God is holy.

## Proverbs 23:22–25

[22]Listen to your father, who gave you life,
and do not forget your mother when she is old.

[23]Learn the truth and never reject it.
Get wisdom, self-control, and understanding.

[24]The father of a good child is very happy;
parents who have wise children are glad because of them.

[25]Make your father and mother happy;
give your mother a reason to be glad.

## 1 Corinthians 4:1–21

### *Apostles Are Servants of Christ*

[4] People should think of us as servants of Christ, the ones God has trusted with his secrets. [2]Now in this way those who are trusted with something valuable must show they are worthy of that trust. [3]As for myself, I do not care if I am judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. [4]I know of no wrong I have done, but this does not make me right before the Lord. The Lord is the One who judges me. [5]So do not judge before the right time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light things that are now hidden in darkness, and will make known the secret purposes of people's hearts. Then God will praise each one of them.

[6]Brothers and sisters, I have used Apollos and myself as examples so you could learn through us the meaning of the saying, “Follow only what is written in the Scriptures.” Then you will not be more proud of one person than another. [7]Who says you are better than others? What do you have that was not given to you? And if it was given to you, why do you brag as if you did not receive it as a gift?

[8]You think you already have everything you need. You think you are rich. You think you have become kings without us. I wish you really were kings so we could be kings together with you. [9]But it seems to me that God has put us apostles in last place, like those sentenced to die. We are like a show for the whole world to see—angels and people. [10]We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are very wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You receive honor, but we are shamed. [11]Even to this very hour we do not have enough to eat or drink or to wear. We are often beaten, and we have no homes in which to live. [12]We work hard with our own hands for our food. When people curse us, we bless them. When they hurt us, we put up with it. [13]When they tell evil lies about us, we speak nice words about them. Even today, we are treated as though we were the garbage of the world—the filth of the earth.

[14]I am not trying to make you feel ashamed. I am writing this to give you a warning as my own dear children. [15]For though you may have ten thousand teachers in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Through the Good News I became your father in Christ Jesus, [16]so I beg you, please follow my example. [17]That is why I am sending to you Timothy, my son in the Lord. I love Timothy, and he is faithful. He will help you remember my way of life in Christ Jesus, just as I teach it in all the churches everywhere.

[18]Some of you have become proud, thinking that I will not come to you again. [19]But I will come to you very soon if the Lord wishes. Then I will know what the proud ones do, not what they say, [20]because the kingdom of God is present not in talk but in power. [21]Which do you want: that I come to you with punishment or with love and gentleness?

# August 23

## Jesus Honors You

*The LORD is good. His love is forever, and his loyalty goes on and on.*

Psalm 100:5

LISTEN closely. Jesus' love does not depend upon what we do for him. Not at all. In the eyes of the King, you have value simply because you are. You don't have to look nice or perform well. Your value is inborn.

Period.

Think about that for just a minute. You are valuable just because you exist. Not because of what you do or what you have done, but simply because you are. Remember that the next time you are left bobbing in the wake of someone's steamboat ambition. Remember that the next time some trickster tries to hang a bargain basement price tag on your self-worth. The next time someone tries to pass you off as a cheap buy, just think about the way Jesus honors you … and smile.

I do. I smile because I know I don't deserve love like that. None of us do.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Job 37:1—38:41

37 "At the sound of his thunder, my
heart pounds
as if it will jump out of my chest.

2 Listen! Listen to the thunder of God's voice
and to the rumbling that comes from his mouth.

[3]He turns his lightning loose under the whole sky
and sends it to the farthest parts of the earth.

[4]After that you can hear the roar
when he thunders with a great sound.

He does not hold back the flashing
when his voice is heard.

[5]God’s voice thunders in wonderful ways;
he does great things we cannot understand.

[6]He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth,’
and to the shower, ‘Be a heavy rain.’

[7]With it, he stops everyone from working
so everyone knows it is the work of God.

[8]The animals take cover from the rain
and stay in their dens.

[9]The storm comes from where it was stored;
the cold comes with the strong winds.

[10]The breath of God makes ice,
and the wide waters become frozen.

[11]He fills the clouds with water
and scatters his lightning through them.

[12]At his command they swirl around
over the whole earth,
doing whatever he commands.

[13]He uses the clouds to punish people
or to water his earth and show his love.

14 “Job, listen to this:
Stop and notice God’s miracles.

15 Do you know how God controls the clouds
and makes his lightning flash?

16 Do you know how the clouds hang in the sky?
Do you know the miracles of God, who knows everything?

17 You suffer in your clothes
when the land is silenced by the hot, south wind.

18 You cannot stretch out the sky like God
and make it look as hard as polished bronze.

19 Tell us what we should say to him;
we cannot get our arguments ready because we do not have enough understanding.

20 Should God be told that I want to speak?
Would a person ask to be swallowed up?

21 No one can look at the sun
when it is bright in the sky
after the wind has blown all the clouds away.

22 God comes out of the north in golden light,
in overwhelming greatness.

23 The Almighty is too high for us to reach.
He has great strength;
he is always right and never punishes unfairly.

24 That is why people honor him;
he does not respect those who say they are wise.”

## *The LORD Questions Job*

38 Then the LORD answered Job from the storm. He said:

2 “Who is this that makes my purpose unclear
by saying things that are not true?

3 Be strong like a man!
I will ask you questions,
and you must answer me.

4 Where were you when I made the earth’s foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.

5 Who marked off how big it should be? Surely you know!
Who stretched a ruler across it?

6 What were the earth’s foundations set on,
or who put its cornerstone in place

7 while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted with joy?

8 “Who shut the doors to keep the sea in
when it broke through and was born,

9 when I made the clouds like a coat for the sea
and wrapped it in dark clouds,

10 when I put limits on the sea
and put its doors and bars in place,

11 when I said to the sea, ‘You may come this far, but no farther;
this is where your proud waves must stop’?

12 “Have you ever ordered the morning to begin,

or shown the dawn where its place was

13 in order to take hold of the earth by its edges
and shake evil people out of it?

14 At dawn the earth changes like clay being pressed by a seal;
the hills and valleys stand out like folds in a coat.

15 Light is not given to evil people;
their arm is raised to do harm, but it is broken.

16 “Have you ever gone to where the sea begins
or walked in the valleys under the sea?

17 Have the gates of death been opened to you?
Have you seen the gates of the deep darkness?

18 Do you understand how wide the earth is?
Tell me, if you know all these things.

19 “What is the path to light’s home,
and where does darkness live?

20 Can you take them to their places?
Do you know the way to their homes?

21 Surely you know, if you were already born when all this happened!
Have you lived that many years?

22 “Have you ever gone into the storehouse of the snow
or seen the storehouses for hail,

23 which I save for times of trouble,
for days of war and battle?

[24]Where is the place from which light comes?
Where is the place from which the east winds blow over the earth?

[25]Who cuts a waterway for the heavy rains
and sets a path for the thunderstorm?

[26]Who waters the land where no one lives,
the desert that has no one in it?

[27]Who sends rain to satisfy the empty land
so the grass begins to grow?

[28]Does the rain have a father?
Who is father to the drops of dew?

[29]Who is the mother of the ice?
Who gives birth to the frost from the sky

[30]when the water becomes hard as stone,
and even the surface of the ocean is frozen?

[31]“Can you tie up the stars of the Pleiades
or loosen the ropes of the stars in Orion?

[32]Can you bring out the stars on time
or lead out the stars of the Bear with its cubs?

[33]Do you know the laws of the sky
and understand their rule over the earth?

[34]“Can you shout an order to the clouds
and cover yourself with a flood of water?

[35]Can you send lightning bolts on their way?
Do they come to you and say, ‘Here we are’?

[36]Who put wisdom inside the mind
or understanding in the heart?

[37]Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?
Who can pour water from the jars of the sky

[38]when the dust becomes hard
and the clumps of dirt stick together?

[39]"Do you hunt food for the female lion
to satisfy the hunger of the young lions

[40]while they lie in their dens
or hide in the bushes waiting to attack?

[41]Who gives food to the birds
when their young cry out to God
and wander about without food?

## Psalm 100:1–5

### *A Call to Praise the Lord*

**A psalm of thanks.**

[100] Shout to the LORD, all the earth.[2] Serve the LORD with joy;
come before him with singing.

[3]Know that the LORD is God.
He made us, and we belong to him;
we are his people, the sheep he tends.

[4]Come into his city with songs of thanksgiving
and into his courtyards with songs of praise.
Thank him and praise his name.

5 The LORD is good. His love is forever,
and his loyalty goes on and on.

## Proverbs 23:26–28

26 My son, pay attention to me,
and watch closely what I do.

27 A prostitute is as dangerous as a deep pit,
and an unfaithful wife is like a narrow well.

28 They ambush you like robbers
and cause many men to be unfaithful to their wives.

## 1 Corinthians 5:1–13

### *Wickedness in the Church*

5 It is actually being said that there is sexual sin among you.
And it is a kind that does not happen even among people who
do not know God. A man there has his father's wife. 2 And you
are proud! You should have been filled with sadness so that the
man who did this should be put out of your group. 3 I am not
there with you in person, but I am with you in spirit. And I have
already judged the man who did that sin as if I were really
there. 4 When you meet together in the name of our Lord Jesus,
and I meet with you in spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus,
5 then hand this man over to Satan. So his sinful self[n] will be
destroyed, and his spirit will be saved on the day of the Lord.

6 Your bragging is not good. You know the saying, "Just a
little yeast makes the whole batch of dough rise." 7 Take out all
the old yeast so that you will be a new batch of dough without
yeast, which you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has
been sacrificed. 8 So let us celebrate this feast, but not with the
bread that has the old yeast—the yeast of sin and wickedness.
Let us celebrate this feast with the bread that has no yeast—the
bread of goodness and truth.

9 I wrote you in my earlier letter not to associate with those

who sin sexually. 10But I did not mean you should not associate
with those of this world who sin sexually, or with the greedy, or
robbers, or those who worship idols. To get away from them you
would have to leave this world. 11I am writing to tell you that
you must not associate with those who call themselves believers
in Christ but who sin sexually, or are greedy, or worship idols,
or abuse others with words, or get drunk, or cheat people. Do
not even eat with people like that.

12–13It is not my business to judge those who are not part of
the church. God will judge them. But you must judge the people
who are part of the church. The Scripture says, “You must get
rid of the evil person among you.”[n]

# August 24

## The Temple of God's Spirit

*You should know that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit who is in you. You have received the Holy Spirit from God. So you do not belong to yourselves.*

1 Corinthians 6:19

You will live forever in this body. It will be different, mind you. What is now crooked will be straightened. What is now faulty will be fixed. Your body will be different, but you won't have a different body. You will have this one. Does that change the view you have of it? I hope so.

God has a high regard for your body. You should as well. Respect it. I did not say worship it. But I did say respect it. It is after all the temple of God. Be careful how you feed it, use it, and maintain it. You wouldn't want anyone trashing your home; God doesn't want anyone trashing his. After all, it is his, isn't it?

from *When Christ Comes*

### Job 39:1—40:24

39 "Do you know when the mountain goats
give birth?
Do you watch when the deer gives birth to her fawn?

2 Do you count the months until they give birth
and know the right time for them to give birth?

3 They lie down, their young are born,
and then the pain of giving birth is over.

[4]Their young ones grow big and strong in the wild country.
Then they leave their homes and do not return.

[5]“Who let the wild donkey go free?
Who untied its ropes?

[6]I am the one who gave the donkey the desert as its home;
I gave it the desert lands as a place to live.

[7]The wild donkey laughs at the confusion in the city,
and it does not hear the drivers shout.

[8]It roams the hills looking for pasture,
looking for anything green to eat.

[9]“Will the wild ox agree to serve you
and stay by your feeding box at night?

[10]Can you hold it to the plowed row with a harness
so it will plow the valleys for you?

[11]Will you depend on the wild ox for its great strength
and leave your heavy work for it to do?

[12]Can you trust the ox to bring in your grain
and gather it to your threshing floor?

[13]“The wings of the ostrich flap happily,
but they are not like the feathers of the stork.

[14]The ostrich lays its eggs on the ground
and lets them warm in the sand.

[15]It does not stop to think that a foot might step on them and crush them;
it does not care that some animal might walk on them.

16 The ostrich is cruel to its young, as if they were not even its own.
It does not care that its work is for nothing,

17 because God did not give the ostrich wisdom;
God did not give it a share of good sense.

18 But when the ostrich gets up to run, it is so fast
that it laughs at the horse and its rider.

19 “Job, are you the one who gives the horse its strength
or puts a flowing mane on its neck?

20 Do you make the horse jump like a locust?
It scares people with its proud snorting.

21 It paws wildly, enjoying its strength,
and charges into battle.

22 It laughs at fear and is afraid of nothing;
it does not run away from the sword.

23 The bag of arrows rattles against the horse’s side,
along with the flashing spears and swords.

24 With great excitement, the horse races over the ground;
and it cannot stand still when it hears the trumpet.

25 When the trumpet blows, the horse snorts, ‘Aha!’
It smells the battle from far away;
it hears the shouts of commanders and the battle cry.

26 “Is it through your wisdom that the hawk flies
and spreads its wings toward the south?

27 Are you the one that commands the eagle to fly

and build its nest so high?

28 It lives on a high cliff and stays there at night;
the rocky peak is its protected place.

29 From there it looks for its food;
its eyes can see it from far away.

30 Its young eat blood,
and where there is something dead, the eagle is there.”

40 The LORD said to Job: 2 “Will the person who argues with the Almighty correct him?
Let the person who accuses God answer him.”

3 Then Job answered the LORD:

4 “I am not worthy; I cannot answer you anything,
so I will put my hand over my mouth.

5 I spoke one time, but I will not answer again;
I even spoke two times, but I will say nothing more.”

6 Then the LORD spoke to Job from the storm:

7 “Be strong, like a man!
I will ask you questions,
and you must answer me.

8 Would you say that I am unfair?
Would you blame me to make yourself look right?

9 Are you as strong as God?
Can your voice thunder like his?

10 If so, then decorate yourself with glory and beauty;
dress in honor and greatness as if they were clothing.

11 Let your great anger punish;
look at the proud and bring them down.

12 Look at the proud and make them humble.
Crush the wicked wherever they are.

13 Bury them all in the dirt together;
cover their faces in the grave.

14 If you can do that, then I myself will praise you,
because you are strong enough to save yourself.

15 “Look at Behemoth,[n]
which I made just as I made you.
It eats grass like an ox.

16 Look at the strength it has in its body;
the muscles of its stomach are powerful.

17 Its tail is like a cedar tree;
the muscles of its thighs are woven together.

18 Its bones are like tubes of bronze;
its legs are like bars of iron.

19 It is one of the first of God’s works,
but its Maker can destroy it.

20 The hills, where the wild animals play,
provide food for it.

21 It lies under the lotus plants,
hidden by the tall grass in the swamp.

22 The lotus plants hide it in their shadow;
the poplar trees by the streams surround it.

23 If the river floods, it will not be afraid;
it is safe even if the Jordan River rushes to its mouth.

24 Can anyone blind its eyes and capture it?
Can anyone put hooks in its nose?

## Psalm 101:1–4

### *A Promise to Rule Well*

**A psalm of David.**

101 I will sing of your love and fairness; LORD, I will sing praises to you.

2 I will be careful to live an innocent life.
When will you come to me?

I will live an innocent life in my house.
3 I will not look at anything wicked.

I hate those who turn against you;
they will not be found near me.

4 Let those who want to do wrong stay away from me;
I will have nothing to do with evil.

## Proverbs 23:29–30

29 Who has trouble? Who has pain?
Who fights? Who complains?

Who has unnecessary bruises?
Who has bloodshot eyes?

30 It is people who drink too much wine,
who try out all different kinds of strong drinks.

## 1 Corinthians 6:1–20

### *Judging Problems Among Christians*

6 When you have something against another Christian, how can
you bring yourself to go before judges who are not right with
God? Why do you not let God's people decide who is right?
2 Surely you know that God's people will judge the world. So if
you are to judge the world, are you not able to judge small
cases as well? 3 You know that in the future we will judge angels,
so surely we can judge the ordinary things of this life. 4 If you
have ordinary cases that must be judged, are you going to
appoint people as judges who mean nothing to the church? 5 I
say this to shame you. Surely there is someone among you wise
enough to judge a complaint between believers. 6 But now one
believer goes to court against another believer—and you do this
in front of unbelievers!
7 The fact that you have lawsuits against each other shows
that you are already defeated. Why not let yourselves be
wronged? Why not let yourselves be cheated? 8 But you
yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do this to other
believers!
9–10 Surely you know that the people who do wrong will not
inherit God's kingdom. Do not be fooled. Those who sin sexually,
worship idols, take part in adultery, those who are male
prostitutes, or men who have sexual relations with other men,
those who steal, are greedy, get drunk, lie about others, or rob
—these people will not inherit God's kingdom. 11 In the past,
some of you were like that, but you were washed clean. You
were made holy, and you were made right with God in the name
of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

### *Use Your Bodies for God's Glory*

12 "I am allowed to do all things," but not all things are good
for me to do. "I am allowed to do all things," but I will not let
anything make me its slave. 13 "Food is for the stomach, and the

stomach for food," but God will destroy them both. The body is not for sexual sin but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.
14By his power God has raised the Lord from the dead and will also raise us from the dead. 15Surely you know that your bodies are parts of Christ himself. So I must never take the parts of Christ and join them to a prostitute! 16It is written in the Scriptures, "The two will become one body."[n] So you should know that anyone who joins with a prostitute becomes one body with the prostitute. 17But the one who joins with the Lord is one spirit with the Lord.

18So run away from sexual sin. Every other sin people do is outside their bodies, but those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies. 19You should know that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit who is in you. You have received the Holy Spirit from God. So you do not belong to yourselves, 20because you were bought by God for a price. So honor God with your bodies.

# August 25

## God Knows What He's Doing

*"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand; I talked of things too wonderful for me to know."*

Job 42:3

It's easy to thank God when he does what we want. But God doesn't always do what we want. Ask Job. His empire collapsed, his children were killed, and what was a healthy body became a rage of boils. From whence came this torrent? From whence will come any help?

Job goes straight to God and pleads his case. His head hurts. His body hurts. His heart hurts.

And God answers. Not with answers but with questions. An ocean of questions …

After several dozen questions … Job has gotten the point. What is it?

The point is this: God owes no one anything. No reasons. No explanations. Nothing. If he gave them, we couldn't understand them.

God is God. He knows what he is doing. When you can't trace his hand, trust his heart.

from *The Inspirational Study Bible*

### Job 41:1—42:17

41 "Can you catch Leviathan[n] on a fishhook or tie its tongue
down with a rope?

2 Can you put a cord through its nose
or a hook in its jaw?

3 Will it keep begging you for mercy
and speak to you with gentle words?

[4]Will it make an agreement with you
and let you take it as your slave for life?

[5]Can you make a pet of Leviathan as you would a bird
or put it on a leash for your girls?

[6]Will traders try to bargain with you for it?
Will they divide it up among the merchants?

[7]Can you stick darts all over its skin
or fill its head with fishing spears?

[8]If you put one hand on it,
you will never forget the battle,
and you will never do it again!

[9]There is no hope of defeating it;
just seeing it overwhelms people.

[10]No one is brave enough to make it angry,
so who would be able to stand up against me?

[11]No one has ever given me anything that I must pay back,
because everything under the sky belongs to me.

[12]“I will speak about Leviathan’s arms and legs,
its great strength and well-formed body.

[13]No one can tear off its outer hide
or poke through its double armor.

[14]No one can force open its great jaws;
they are filled with frightening teeth.

[15]It has rows of shields on its back
that are tightly sealed together.

16 Each shield is so close to the next one
that no air can go between them.

17 They are joined strongly to one another;
they hold on to each other and cannot be separated.

18 When it snorts, flashes of light are thrown out,
and its eyes look like the light at dawn.

19 Flames blaze from its mouth;
sparks of fire shoot out.

20 Smoke pours out of its nose,
as if coming from a large pot over a hot fire.

21 Its breath sets coals on fire,
and flames come out of its mouth.

22 There is great strength in its neck.
People are afraid and run away.

23 The folds of its skin are tightly joined;
they are set and cannot be moved.

24 Its chest is as hard as a rock,
even as hard as a grinding stone.

25 The powerful fear its terrible looks
and draw back in fear as it moves.

26 The sword that hits it does not hurt it,
nor the arrows, darts, and spears.

27 It treats iron as if it were straw
and bronze metal as if it were rotten wood.

28It does not run away from arrows;
stones from slings are like chaff to it.

29Clubs feel like pieces of straw to it,
and it laughs when they shake a spear at it.

30The underside of its body is like broken pieces of pottery.
It leaves a trail in the mud like a threshing board.

31It makes the deep sea bubble like a boiling pot;
it stirs up the sea like a pot of oil.

32When it swims, it leaves a shining path in the water
that makes the sea look as if it had white hair.

33Nothing else on earth is equal to it;
it is a creature without fear.

34It looks down on all those who are too proud;
it is king over all proud creatures.”

## *Job Answers the LORD*

42 Then Job answered the LORD: 2“I know that you can do all things
and that no plan of yours can be ruined.

3You asked, ‘Who is this that made my purpose unclear by saying things that are not true?’
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand;
I talked of things too wonderful for me to know.

4You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak.
I will ask you questions,
and you must answer me.’

5 My ears had heard of you before,
but now my eyes have seen you.

6 So now I hate myself;
I will change my heart and life.
I will sit in the dust and ashes.”

### *End of the Story*

7 After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not said what is right about me, as my servant Job did. 8 Now take seven bulls and seven male sheep, and go to my servant Job, and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will listen to his prayer. Then I will not punish you for being foolish. You have not said what is right about me, as my servant Job did.” 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite did as the LORD said, and the LORD listened to Job’s prayer.

10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD gave him success again. The LORD gave Job twice as much as he had owned before. 11 Job’s brothers and sisters came to his house, along with everyone who had known him before, and they all ate with him there. They comforted him and made him feel better about the trouble the LORD had brought on him, and each one gave Job a piece of silver and a gold ring.

12 The LORD blessed the last part of Job’s life even more than the first part. Job had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand teams of oxen, and a thousand female donkeys. 13 Job also had seven sons and three daughters. 14 He named the first daughter Jemimah, the second daughter Keziah, and the third daughter Keren-Happuch. 15 There were no other women in all the land as beautiful as Job’s daughters. And their father Job gave them land to own along with their brothers.

16 After this, Job lived one hundred forty years. He lived to see his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. 17 Then Job died; he was old and had lived many years.

## Psalm 101:5–8

5 If anyone secretly says things against his neighbor,

I will stop him.

I will not allow people
to be proud and look down on others.

6 I will look for trustworthy people
so I can live with them in the land.

Only those who live innocent lives
will be my servants.

7 No one who is dishonest will live in my house;
no liars will stay around me.

8 Every morning I will destroy the wicked in the land.
I will rid the LORD's city of people who do evil.

## Proverbs 23:31–35

31 Don't stare at the wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup,
when it goes down smoothly.

32 Later it bites like a snake
with poison in its fangs.

33 Your eyes will see strange sights,
and your mind will be confused.

34 You will feel dizzy as if you're in a storm on the ocean,
as if you're on top of a ship's sails.

35 You will think, "They hit me, but I'm not hurt.
They beat me up, but I don't remember it.

I wish I could wake up.
Then I would get another drink.”

## 1 Corinthians 7:1–16

### *About Marriage*

7 Now I will discuss the things you wrote me about. It is good
for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. 2But
because sexual sin is a danger, each man should have his own
wife, and each woman should have her own husband. 3The
husband should give his wife all that he owes her as his wife.
And the wife should give her husband all that she owes him as
her husband. 4The wife does not have full rights over her own
body; her husband shares them. And the husband does not have
full rights over his own body; his wife shares them. 5Do not
refuse to give your bodies to each other, unless you both agree
to stay away from sexual relations for a time so you can give
your time to prayer. Then come together again so Satan cannot
tempt you because of a lack of self-control. 6I say this to give
you permission to stay away from sexual relations for a time. It
is not a command to do so. 7I wish that everyone were like me,
but each person has his own gift from God. One has one gift,
another has another gift.

8Now for those who are not married and for the widows I say
this: It is good for them to stay unmarried as I am. 9But if they
cannot control themselves, they should marry. It is better to
marry than to burn with sexual desire.

10Now I give this command for the married people. (The
command is not from me; it is from the Lord.) A wife should not
leave her husband. 11But if she does leave, she must not marry
again, or she should make up with her husband. Also the
husband should not divorce his wife.

12For all the others I say this (I am saying this, not the Lord):
If a Christian man has a wife who is not a believer, and she is
happy to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13And if a
Christian woman has a husband who is not a believer, and he is
happy to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14The husband
who is not a believer is made holy through his believing wife.
And the wife who is not a believer is made holy through her
believing husband. If this were not true, your children would
not be clean, but now your children are holy.

15But if those who are not believers decide to leave, let them
leave. When this happens, the Christian man or woman is free.
But God called us[n] to live in peace. 16Wife, you don’t know;

maybe you will save your husband. And husband, you don’t know; maybe you will save your wife.

# August 26

## Fix Your Eyes on Jesus

*I want you to live in the right way, to give yourselves fully to the Lord without concern for other things.*

1 Corinthians 7:35

what [does] it mean to be just like Jesus? The world has never known a heart so pure, a character so flawless. His spiritual hearing was so keen he never missed a heavenly whisper. His mercy so abundant he never missed a chance to forgive. No lie left his lips, no distraction marred his vision. He touched when others recoiled. He endured when others quit.

Jesus is the ultimate model for every person … God urges you to fix your eyes upon Jesus. Heaven invites you to set the lens of your heart on the heart of the Savior and make him the object of your life.

from *Just Like Jesus*

### Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:26

1 These are the words of the Teacher, a son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 The Teacher says,
"Useless! Useless!

Completely useless!
Everything is useless."

3 What do people really gain
from all the hard work they do here on earth?

## *Things Never Change*

[4]People live, and people die,
but the earth continues forever.

[5]The sun rises, the sun sets,
and then it hurries back to where it rises again.

[6]The wind blows to the south;
it blows to the north.

It blows from one direction and then another.
Then it turns around and repeats the same pattern, going nowhere.

[7]All the rivers flow to the sea,
but the sea never becomes full.

[8]Everything is boring,
so boring that you don’t even want to talk about it.

Words come again and again to our ears,
but we never hear enough,
nor can we ever really see all we want to see.

[9]All things continue the way they have been since the beginning.
What has happened will happen again;
there is nothing new here on earth.

[10]Someone might say,
“Look, this is new,”

but really it has always been here.
It was here before we were.

11 People don’t remember what happened long ago,
and in the future people will not remember what happens now.
Even later, other people will not remember what was done before them.

## *Does Wisdom Bring Happiness?*

12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I decided to use my wisdom to learn about everything that happens on earth. I learned that God has given us terrible things to face. 14 I looked at everything done on earth and saw that it is all useless, like chasing the wind.

15 If something is crooked,
you can’t make it straight.

If something is missing,
you can’t say it is there.

16 I said to myself, “I have become very wise and am now wiser than anyone who ruled Jerusalem before me. I know what wisdom and knowledge really are.” 17 So I decided to find out about wisdom and knowledge and also about foolish thinking, but this turned out to be like chasing the wind.

18 With much wisdom comes much disappointment;
the person who gains more knowledge also gains more sorrow.

## *Does “Having Fun” Bring Happiness?*

2 I said to myself, “I will try having fun. I will enjoy myself.” But I found that this is also useless. 2 It is foolish to laugh all the time, and having fun doesn’t accomplish anything. 3 I decided to cheer myself up with wine while my mind was still thinking wisely. I wanted to find a way to enjoy myself and see what was good for people to do during their few days of life.

## *Does Hard Work Bring Happiness?*

4 Then I did great things: I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made gardens and parks, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made pools of water for myself and used

them to water my growing trees. [7]I bought male and female slaves, and slaves were also born in my house. I had large herds and flocks, more than anyone in Jerusalem had ever had before. [8]I also gathered silver and gold for myself, treasures from kings and other areas. I had male and female singers and all the women a man could ever want. [9]I became very famous, even greater than anyone who had lived in Jerusalem before me. My wisdom helped me in all this.

[10]Anything I saw and wanted, I got for myself;
I did not miss any pleasure I desired.

I was pleased with everything I did,
and this pleasure was the reward for all my hard work.

[11]But then I looked at what I had done,
and I thought about all the hard work.

Suddenly I realized it was useless, like chasing the wind.
There is nothing to gain from anything we do here on earth.

## *Maybe Wisdom Is the Answer*

[12]Then I began to think again about being wise,
and also about being foolish and doing crazy things.

But after all, what more can anyone do?
He can’t do more than what the other king has already done.

[13]I saw that being wise is certainly better than being foolish,
just as light is better than darkness.

[14]Wise people see where they are going,
but fools walk around in the dark.

Yet I saw that
both wise and foolish people end the same way.

15 I thought to myself,

“What happens to a fool will happen to me, too,
so what is the reward for being wise?”

I said to myself,
“Being wise is also useless.”

16 The wise person and the fool
will both die,

and no one will remember either one for long.
In the future, both will be forgotten.

### *Is There Real Happiness in Life?*

17 So I hated life. It made me sad to think that everything here on earth is useless, like chasing the wind. 18 I hated all the things I had worked for here on earth, because I must leave them to someone who will live after me. 19 Someone else will control everything for which I worked so hard here on earth, and I don’t know if he will be wise or foolish. This is also useless. 20 So I became sad about all the hard work I had done here on earth. 21 People can work hard using all their wisdom, knowledge, and skill, but they will die, and other people will get the things for which they worked. They did not do the work, but they will get everything. This is also unfair and useless. 22 What do people get for all their work and struggling here on earth? 23 All of their lives their work is full of pain and sorrow, and even at night their minds don’t rest. This is also useless.

24 The best that people can do is eat, drink, and enjoy their work. I saw that even this comes from God, 25 because no one can eat or enjoy life without him. 26 If people please God, God will give them wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But sinners will get only the work of gathering and storing wealth that they will have to give to the ones who please God. So all their work is useless, like chasing the wind.

## Psalm 102:1–11

## *A Cry for Help*

**A prayer of a person who is suffering when he is discouraged and tells the LORD his complaints.**

102 LORD, listen to my prayer; let my cry for help come to you.

2 Do not hide from me
in my time of trouble.

Pay attention to me.
When I cry for help, answer me quickly.

3 My life is passing away like smoke,
and my bones are burned up with fire.

4 My heart is like grass
that has been cut and dried.
I forget to eat.

5 Because of my grief,
my skin hangs on my bones.

6 I am like a desert owl,
like an owl living among the ruins.

7 I lie awake.
I am like a lonely bird on a housetop.

8 All day long enemies insult me;
those who make fun of me use my name as a curse.

9 I eat ashes for food,

and my tears fall into my drinks.

10 Because of your great anger,
you have picked me up and thrown me away.

11 My days are like a passing shadow;
I am like dried grass.

## Proverbs 24:1–2

24 Don’t envy evil people or try to be friends with them.

2 Their minds are always planning violence,
and they always talk about making trouble.

## 1 Corinthians 7:17–40

### *Live as God Called You*

17 But in any case each one of you should continue to live the way God has given you to live—the way you were when God called you. This is a rule I make in all the churches. 18 If a man was already circumcised when he was called, he should not undo his circumcision. If a man was without circumcision when he was called, he should not be circumcised. 19 It is not important if a man is circumcised or not. The important thing is obeying God’s commands. 20 Each one of you should stay the way you were when God called you. 21 If you were a slave when God called you, do not let that bother you. But if you can be free, then make good use of your freedom. 22 Those who were slaves when the Lord called them are free persons who belong to the Lord. In the same way, those who were free when they were called are now Christ’s slaves. 23 You all were bought at a great price, so do not become slaves of people. 24 Brothers and sisters, each of you should stay as you were when you were called, and stay there with God.

### *Questions About Getting Married*

25 Now I write about people who are not married. I have no
command from the Lord about this; I give my opinion. But I can
be trusted, because the Lord has shown me mercy. 26 The
present time is a time of trouble, so I think it is good for you to
stay the way you are. 27 If you have a wife, do not try to become
free from her. If you are not married, do not try to find a wife.
28 But if you decide to marry, you have not sinned. And if a girl
who has never married decides to marry, she has not sinned.
But those who marry will have trouble in this life, and I want
you to be free from trouble.

29 Brothers and sisters, this is what I mean: We do not have
much time left. So starting now, those who have wives should
live as if they had no wives. 30 Those who are crying should live
as if they were not crying. Those who are happy should live as if
they were not happy. Those who buy things should live as if they
own nothing. 31 Those who use the things of the world should
live as if they were not using them, because this world in its
present form will soon be gone.

32 I want you to be free from worry. A man who is not married
is busy with the Lord's work, trying to please the Lord. 33 But a
man who is married is busy with things of the world, trying to
please his wife. 34 He must think about two things—pleasing his
wife and pleasing the Lord. A woman who is not married or a
girl who has never married is busy with the Lord's work. She
wants to be holy in body and spirit. But a married woman is
busy with things of the world, as to how she can please her
husband. 35 I am saying this to help you, not to limit you. But I
want you to live in the right way, to give yourselves fully to the
Lord without concern for other things.

36 If a man thinks he is not doing the right thing with the girl
he is engaged to, if she is almost past the best age to marry and
he feels he should marry her, he should do what he wants. They
should get married. It is no sin. 37 But if a man is sure in his
mind that there is no need for marriage, and has his own
desires under control, and has decided not to marry the one to
whom he is engaged, he is doing the right thing. 38 So the man
who marries his girl does right, but the man who does not
marry will do better.

39 A woman must stay with her husband as long as he lives.
But if her husband dies, she is free to marry any man she wants,
but she must marry another believer. 40 The woman is happier if
she does not marry again. This is my opinion, but I believe I also
have God's Spirit.

# August 27

## Who Can Fathom Eternity?

*God has given them a desire to know the future … but people can never completely understand what he is doing.*

Ecclesiastes 3:11

It doesn't take a wise person to know that people long for more than earth. When we see pain, we yearn. When we see hunger, we question why. Senseless deaths. Endless tears, needless loss …

We have our moments. The newborn on our breast, the bride on our arm, the sunshine on our back. But even those moments are simply slivers of light breaking through heaven's window. God flirts with us. He tantalizes us. He romances us. Those moments are appetizers for the dish that is to come.

"No one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

What a breathtaking verse! Do you see what it says? *Heaven is beyond our imagination …* At our most creative moment, at our deepest thought, at our highest level, we still cannot fathom eternity.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

### Ecclesiastes 3:1–22

### *There Is a Time for Everything*

3 There is a time for everything,and everything on earth has its
special season.

2There is a time to be born

and a time to die.

There is a time to plant
and a time to pull up plants.

3 There is a time to kill
and a time to heal.

There is a time to destroy
and a time to build.

4 There is a time to cry
and a time to laugh.

There is a time to be sad
and a time to dance.

5 There is a time to throw away stones
and a time to gather them.

There is a time to hug
and a time not to hug.

6 There is a time to look for something
and a time to stop looking for it.

There is a time to keep things
and a time to throw things away.

7 There is a time to tear apart
and a time to sew together.

There is a time to be silent
and a time to speak.

[8]There is a time to love
and a time to hate.

There is a time for war
and a time for peace.

## *God Controls His World*

[9]Do people really gain anything from their work? [10]I saw the hard work God has given people to do. [11]God has given them a desire to know the future. He does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what he is doing. [12]So I realize that the best thing for them is to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live. [13]God wants all people to eat and drink and be happy in their work, which are gifts from God. [14]I know that everything God does will continue forever. People cannot add anything to what God has done, and they cannot take anything away from it. God does it this way to make people respect him.

[15]What happens now has happened in the past,
and what will happen in the future has happened before.
God makes the same things happen again and again.

## *Unfairness on Earth*

[16]I also saw this here on earth:

Where there should have been justice, there was evil;
where there should have been right, there was wrong.

[17]I said to myself,

God has planned a time for every thing and every action,
so he will judge both good people and bad.

[18]I decided that God leaves it the way it is to test people and to show them they are just like animals. [19]The same thing happens to animals and to people; they both have the same breath, so they both die. People are no better off than the

animals, because everything is useless. [20]Both end up the same way; both came from dust and both will go back to dust. [21]Who can be sure that the human spirit goes up to God and that the spirit of an animal goes down into the ground? [22]So I saw that the best thing people can do is to enjoy their work, because that is all they have. No one can help another person see what will happen in the future.

## Psalm 102:12–17

[12]But, LORD, you rule forever,
and your fame goes on and on.

[13]You will come and have mercy on Jerusalem,
because the time has now come to be kind to her;
the right time has come.

[14]Your servants love even her stones;
they even care about her dust.

[15]Nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings on earth will honor you.

[16]The LORD will rebuild Jerusalem;
there his glory will be seen.

[17]He will answer the prayers of the needy;
he will not reject their prayers.

## Proverbs 24:3–4

[3]It takes wisdom to have a good family,
and it takes understanding to make it strong.

[4]It takes knowledge to fill a home
with rare and beautiful treasures.

## 1 Corinthians 8:1–13

### *About Food Offered to Idols*

[8] Now I will write about meat that is sacrificed to idols. We know that “we all have knowledge.” Knowledge puffs you up with pride, but love builds up. [2]If you think you know something, you do not yet know anything as you should. [3]But if any person loves God, that person is known by God.

[4]So this is what I say about eating meat sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is really nothing in the world, and we know there is only one God. [5]Even though there are things called gods, in heaven or on earth (and there are many “gods” and “lords”), [6]for us there is only one God—our Father. All things came from him, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord—Jesus Christ. All things were made through him, and we also were made through him.

[7]But not all people know this. Some people are still so used to idols that when they eat meat, they still think of it as being sacrificed to an idol. Because their conscience is weak, when they eat it, they feel guilty. [8]But food will not bring us closer to God. Refusing to eat does not make us less pleasing to God, and eating does not make us better in God’s sight.

[9]But be careful that your freedom does not cause those who are weak in faith to fall into sin. [10]Suppose one of you who has knowledge eats in an idol’s temple.[n] Someone who is weak in faith might see you eating there and be encouraged to eat meat sacrificed to idols while thinking it is wrong to do so. [11]This weak believer for whom Christ died is ruined because of your “knowledge.” [12]When you sin against your brothers and sisters in Christ like this and cause them to do what they feel is wrong, you are also sinning against Christ. [13]So if the food I eat causes them to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again so that I will not cause any of them to sin.

# August 28

## Guard Against Greed

*Whoever loves money will never have enough money; Whoever loves wealth will not be satisfied with it.*

Ecclesiastes 5:10

Greed comes in many forms. Greed for approval. Greed for applause. Greed for status. Greed for the best office, the fastest car, the prettiest date. Greed has many faces, but speaks one language: the language of more. Epicurus noted, “Nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little.” And what was that observation of John D. Rockefeller’s? He was asked, “How much money does it take to satisfy a man?” He answered, “Just a little more.” Wise was the one who wrote, “Whoever loves money will never have enough money; Whoever loves wealth will not be satisfied with it” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

Greed has a growling stomach. Feed it, and you risk more than budget-busting debt. You risk losing purpose.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Ecclesiastes 4:1—6:12

#### *Is It Better to Be Dead?*

4 Again I saw all the people who were mistreated here on earth.

I saw their tears
and that they had no one to comfort them.

Cruel people had all the power,
and there was no one to comfort those they hurt.

[2]I decided that the dead
are better off than the living.

[3]But those who have never been born
are better off still;

they have not seen the evil
that is done here on earth.

## *Why Work So Hard?*

[4]I realized the reason people work hard and try to succeed:
They are jealous of each other. This, too, is useless, like chasing
the wind.

[5]Some say it is foolish to fold your hands and do nothing,
because you will starve to death.

[6]Maybe so, but I say it is better to be content
with what little you have.

Otherwise, you will always be struggling for more,
and that is like chasing the wind.

[7]Again I saw something here on earth that was useless:

[8]I saw a man who had no family,
no son or brother.

He always worked hard
but was never satisfied with what he had.

He never asked himself, “For whom am I working so hard?
Why don’t I let myself enjoy life?”

This also is very sad and useless.

## *Friends and Family Give Strength*

9 Two people are better than one,
because they get more done by working together.

10 If one falls down,
the other can help him up.

But it is bad for the person who is alone and falls,
because no one is there to help.

11 If two lie down together, they will be warm,
but a person alone will not be warm.

12 An enemy might defeat one person,
but two people together can defend themselves;
a rope that is woven of three strings is hard to break.

## *Fame and Power Are Useless*

13 A poor but wise boy is better than a foolish but old king
who doesn't listen to advice. 14 A boy became king. He had been
born poor in the kingdom and had even gone to prison before
becoming king. 15 I watched all the people who live on earth
follow him and make him their king. 16 Many followed him at
first, but later, they did not like him, either. So fame and power
are useless, like chasing the wind.

## *Be Careful About Making Promises*

5 Be careful when you go to worship at the Temple. It is better
to listen than to offer foolish sacrifices without even knowing
you are doing wrong.

2 Think before you speak,
and be careful about what you say to God.

God is in heaven,
and you are on the earth,

so say only a few words to God.

3 The saying is true: Bad dreams come from too much worrying,
and too many words come from foolish people.

4 If you make a promise to God, don't be slow to keep it. God is not happy with fools, so give God what you promised. 5 It is better not to promise anything than to promise something and not do it. 6 Don't let your words cause you to sin, and don't say to the priest at the Temple, "I didn't mean what I promised." If you do, God will become angry with your words and will destroy everything you have worked for. 7 Many useless promises are like so many dreams; they mean nothing. You should respect God.

## *Officers Cheat Each Other*

8 In some places you will see poor people mistreated. Don't be surprised when they are not treated fairly or given their rights. One officer is cheated by a higher officer who in turn is cheated by even higher officers. 9 The wealth of the country is divided up among them all. Even the king makes sure he gets his share of the profits.

## *Wealth Cannot Buy Happiness*

10 Whoever loves money
will never have enough money;

Whoever loves wealth
will not be satisfied with it.
This is also useless.

11 The more wealth people have,
the more friends they have to help spend it.

So what do people really gain?
They gain nothing except to look at their riches.

12 Those who work hard sleep in peace;
it is not important if they eat little or much.

But rich people worry about their wealth
and cannot sleep.

13 I have seen real misery here on earth:

Money saved is a curse to its owners.
14 They lose it all in a bad deal

and have nothing to give to their children.

15 People come into this world with nothing,
and when they die they leave with nothing.

In spite of all their hard work,
they leave just as they came.

16 This, too, is real misery:

They leave just as they came.
So what do they gain from chasing the wind?

17 All they get are days full of sadness and sorrow,
and they end up sick, defeated, and angry.

## *Enjoy Your Life's Work*

18 I have seen what is best for people here on earth. They should eat and drink and enjoy their work, because the life God has given them on earth is short. 19 God gives some people the ability to enjoy the wealth and property he gives them, as well as the ability to accept their state in life and enjoy their work. 20 They do not worry about how short life is, because God keeps them busy with what they love to do.

6 I have seen something else wrong here on earth that causes serious problems for people. 2 God gives great wealth, riches,

and honor to some people; they have everything they want. But God does not let them enjoy such things; a stranger enjoys them instead. This is useless and very wrong. [3]A man might have a hundred children and live a long time, but what good is it if he can't enjoy the good God gives him or have a proper burial? I say a baby born dead is better off than he is. [4]A baby born dead is useless. It returns to darkness without even a name. [5]That baby never saw the sun and never knew anything, but it finds more rest than that man. [6]Even if he lives two thousand years, he doesn't enjoy the good God gives him. Everyone is going to the same place.

[7]People work just to feed themselves,
but they never seem to get enough to eat.

[8]In this way a wise person
is no better off than a fool.

Then, too, it does a poor person little good
to know how to get along in life.

[9]It is better to see what you have
than to want more.

Wanting more is useless—
like chasing the wind.

### *Who Can Understand God's Plan?*

[10]Whatever happens was planned long ago.
Everyone knows what people are like.

No one can argue with God,
who is stronger than anyone.

[11]The more you say,
the more useless it is.
What good does it do?

12 People have only a few useless days of life on the earth;
their short life passes like a shadow. Who knows what is best for
them while they live? Who can tell them what the future will
bring?

## Psalm 102:18–28

18 Write these things for the future
so that people who are not yet born will praise the LORD.

19 The LORD looked down from his holy place above;
from heaven he looked down at the earth.

20 He heard the moans of the prisoners,
and he freed those sentenced to die.

21 The name of the LORD will be heard in Jerusalem;
his praise will be heard there.

22 People will come together,
and kingdoms will serve the LORD.

23 God has made me tired of living;
he has cut short my life.

24 So I said, “My God, do not take me in the middle of my life.
Your years go on and on.

25 In the beginning you made the earth,
and your hands made the skies.

26 They will be destroyed, but you will remain.
They will all wear out like clothes.

And, like clothes, you will change them
and throw them away.

[27]But you never change,
and your life will never end.

[28]Our children will live in your presence,
and their children will remain with you.”

## Proverbs 24:5–6

[5]Wise people have great power,
and those with knowledge have great strength.

[6]So you need advice when you go to war.
If you have lots of good advice, you will win.

## 1 Corinthians 9:1–27

### *Paul Is like the Other Apostles*

[9] I am a free man. I am an apostle. I have seen Jesus our Lord. You people are all an example of my work in the Lord. [2]If others do not accept me as an apostle, surely you do, because you are proof that I am an apostle in the Lord.

[3]This is the answer I give people who want to judge me: [4]Do we not have the right to eat and drink? [5]Do we not have the right to bring a believing wife with us when we travel as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Peter? [6]Are Barnabas and I the only ones who must work to earn our living? [7]No soldier ever serves in the army and pays his own salary. No one ever plants a vineyard without eating some of the grapes. No person takes care of a flock without drinking some of the milk.

[8]I do not say this by human authority; God’s law also says the same thing. [9]It is written in the law of Moses: “When an ox is working in the grain, do not cover its mouth to keep it from

eating.”[n] When God said this, was he thinking only about oxen?
No. 10He was really talking about us. Yes, that Scripture was
written for us, because it goes on to say: “The one who plows
and the one who works in the grain should hope to get some of
the grain for their work.” 11Since we planted spiritual seed
among you, is it too much if we should harvest material things?
12If others have the right to get something from you, surely we
have this right, too. But we do not use it. No, we put up with
everything ourselves so that we will not keep anyone from
believing the Good News of Christ. 13Surely you know that
those who work at the Temple get their food from the Temple,
and those who serve at the altar get part of what is offered at
the altar. 14In the same way, the Lord has commanded that
those who tell the Good News should get their living from this
work.

15But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not
writing this now to get anything from you. I would rather die
than to have my reason for bragging taken away. 16Telling the
Good News does not give me any reason for bragging. Telling
the Good News is my duty—something I must do. And how
terrible it will be for me if I do not tell the Good News. 17If I
preach because it is my own choice, I have a reward. But if I
preach and it is not my choice to do so, I am only doing the duty
that was given to me. 18So what reward do I get? This is my
reward: that when I tell the Good News I can offer it freely. I do
not use my full rights in my work of preaching the Good News.

19I am free and belong to no one. But I make myself a slave
to all people to win as many as I can. 20To the Jews I became
like a Jew to win the Jews. I myself am not ruled by the law. But
to those who are ruled by the law I became like a person who is
ruled by the law. I did this to win those who are ruled by the
law. 21To those who are without the law I became like a person
who is without the law. I did this to win those people who are
without the law. (But really, I am not without God’s law—I am
ruled by Christ’s law.) 22To those who are weak, I became weak
so I could win the weak. I have become all things to all people
so I could save some of them in any way possible. 23I do all this
because of the Good News and so I can share in its blessings.

24You know that in a race all the runners run, but only one
gets the prize. So run to win! 25All those who compete in the
games use self-control so they can win a crown. That crown is
an earthly thing that lasts only a short time, but our crown will
never be destroyed. 26So I do not run without a goal. I fight like
a boxer who is hitting something—not just the air. 27I treat my
body hard and make it my slave so that I myself will not be
disqualified after I have preached to others.

# August 29

## God Forgets

*Praise the* LORD *… He forgives all my sins.*

Psalm 103:2–3

God doesn't remember the past. But I do, you do. You still remember. You're like me. You still remember what you did before you changed. In the cellar of your heart lurk the ghosts of yesterday's sins. Sins you've confessed; errors of which you've repented; damage you've done your best to repair …

That horrid lie.

The time you exploded in anger.

Now, honestly. Do you think God was exaggerating when he said he would cast our sins as far as the east is from the west? Do you actually believe he would make a statement like "I will not remember their sins anymore" (Jeremiah 31:34) and then rub our noses in them whenever we ask for help?

Of course you don't. You and I just need an occasional reminder of God's nature, his forgetful nature.

from *God Came Near*

## Ecclesiastes 7:1–29

### *Some Benefits of Serious Thinking*

7 It is better to have respect than good perfume.
The day of death is better than the day of birth.

2 It is better to go to a funeral
than to a party.

We all must die,
and everyone living should think about this.

3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
and sadness has a good influence on you.

4 A wise person thinks about death,
but a fool thinks only about having a good time.

5 It is better to be criticized by a wise person
than to be praised by a fool.

6 The laughter of fools
is like the crackling of thorns in a cooking fire.
Both are useless.

7 Even wise people are fools
if they let money change their thinking.

8 It is better to finish something
than to start it.

It is better to be patient
than to be proud.

9 Don't become angry quickly,
because getting angry is foolish.

10 Don't ask, "Why was life better in the 'good old days'?"
It is not wise to ask such questions.

11 Wisdom is better when it comes with money.
They both help those who are alive.

12 Wisdom is like money:
they both help.

But wisdom is better,
because it can save whoever has it.

13 Look at what God has done:
No one can straighten what he has bent.

14 When life is good, enjoy it.
But when life is hard, remember:

God gives good times and hard times,
and no one knows what tomorrow will bring.

## *It Is Impossible to Be Truly Good*

15 In my useless life I have seen both of these:

I have seen good people die in spite of their goodness
and evil people live a long time in spite of their evil.

16 Don't be too right,
and don't be too wise.
Why destroy yourself?

17 Don't be too wicked,
and don't be foolish.
Why die before your time?

18 It is good to grab the one and not let go of the other;
those who honor God will hold them both.

19 Wisdom makes a person stronger
than ten leaders in a city.

20 Surely there is not a good person on earth
who always does good and never sins.

[21]Don’t listen to everything people say,
or you might hear your servant insulting you.

[22]You know that many times
you have insulted others.

[23]I used wisdom to test all these things.

I wanted to be wise,
but it was too hard for me.

[24]I cannot understand why things are as they are.
It is too hard for anyone to understand.

[25]I studied and tried very hard to find wisdom,
to find some meaning for everything.

I learned that it is foolish to be evil,
and it is crazy to act like a fool.

[26]I found that some women are worse than death
and are as dangerous as traps.

Their love is like a net,
and their arms hold men like chains.

A man who pleases God will be saved from them,
but a sinner will be caught by them.

[27]The Teacher says, “This is what I learned:

I added all these things together
to find some meaning for everything.

[28]While I was searching,

I did not find one man among the thousands I found.

Nor did I find a woman among all these.

29 One thing I have learned:

God made people good,
but they have found all kinds of ways to be bad.”

## Psalm 103:1–5

### *Praise to the LORD of Love*

**Of David.**

103 All that I am, praise the LORD; everything in me, praise his holy name.

2 My whole being, praise the LORD
and do not forget all his kindnesses.

3 He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.

4 He saves my life from the grave
and loads me with love and mercy.

5 He satisfies me with good things
and makes me young again, like the eagle.

## Proverbs 24:7–9

7 Foolish people cannot understand wisdom.
They have nothing to say in a discussion.

8 Whoever makes evil plans
will be known as a troublemaker.

9 Making foolish plans is sinful,
and making fun of wisdom is hateful.

## 1 Corinthians 10:1–22

### *Warnings from Israel's Past*

10 Brothers and sisters, I want you to know what happened to
our ancestors who followed Moses. They were all under the
cloud and all went through the sea. 2 They were all baptized as
followers of Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the
same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink.
They drank from that spiritual rock that followed them, and that
rock was Christ. 5 But God was not pleased with most of them,
so they died in the desert.

6 And these things happened as examples for us, to stop us
from wanting evil things as those people did. 7 Do not worship
idols, as some of them did. Just as it is written in the Scriptures:
"They sat down to eat and drink, and then they got up and
sinned sexually."[n] 8 We must not take part in sexual sins, as
some of them did. In one day twenty-three thousand of them
died because of their sins. 9 We must not test Christ as some of
them did; they were killed by snakes. 10 Do not complain as
some of them did; they were killed by the angel that destroys.

11 The things that happened to those people are examples.
They were written down to teach us, because we live in a time
when all these things of the past have reached their goal. 12 If
you think you are strong, you should be careful not to fall. 13 The
only temptation that has come to you is that which everyone
has. But you can trust God, who will not permit you to be
tempted more than you can stand. But when you are tempted,
he will also give you a way to escape so that you will be able to
stand it.

14 So, my dear friends, run away from the worship of idols. 15 I
am speaking to you as to reasonable people; judge for
yourselves what I say. 16 We give thanks for the cup of blessing,[n]

which is a sharing in the blood of Christ. And the bread that we break is a sharing in the body of Christ. [17]Because there is one loaf of bread, we who are many are one body, because we all share that one loaf.

[18]Think about the Israelites: Do not those who eat the sacrifices share in the altar? [19]I do not mean that the food sacrificed to an idol is important. I do not mean that an idol is anything at all. [20]But I say that what is sacrificed to idols is offered to demons, not to God. And I do not want you to share anything with demons. [21]You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons also. You cannot share in the Lord's table and the table of demons. [22]Are we trying to make the Lord jealous? We are not stronger than he is, are we?

# August 30

## God Honors Work

*Whatever work you do, do your best.*

Ecclesiastes 9:10

Heaven's calendar has seven Sundays a week. God sanctifies each day. He conducts holy business at all hours and in all places. He uncommons the common by turning kitchen sinks into shrines, cafes into convents, and nine-to-five workdays into spiritual adventures.

*Workdays?* Yes, workdays. He ordained your work as something good. Before he gave Adam a wife or a child, even before he gave Adam britches, God gave Adam a job. "The LORD God put the man in the garden of Eden to care for it and work it" (Genesis 2:15). Innocence, not indolence, characterized the first family ...

God unilaterally calls all the physically able to till the gardens he gives. God honors work. So honor God in your work.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Ecclesiastes 8:1—10:20

### *Obey the King*

8 No one is like the wise person
who can understand what things mean.

Wisdom brings happiness;
it makes sad faces happy.

2 Obey the king's command, because you made a promise to God. 3 Don't be too quick to leave the king. Don't support

something that is wrong, because the king does whatever he pleases. [4]What the king says is law; no one tells him what to do.

[5]Whoever obeys the king's command will be safe.
A wise person does the right thing at the right time.

[6]There is a right time and a right way for everything,
yet people often have many troubles.

[7]They do not know what the future holds,
and no one can tell them what will happen.

[8]No one can control the wind
or stop his own death.

No soldier is released in times of war,
and evil does not set free those who do evil.

## *Justice, Rewards, and Punishment*

[9]I saw all of this as I considered all that is done here on earth. Sometimes people harm those they control. [10]I saw the funerals of evil people who used to go in and out of the holy place. They were honored in the same towns where they had done evil. This is useless, too.

[11]When evil people are not punished right away, it makes others want to do evil, too. [12]Though a sinner might do a hundred evil things and might live a long time, I know it will be better for those who honor God. [13]I also know it will not go well for evil people, because they do not honor God. Like a shadow, they will not last. [14]Sometimes something useless happens on earth. Bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people. I say that this is also useless. [15]So I decided it was more important to enjoy life. The best that people can do here on earth is to eat, drink, and enjoy life, because these joys will help them do the hard work God gives them here on earth.

## *We Cannot Understand All God Does*

[16]I tried to understand all that happens on earth. I saw how busy people are, working day and night and hardly ever

sleeping. [17]I also saw all that God has done. Nobody can understand what God does here on earth. No matter how hard people try to understand it, they cannot. Even if wise people say they understand, they cannot; no one can really understand it.

## *Is Death Fair?*

[9] I thought about all this and tried to understand it. I saw that God controls good people and wise people and what they do, but no one knows if they will experience love or hate.

[2]Good and bad people end up the same—
those who are right and those who are wrong,

those who are good and those who are evil,
those who are clean and those who are unclean,
those who sacrifice and those who do not.

The same things happen to a good person
as happen to a sinner,

to a person who makes promises to God
and to one who does not.

[3]This is something wrong that happens here on earth: What happens to one happens to all. So people's minds are full of evil and foolish thoughts while they live. After that, they join the dead. [4]But anyone still alive has hope; even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!

[5]The living know they will die,
but the dead know nothing.

Dead people have no more reward,
and people forget them.

[6]After people are dead,
they can no longer love or hate or envy.

They will never again share
in what happens here on earth.

## *Enjoy Life While You Can*

7 So go eat your food and enjoy it;
drink your wine and be happy,

because that is what God wants you to do.

8 Put on nice clothes
and make yourself look good.

9 Enjoy life with the wife you love. Enjoy all the useless days of this useless life God has given you here on earth, because it is all you have. So enjoy the work you do here on earth. 10 Whatever work you do, do your best, because you are going to the grave, where there is no working, no planning, no knowledge, and no wisdom.

## *Time and Chance*

11 I also saw something else here on earth:

The fastest runner does not always win the race,
the strongest soldier does not always win the battle,

the wisest does not always have food,
the smartest does not always become wealthy,
and the talented one does not always receive praise.

Time and chance happen to everyone.

12 No one knows what will happen next.

Like a fish caught in a net,

or a bird caught in a trap,

people are trapped by evil
when it suddenly falls on them.

## *Wisdom Does Not Always Win*

13 I also saw something wise here on earth that impressed
me. 14 There was a small town with only a few people in it. A
great king fought against it and put his armies all around it.
15 Now there was a poor but wise man in the town who used his
wisdom to save his town. But later on, everyone forgot about
him. 16 I still think wisdom is better than strength. But those
people forgot about the poor man's wisdom and stopped
listening to what he said.

17 The quiet words of a wise person are better
than the shouts of a foolish ruler.

18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war,
but one sinner can destroy much good.

10 Dead flies can make even perfume stink. In the same way,
a little foolishness can spoil wisdom.

2 The heart of the wise leads to right,
but the heart of a fool leads to wrong.

3 Even in the way fools walk along the road,
they show they are not wise;
they show everyone how stupid they are.

4 Don't leave your job
just because your boss is angry with you.

Remaining calm solves great problems.

5 There is something else wrong that happens here on earth.

It is the kind of mistake rulers make:

6 Fools are given important positions
while gifted people are given lower ones;

7 I have seen servants ride horses
while princes walk like servants on foot.

8 Anyone who digs a pit might fall into it;
anyone who knocks down a wall might be bitten by a snake;

9 anyone who moves boulders might be hurt by them;
and anyone who cuts logs might be harmed by them.

10 A dull ax means
harder work.
Being wise will make it easier.

11 If a snake bites the tamer before it is tamed,
what good is the tamer?

12 The words of the wise bring them praise,
but the words of a fool will destroy them.

13 A fool begins by saying foolish things
and ends by saying crazy and wicked things.

14 A fool talks too much.
No one knows the future,
and no one can tell what will happen after death.

15 Work wears fools out;
they don't even know how to get home.

## *The Value of Work*

16 How terrible it is for a country whose king is a child
and whose leaders eat all morning.

17 How lucky a country is whose king comes from a good family,
whose leaders eat only at mealtime
and for strength, not to get drunk.

18 If someone is lazy, the roof will begin to fall.
If he doesn't fix it, the house will leak.

19 A party makes you feel good,
wine makes you feel happy,
and money buys anything.

20 Don't make fun of the king,
and don't make fun of rich people, even in your bedroom.

A little bird might carry your words;
a bird might fly and tell what you said.

## Psalm 103:6–14

6 The LORD does what is right and fair
for all who are wronged by others.

7 He showed his ways to Moses
and his deeds to the people of Israel.

8 The LORD shows mercy and is kind.
He does not become angry quickly, and he has great love.

9 He will not always accuse us,
and he will not be angry forever.

10 He has not punished us as our sins should be punished;
he has not repaid us for the evil we have done.

11 As high as the sky is above the earth,
so great is his love for those who respect him.

12 He has taken our sins away from us
as far as the east is from west.

13 The LORD has mercy on those who respect him,
as a father has mercy on his children.

14 He knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.

## Proverbs 24:10–12

10 If you give up when trouble comes,
it shows that you are weak.

11 Save those who are being led to their death;
rescue those who are about to be killed.

12 If you say, “We don’t know anything about this,”
God, who knows what’s in your mind, will notice.

He is watching you, and he will know.
He will reward each person for what he has done.

## 1 Corinthians 10:23—11:1

### *How to Use Christian Freedom*

[23]"We are allowed to do all things," but not all things are
good for us to do. "We are allowed to do all things," but not all
things help others grow stronger. [24]Do not look out only for
yourselves. Look out for the good of others also.
[25]Eat any meat that is sold in the meat market. Do not ask
questions about it. [26]You may eat it, "because the earth belongs
to the Lord, and everything in it."[n]
[27]Those who are not believers may invite you to eat with
them. If you want to go, eat anything that is put before you. Do
not ask questions about it. [28]But if anyone says to you, "That
food was offered to idols," do not eat it. Do not eat it because of
that person who told you and because eating it might be
thought to be wrong. [29]I don't mean you think it is wrong, but
the other person might. But why, you ask, should my freedom be
judged by someone else's conscience? [30]If I eat the meal with
thankfulness, why am I criticized because of something for
which I thank God?
[31]The answer is, if you eat or drink, or if you do anything, do
it all for the glory of God. [32]Never do anything that might hurt
others—Jews, Greeks, or God's church— [33]just as I, also, try to
please everybody in every way. I am not trying to do what is
good for me but what is good for most people so they can be
saved.
[11] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

# August 31

## Heed the Signals

*Honor God and obey his commands, because this is all people must do.*

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Here are some God-given, time-tested truths that define the way you should navigate your life. Observe them and enjoy secure passage. Ignore them and crash against the ragged rocks of reality … :

Love God more than you fear hell.
Make major decisions in a cemetery.
When no one is watching, live as if someone is.
Succeed at home first.
Don't spend tomorrow's money today.
Pray twice as much as you fret.
God has forgiven you; you'd be wise to do the same.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

### Ecclesiastes 11:1—12:14

### *Boldly Face the Future*

11 Invest what you have,
because after a while you will get a return.

2 Invest what you have in several different businesses,
because you don't know what disasters might happen.

[3]If clouds are full of rain,
they will shower on the earth.

A tree can fall to the north or south,
but it will stay where it falls.

[4]Those who wait for perfect weather
will never plant seeds;

those who look at every cloud
will never harvest crops.

[5]You don’t know where the wind will blow,
and you don’t know how a baby grows inside the mother.

In the same way, you don’t know what God is doing,
or how he created everything.

[6]Plant early in the morning,
and work until evening,

because you don’t know if this or that will succeed.
They might both do well.

## *Serve God While You Are Young*

[7]Sunshine is sweet;
it is good to see the light of day.

[8]People ought to enjoy every day of their lives,
no matter how long they live.

But they should also remember this:
You will be dead a long time.
Everything that happens then is useless.

9 Young people, enjoy yourselves while you are young;
be happy while you are young.

Do whatever your heart desires,
whatever you want to do.

But remember that God will judge you
for everything you do.

10 Don't worry,
and forget the troubles of your body,
because youth and childhood are useless.

## *The Problems of Old Age*

12 Remember your Creator while you are young,

before the days of trouble come
and the years when you say, "I find no pleasure in them."

2 When you get old,
the light from the sun, moon, and stars will grow dark;the rain clouds will never seem to go away.

3 At that time your arms will shake
and your legs will become weak.

Your teeth will fall out so you cannot chew,
and your eyes will not see clearly.

4 Your ears will be deaf to the noise in the streets,
and you will barely hear the millstone grinding grain.

You'll wake up when a bird starts singing,
but you will barely hear singing.

5 You will fear high places

and will be afraid to go for a walk.

Your hair will become white like the flowers on an almond tree.
You will limp along like a grasshopper when you walk.
Your appetite will be gone.

Then you will go to your everlasting home,
and people will go to your funeral.

6 Soon your life will snap like a silver chain
or break like a golden bowl.

You will be like a broken pitcher at a spring,
or a broken wheel at a well.

7 You will turn back into the dust of the earth again,
but your spirit will return to God who gave it.

8 Everything is useless!
The Teacher says that everything is useless.

## *Conclusion: Honor God*

9 The Teacher was very wise and taught the people what he knew. He very carefully thought about, studied, and set in order many wise teachings. 10 The Teacher looked for just the right words to write what is dependable and true.
11 Words from wise people are like sharp sticks used to guide animals. They are like nails that have been driven in firmly. Altogether they are wise teachings that come from one Shepherd. 12 So be careful, my son, about other teachings. People are always writing books, and too much study will make you tired.

13 Now, everything has been heard,
so I give my final advice:

Honor God and obey his commands,

because this is all people must do.

14 God will judge everything,
even what is done in secret,

the good and the evil.

## Psalm 103:15–22

15 Human life is like grass;
we grow like a flower in the field.

16 After the wind blows, the flower is gone,
and there is no sign of where it was.

17 But the LORD's love for those who respect him
continues forever and ever,
and his goodness continues to their grandchildren

18 and to those who keep his agreement
and who remember to obey his orders.

19 The LORD has set his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over everything.

20 You who are his angels, praise the LORD.
You are the mighty warriors who do what he says
and who obey his voice.

21 You, his armies, praise the LORD;
you are his servants who do what he wants.

22 Everything the LORD has made
should praise him in all the places he rules.

My whole being, praise the LORD.

## Proverbs 24:13–14

13 My child, eat honey because it is good.
Honey from the honeycomb tastes sweet.

14 In the same way, wisdom is pleasing to you.
If you find it, you have hope for the future,
and your wishes will come true.

## 1 Corinthians 11:2–16

### *Being Under Authority*

2 I praise you because you remember me in everything, and
you follow closely the teachings just as I gave them to you. 3 But
I want you to understand this: The head of every man is Christ,
the head of a woman is the man,[n] and the head of Christ is God.
4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered
brings shame to his head. 5 But every woman who prays or
prophesies with her head uncovered brings shame to her head.
She is the same as a woman who has her head shaved. 6 If a
woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut
off. But since it is shameful for a woman to cut off her hair or to
shave her head, she should cover her head. 7 But a man should
not cover his head, because he is the likeness and glory of God.
But woman is man's glory. 8 Man did not come from woman, but
woman came from man. 9 And man was not made for woman,
but woman was made for man. 10 So that is why a woman should
have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.
11 But in the Lord women are not independent of men, and
men are not independent of women. 12 This is true because
woman came from man, but also man is born from woman. But
everything comes from God. 13 Decide this for yourselves: Is it
right for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?
14 Even nature itself teaches you that wearing long hair is
shameful for a man. 15 But long hair is a woman's glory. Long
hair is given to her as a covering. 16 Some people may still want

to argue about this, but I would add that neither we nor the churches of God have any other practice.

# September 1

# God Is Enough

*Promise me … not to awaken or excite my feelings of love until it is ready.*

Song of Songs 2:7

when it comes to love: *Be careful*. Before you walk down the aisle, take a good long look around. Make sure this is God's intended place for you. And, if you suspect it isn't, get out. Don't force what is wrong to be right … Be careful.

And, until love is stirred, let God's love be enough for you. There are seasons when God allows us to feel the frailty of human love so we'll appreciate the strength of his love. Didn't he do this with David? Saul turned on him. Michal, his wife, betrayed him. Jonathan and Samuel were David's friends, but they couldn't follow him into the wilderness. Betrayal and circumstances left David alone. Alone with God. And, as David discovered, God was enough. David wrote these words in a desert: "Because your love is better than life, I will praise you … I will be content as if I had eaten the best foods" (Psalm 63:3, 5).

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Song of Songs 1:1—2:17

1 Solomon's Song of Songs.

### *The Woman Speaks to the Man She Loves*

2 Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth,
because your love is better than wine.

3 The smell of your perfume is pleasant,
and your name is pleasant like expensive perfume.
That’s why the young women love you.

4 Take me with you; let’s run together.
The king takes me into his rooms.

### *Friends Speak to the Man*

We will rejoice and be happy with you;
we praise your love more than wine.
With good reason, the young women love you.

### *The Woman Speaks*

5 I’m dark but lovely,
women of Jerusalem,
dark like the tents of Kedar,
like the curtains of Solomon.

6 Don’t look at how dark I am,
at how dark the sun has made me.

My brothers were angry with me
and made me tend the vineyards,
so I haven’t tended my own vineyard!

7 Tell me, you whom I love,
where do you feed your sheep?
Where do you let them rest at noon?

Why should I look for you near your friend’s sheep,
like a woman who wears a veil?[n]

### *The Man Speaks to the Woman*

[8]You are the most beautiful of women.
Surely you know to follow the sheep

and feed your young goats
near the shepherds' tents.

[9]My darling, you are like a mare
among the king's stallions.

[10]Your cheeks are beautiful with ornaments,
and your neck with jewels.

[11]We will make for you gold earrings
with silver hooks.

### *The Woman Speaks*

[12]The smell of my perfume spreads out
to the king on his couch.

[13]My lover is like a bag of myrrh
that lies all night between my breasts.

[14]My lover is like a bunch of flowers
from the vineyards at En Gedi.

### *The Man Speaks*

[15]My darling, you are beautiful!
Oh, you are beautiful,
and your eyes are like doves.

### *The Woman Answers the Man*

16 You are so handsome, my lover,
and so pleasant!
Our bed is the grass.

17 Cedar trees form our roof;
our ceiling is made of juniper wood.

### *The Woman Speaks Again*

2 I am a rose in the Plain of Sharon,
a lily in the valleys.

### *The Man Speaks Again*

2 Among the young women, my darling
is like a lily among thorns!

### *The Woman Answers*

3 Among the young men, my lover
is like an apple tree in the woods!

I enjoy sitting in his shadow;
his fruit is sweet to my taste.

4 He brought me to the banquet room,
and his banner over me is love.

5 Strengthen me with raisins,
and refresh me with apples,
because I am weak with love.

6 My lover's left hand is under my head,
and his right arm holds me tight.

## *The Woman Speaks to the Friends*

[7]Women of Jerusalem, promise me
by the gazelles and the deer

not to awaken
or excite my feelings of love
until it is ready.

## *The Woman Speaks Again*

[8]I hear my lover's voice.
Here he comes jumping across the mountains,
skipping over the hills.

[9]My lover is like a gazelle or a young deer.
Look, he stands behind our wall

peeking through the windows,
looking through the blinds.

[10]My lover spoke and said to me,
"Get up, my darling;
let's go away, my beautiful one.

[11]Look, the winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.

[12]Blossoms appear through all the land.
The time has come to sing;
the cooing of doves is heard in our land.

[13]There are young figs on the fig trees,
and the blossoms on the vines smell sweet.

Get up, my darling;
let’s go away, my beautiful one.”

### *The Man Speaks*

14 My beloved is like a dove hiding in the cracks of the rock,
in the secret places of the cliff.

Show me your face,
and let me hear your voice.

Your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.

15 Catch the foxes for us—
the little foxes that ruin the vineyards
while they are in blossom.

### *The Woman Speaks*

16 My lover is mine, and I am his.
He feeds among the lilies

17 until the day dawns
and the shadows disappear.

Turn, my lover.
Be like a gazelle or a young deer
on the mountain valleys.

## Psalm 104:1–9

### *Praise to God Who Made the World*

104 My whole being, praise the LORD. LORD my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with glory and majesty;
2 you wear light like a robe.

You stretch out the skies like a tent.
3 You build your room above the clouds.

You make the clouds your chariot,
and you ride on the wings of the wind.

4You make the winds your messengers,
and flames of fire are your servants.

5You built the earth on its foundations
so it can never be moved.

6You covered the earth with oceans;
the water was above the mountains.

7But at your command, the water rushed away.
When you thundered your orders, it hurried away.

8The mountains rose; the valleys sank.
The water went to the places you made for it.

9You set borders for the seas that they cannot cross,
so water will never cover the earth again.

## Proverbs 24:15–16

15Don’t be wicked and attack a good family’s house;
don’t rob the place where they live.

16 Even though good people may be bothered by trouble
seven times, they are never defeated,
but the wicked are overwhelmed by trouble.

## 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

### *The Lord's Supper*

17 In the things I tell you now I do not praise you, because
when you come together you do more harm than good. 18 First, I
hear that when you meet together as a church you are divided,
and I believe some of this. 19 (It is necessary to have differences
among you so that it may be clear which of you really have
God's approval.) 20 When you come together, you are not really
eating the Lord's Supper.[n] 21 This is because when you eat, each
person eats without waiting for the others. Some people do not
get enough to eat, while others have too much to drink. 22 You
can eat and drink in your own homes! You seem to think God's
church is not important, and you embarrass those who are poor.
What should I tell you? Should I praise you? I do not praise you
for doing this.

23 The teaching I gave you is the same teaching I received
from the Lord: On the night when the Lord Jesus was handed
over to be killed, he took bread 24 and gave thanks for it. Then
he broke the bread and said, "This is my body; it is[n] for you. Do
this to remember me." 25 In the same way, after they ate, Jesus
took the cup. He said, "This cup is the new agreement that is
sealed with the blood of my death. When you drink this, do it to
remember me." 26 Every time you eat this bread and drink this
cup you are telling others about the Lord's death until he
comes.

27 So a person who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the
Lord in a way that is not worthy of it will be guilty of sinning
against the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 Look into your
own hearts before you eat the bread and drink the cup,
29 because all who eat the bread and drink the cup without
recognizing the body eat and drink judgment against
themselves. 30 That is why many in your group are sick and
weak, and some of you have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves
in the right way, God would not judge us. 32 But when the Lord
judges us, he disciplines us so that we will not be destroyed
along with the world.

33 So my brothers and sisters, when you come together to
eat, wait for each other. 34 Anyone who is too hungry should eat

at home so that in meeting together you will not bring God’s judgment on yourselves. I will tell you what to do about the other things when I come.

# September 2

## Gifted to Give

*Something from the Spirit can be seen in each person, for the common good.*

1 Corinthians 12:7

when you place your trust in Christ, he places his Spirit in you. And when the Spirit comes, he brings gifts, housewarming gifts of sorts. “Something from the Spirit can be seen in each person, for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Remember, God prepacked you with strengths. When you become a child of God, the Holy Spirit requisitions your abilities for the expansion of God’s kingdom, and they become spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit may add other gifts according to his plan. But no one is gift deprived.

Lonely? God is with you.

Depleted? He funds the overdrawn.

Weary of an ordinary existence? Your spiritual adventure awaits.

The cure for the common life begins and ends with God.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Song of Songs 3:1—4:16

#### *The Woman Dreams*

3 At night on my bed, I looked for the one I love;
I looked for him, but I could not find him.

2 I got up and went around the city,
in the streets and squares,

looking for the one I love.
I looked for him, but I could not find him.

3 The watchmen found me as they patrolled the city,
so I asked, “Have you seen the one I love?”

4 As soon as I had left them,
I found the one I love.

I held him and would not let him go
until I brought him to my mother’s house,
to the room where I was born.

### *The Woman Speaks to the Friends*

5 Women of Jerusalem, promise me
by the gazelles and the deer

not to awaken
or excite my feelings of love
until it is ready.

6 Who is this coming out of the desert
like a cloud of smoke?

Who is this that smells like myrrh, incense,
and other spices?

7 Look, it’s Solomon’s couch[n]
with sixty soldiers around it,
the finest soldiers of Israel.

8 These soldiers all carry swords
and have been trained in war.

Every man wears a sword at his side

and is ready for the dangers of the night.

9 King Solomon had a couch made for himself
of wood from Lebanon.

10 He made its posts of silver
and its braces of gold.

The seat was covered with purple cloth
that the women of Jerusalem wove with love.

11 Women of Jerusalem, go out and see King Solomon.
He is wearing the crown his mother put on his head

on his wedding day,
when his heart was happy!

## *The Man Speaks to the Woman*

4 How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, you are beautiful!

Your eyes behind your veil are like doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down Mount Gilead.

2 Your teeth are white like newly sheared sheep
just coming from their bath.

Each one has a twin,
and none of them is missing.

3 Your lips are like red silk thread,
and your mouth is lovely.

Your cheeks behind your veil
are like slices of a pomegranate.

4 Your neck is like David’s tower,
built with rows of stones.

A thousand shields hang on its walls;
each shield belongs to a strong soldier.

5 Your breasts are like two fawns,
like twins of a gazelle,
feeding among the lilies.

6 Until the day dawns
and the shadows disappear,

I will go to that mountain of myrrh
and to that hill of incense.

7 My darling, everything about you is beautiful,
and there is nothing at all wrong with you.

8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride.
Come with me from Lebanon,

from the top of Mount Amana,
from the tops of Mount Senir and Mount Hermon.

Come from the lions’ dens
and from the leopards’ hills.

9 My sister, my bride,
you have thrilled my heart;

you have thrilled my heart
with a glance of your eyes,

with one sparkle from your necklace.

10 Your love is so sweet, my sister, my bride.
Your love is better than wine,
and your perfume smells better than any spice.

11 My bride, your lips drip honey;
honey and milk are under your tongue.
Your clothes smell like the cedars of Lebanon.

12 My sister, my bride, you are like a garden locked up,
like a walled-in spring, a closed-up fountain.

13 Your limbs are like an orchard
of pomegranates with all the best fruit,

filled with flowers and nard,

14 nard and saffron, calamus, and cinnamon,
with trees of incense, myrrh, and aloes—all the best spices.

15 You are like a garden fountain—
a well of fresh water
flowing down from the mountains of Lebanon.

### *The Woman Speaks*

16 Awake, north wind.
Come, south wind.

Blow on my garden,
and let its sweet smells flow out.

Let my lover enter the garden
and eat its best fruits.

## Psalm 104:10–23

10 You make springs pour into the ravines;
they flow between the mountains.

11 They water all the wild animals;
the wild donkeys come there to drink.

12 Wild birds make nests by the water;
they sing among the tree branches.

13 You water the mountains from above.
The earth is full of the things you made.

14 You make the grass for cattle
and vegetables for the people.
You make food grow from the earth.

15 You give us wine that makes happy hearts
and olive oil that makes our faces shine.
You give us bread that gives us strength.

16 The LORD's trees have plenty of water;
they are the cedars of Lebanon, which he planted.

17 The birds make their nests there;
the stork's home is in the fir trees.

18 The high mountains belong to the wild goats.
The rocks are hiding places for the badgers.

19 You made the moon to mark the seasons,
and the sun always knows when to set.

20 You make it dark, and it becomes night.
Then all the wild animals creep around.

21 The lions roar as they attack.
They look to God for food.

22 When the sun rises, they leave
and go back to their dens to lie down.

23 Then people go to work
and work until evening.

## Proverbs 24:17–18

17 Don't be happy when your enemy is defeated;
don't be glad when he is overwhelmed.

18 The LORD will notice and be displeased.
He may not be angry with them anymore.

## 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a

### *Gifts from the Holy Spirit*

12 Now, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand about spiritual gifts. 2 You know the way you lived before you were believers. You let yourselves be influenced and led away to worship idols—things that could not speak. 3 So I want you to understand that no one who is speaking with the help of God's Spirit says, "Jesus be cursed." And no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," without the help of the Holy Spirit.

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but they are all from the same Spirit. 5 There are different ways to serve but the same Lord to serve. 6 And there are different ways that God works through people but the same God. God works in all of us in

everything we do. 7Something from the Spirit can be seen in each person, for the common good. 8The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom, and the same Spirit gives another the ability to speak with knowledge. 9The same Spirit gives faith to one person. And, to another, that one Spirit gives gifts of healing. 10The Spirit gives to another person the power to do miracles, to another the ability to prophesy. And he gives to another the ability to know the difference between good and evil spirits. The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak in different kinds of languages[n] and to another the ability to interpret those languages. 11One Spirit, the same Spirit, does all these things, and the Spirit decides what to give each person.

## *The Body of Christ Works Together*

12A person's body is one thing, but it has many parts. Though there are many parts to a body, all those parts make only one body. Christ is like that also. 13Some of us are Jews, and some are Greeks. Some of us are slaves, and some are free. But we were all baptized into one body through one Spirit. And we were all made to share in the one Spirit.

14The human body has many parts. 15The foot might say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body." But saying this would not stop the foot from being a part of the body. 16The ear might say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body." But saying this would not stop the ear from being a part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, it would not be able to hear. If the whole body were an ear, it would not be able to smell. 18–19If each part of the body were the same part, there would be no body. But truly God put all the parts, each one of them, in the body as he wanted them. 20So then there are many parts, but only one body.

21The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the foot, "I don't need you!" 22No! Those parts of the body that seem to be the weaker are really necessary. 23And the parts of the body we think are less deserving are the parts to which we give the most honor. We give special respect to the parts we want to hide. 24The more respectable parts of our body need no special care. But God put the body together and gave more honor to the parts that need it 25so our body would not be divided. God wanted the different parts to care the same for each other. 26If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. Or if one part of our body is honored, all the other parts share its honor.

27Together you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of that body. 28In the church God has given a place first to apostles, second to prophets, and third to teachers. Then God

has given a place to those who do miracles, those who have gifts of healing, those who can help others, those who are able to govern, and those who can speak in different languages.[n] 29Not all are apostles. Not all are prophets. Not all are teachers. Not all do miracles. 30Not all have gifts of healing. Not all speak in different languages. Not all interpret those languages. 31But you should truly want to have the greater gifts.

# September 3

## Is It Loving?

*Love is not rude.*

1 Corinthians 13:5

when defining what love is not, Paul put *rudeness* on the list. The Greek word for *rude* means shameful or disgraceful behavior. An example of rudeness was recently taken before the courts in Minnesota. A man fell out of his canoe and lost his temper. Though the river was lined with vacationing families, he polluted the air with obscenities. Some of those families sued him. He said, "I have my rights."

God calls us to a higher, more noble concern. Not "What are my rights?" but "What is loving?"

Do you have the right to dominate a conversation? Yes, but is it loving to do so? …

Is it within your rights to bark at the clerk or snap at the kids? Yes. But is it loving to act this way?

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### Song of Songs 5:1—6:13

#### *The Man Speaks*

5 I have entered my garden, my sister, my bride.
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.

I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey.
I have drunk my wine and my milk.

#### *The Friends Speak*

Eat, friends, and drink;
yes, drink deeply, lovers.

## *The Woman Dreams*

[2]I sleep, but my heart is awake.
I hear my lover knocking.

“Open to me, my sister, my darling,
my dove, my perfect one.

My head is wet with dew,
and my hair with the dampness of the night.”

[3]I have taken off my garment
and don’t want to put it on again.

I have washed my feet
and don’t want to get them dirty again.

[4]My lover put his hand through the opening,
and I felt excited inside.

[5]I got up to open the door for my lover.
Myrrh was dripping from my hands

and flowing from my fingers,
onto the handles of the lock.

[6]I opened the door for my lover,
but my lover had left and was gone.
When he spoke, he took my breath away.

I looked for him, but I could not find him;
I called for him, but he did not answer.

7 The watchmen found me
as they patrolled the city.

They hit me and hurt me;
the guards on the wall took away my veil.

8 Promise me, women of Jerusalem,
if you find my lover,
tell him I am weak with love.

### *The Friends Answer the Woman*

9 How is your lover better than other lovers,
most beautiful of women?

How is your lover better than other lovers?
Why do you want us to promise this?

### *The Woman Answers the Friends*

10 My lover is healthy and tan,
the best of ten thousand men.

11 His head is like the finest gold;
his hair is wavy and black like a raven.

12 His eyes are like doves
by springs of water.

They seem to be bathed in cream
and are set like jewels.

[13]His cheeks are like beds of spices;
they smell like mounds of perfume.

His lips are like lilies
flowing with myrrh.

[14]His hands are like gold hinges,
filled with jewels.

His body is like shiny ivory
covered with sapphires.

[15]His legs are like large marble posts,
standing on bases of fine gold.

He is like a cedar of Lebanon,
like the finest of the trees.

[16]His mouth is sweet to kiss,
and I desire him very much.

Yes, daughters of Jerusalem,
this is my lover
and my friend.

### *The Friends Speak to the Woman*

[6] Where has your lover gone,
most beautiful of women?

Which way did your lover turn?
We will look for him with you.

### *The Woman Answers the Friends*

[2]My lover has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,

to feed in the gardens
and to gather lilies.

[3]I belong to my lover,
and my lover belongs to me.
He feeds among the lilies.

### *The Man Speaks to the Woman*

[4]My darling, you are as beautiful as the city of Tirzah,
as lovely as the city of Jerusalem,
like an army flying flags.

[5]Turn your eyes from me,
because they excite me too much.

Your hair is like a flock of goats
streaming down Mount Gilead.

[6]Your teeth are white like sheep
just coming from their bath;

each one has a twin,
and none of them is missing.

[7]Your cheeks behind your veil
are like slices of a pomegranate.

[8]There may be sixty queens and eighty slave women
and so many girls you cannot count them,

[9]but there is only one like my dove, my perfect one.
She is her mother’s only daughter,

the brightest of the one who gave her birth.

The young women saw her and called her happy;
the queens and the slave women also praised her.

### *The Young Women Praise the Woman*

[10]Who is that young woman
that shines out like the dawn?

She is as pretty as the moon,
as bright as the sun,
as wonderful as an army flying flags.

### *The Man Speaks*

[11]I went down into the orchard of nut trees
to see the blossoms of the valley,

to look for buds on the vines,
to see if the pomegranate trees had bloomed.

[12]Before I realized it, my desire for you made me feel
like a prince in a chariot.

### *The Friends Call to the Woman*

[13]Come back, come back, woman of Shulam.
Come back, come back,
so we may look at you!

### *The Woman Answers the Friends*

Why do you want to look at the woman of Shulam
as you would at the dance of two armies?

## Psalm 104:24–30

24 LORD, you have made many things;
with your wisdom you made them all.
The earth is full of your riches.

25 Look at the sea, so big and wide,
with creatures large and small that cannot be counted.

26 Ships travel over the ocean,
and there is the sea monster Leviathan,
which you made to play there.

27 All these things depend on you
to give them their food at the right time.

28 When you give it to them,
they gather it up.

When you open your hand,
they are filled with good food.

29 When you turn away from them,
they become frightened.

When you take away their breath,
they die and turn to dust.

30 When you breathe on them,
they are created,
and you make the land new again.

## Proverbs 24:19–20

19 Don’t envy evil people,
and don’t be jealous of the wicked.

20 An evil person has nothing to hope for;
the wicked will die like a flame that is put out.

## 1 Corinthians 12:31b—13:13

### *Love Is the Greatest Gift*

And now I will show you the best way of all.
13 I may speak in different languages[n] of people or even angels.
But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing
cymbal. 2 I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all
the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may
have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all
these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing. 3 I may
give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an
offering to be burned.[n] But I gain nothing if I do not have love.
4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not
brag, and it is not proud. 5 Love is not rude, is not selfish, and
does not get upset with others. Love does not count up wrongs
that have been done. 6 Love takes no pleasure in evil but
rejoices over the truth. 7 Love patiently accepts all things. It
always trusts, always hopes, and always endures.
8 Love never ends. There are gifts of prophecy, but they will
be ended. There are gifts of speaking in different languages, but
those gifts will stop. There is the gift of knowledge, but it will
come to an end. 9 The reason is that our knowledge and our
ability to prophesy are not perfect. 10 But when perfection
comes, the things that are not perfect will end. 11 When I was a
child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like
a child. When I became a man, I stopped those childish ways.
12 It is the same with us. Now we see a dim reflection, as if we
were looking into a mirror, but then we shall see clearly. Now I
know only a part, but then I will know fully, as God has known
me. 13 So these three things continue forever: faith, hope, and
love. And the greatest of these is love.

# September 4

## What Worship Does

*My whole being, praise the* LORD*.*

Psalm 104:35

worship humbles the smug and lifts the deflated. Worship adjusts us, lowering the chin of the haughty, straightening the back of the burdened.

Worship properly positions the worshiper. And oh how we need it! We walk through life so bent out of shape. Five-talent folks swaggering: "I bet God's glad to have me." Two-talent folks struggling: "I bet God's sick of putting up with me." So sold on ourselves that we think someone died and made us ruler. Or so down on ourselves that we think everyone died and just left us.

Treat both conditions with worship.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Song of Songs 7:1—8:14

#### *The Man Speaks to the Woman*

7 Your feet are beautiful in sandals,
you daughter of a prince.

Your round thighs are like jewels
shaped by an artist.

2 Your navel is like a round drinking cup
always filled with wine.

Your stomach is like a pile of wheat
surrounded with lilies.

3 Your breasts are like two fawns,
like twins of a gazelle.

4 Your neck is like an ivory tower.

Your eyes are like the pools in Heshbon
near the gate of Bath Rabbim.

Your nose is like the mountain of Lebanon
that looks down on Damascus.

5 Your head is like Mount Carmel,
and your hair is like purple cloth;
the king is captured in its folds.

6 You are beautiful and pleasant;
my love, you are full of delights.

7 You are tall like a palm tree,
and your breasts are like its bunches of fruit.

8 I said, “I will climb up the palm tree
and take hold of its fruit.”

Let your breasts be like bunches of grapes,
the smell of your breath like apples,
9 and your mouth like the best wine.

### *The Woman Speaks to the Man*

Let this wine go down sweetly for my lover;
may it flow gently past the lips and teeth.
10 I belong to my lover,

and he desires only me.
[11]Come, my lover,
let’s go out into the country
and spend the night in the fields.
[12]Let’s go early to the vineyards
and see if the buds are on the vines.

Let’s see if the blossoms have already opened
and if the pomegranates have bloomed.

There I will give you my love.
[13]The mandrake flowers give their sweet smell,
and all the best fruits are at our gates.

I have saved them for you, my lover,
the old delights and the new.

[8] I wish you were like my brother who fed at my mother’s breasts.

If I found you outside,
I would kiss you,
and no one would look down on me.

[2]I would lead you and bring you
to my mother’s house;
she is the one who taught me.

I would give you a drink of spiced wine
from my pomegranates.

### *The Woman Speaks to the Friends*

[3]My lover’s left hand is under my head,
and his right arm holds me tight.

[4]Women of Jerusalem,

promise not to awaken

or excite my feelings of love
until it is ready.

### *The Friends Speak*

[5]Who is this coming out of the desert,
leaning on her lover?

### *The Man Speaks to the Woman*

I woke you under the apple tree
where you were born;
there your mother gave birth to you.

[6]Put me like a seal on your heart,
like a seal on your arm.

Love is as strong as death;
jealousy is as strong as the grave.

Love bursts into flames
and burns like a hot fire.

[7]Even much water cannot put out the flame of love;
floods cannot drown love.

If a man offered everything in his house for love,
people would totally reject it.

### *The Woman's Brothers Speak*

[8]We have a little sister,
and her breasts are not yet grown.

What should we do for our sister
on the day she becomes engaged?

9 If she is a wall,
we will put silver towers on her.

If she is a door,
we will protect her with cedar boards.

### *The Woman Speaks*

10 I am a wall,
and my breasts are like towers.

So I was to him,
as one who brings happiness.

11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon.
He rented the vineyards for others to tend,

and everyone who rented had to pay
twenty-five pounds of silver for the fruit.

12 But my own vineyard is mine to give.
Solomon, the twenty-five pounds of silver are for you,
and five pounds are for those who tend the fruit.

### *The Man Speaks to the Woman*

13 You who live in the gardens,
my friends are listening for your voice;
let me hear it.

### *The Woman Speaks to the Man*

14 Hurry, my lover,
be like a gazelle

or a young deer
on the mountains where spices grow.

## Psalm 104:31–35

31 May the glory of the LORD be forever.
May the LORD enjoy what he has made.

32 He just looks at the earth, and it shakes.
He touches the mountains, and they smoke.

33 I will sing to the LORD all my life;
I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.

34 May my thoughts please him;
I am happy in the LORD.

35 Let sinners be destroyed from the earth,
and let the wicked live no longer.

My whole being, praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD.

## Proverbs 24:21–22

21 My child, respect the LORD and the king.
Don’t join those people who refuse to obey them.

22 The LORD and the king will quickly destroy such people.

Those two can cause great disaster!

## 1 Corinthians 14:1–25

### *Desire Spiritual Gifts*

14 You should seek after love, and you should truly want to have
the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. 2I will explain
why. Those who have the gift of speaking in different
languages[n] are not speaking to people; they are speaking to
God. No one understands them; they are speaking secret things
through the Spirit. 3But those who prophesy are speaking to
people to give them strength, encouragement, and comfort.
4The ones who speak in different languages are helping only
themselves, but those who prophesy are helping the whole
church. 5I wish all of you had the gift of speaking in different
kinds of languages, but more, I wish you would prophesy. Those
who prophesy are greater than those who can only speak in
different languages—unless someone is there who can explain
what is said so that the whole church can be helped.

6Brothers and sisters, will it help you if I come to you
speaking in different languages? No! It will help you only if I
bring you a new truth or some new knowledge, or prophecy, or
teaching. 7It is the same as with lifeless things that make
sounds—like a flute or a harp. If they do not make clear musical
notes, you will not know what is being played. 8And in a war, if
the trumpet does not give a clear sound, who will prepare for
battle? 9It is the same with you. Unless you speak clearly with
your tongue, no one can understand what you are saying. You
will be talking into the air! 10It may be true that there are all
kinds of sounds in the world, and none is without meaning.
11But unless I understand the meaning of what someone says to
me, we will be like foreigners to each other. 12It is the same
with you. Since you want spiritual gifts very much, seek most of
all to have the gifts that help the church grow stronger.

13The one who has the gift of speaking in a different
language should pray for the gift to interpret what is spoken.
14If I pray in a different language, my spirit is praying, but my
mind does nothing. 15So what should I do? I will pray with my
spirit, but I will also pray with my mind. I will sing with my
spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. 16If you praise God with
your spirit, those persons there without understanding cannot
say amen[n] to your prayer of thanks, because they do not know
what you are saying. 17You may be thanking God in a good way,

but the other person is not helped.

18 I thank God that I speak in different kinds of languages
more than all of you. 19 But in the church meetings I would
rather speak five words I understand in order to teach others
than thousands of words in a different language.

20 Brothers and sisters, do not think like children. In evil
things be like babies, but in your thinking you should be like
adults. 21 It is written in the Scriptures:

"With people who use strange words and foreign languages
I will speak to these people.

But even then they will not listen to me,"

Isaiah 28:11–12

says the Lord.

22 So the gift of speaking in different kinds of languages is a
sign for those who do not believe, not for those who do believe.
And prophecy is for people who believe, not for those who do
not believe. 23 Suppose the whole church meets together and
everyone speaks in different languages. If some people come in
who do not understand or do not believe, they will say you are
crazy. 24 But suppose everyone is prophesying and some people
come in who do not believe or do not understand. If everyone is
prophesying, their sin will be shown to them, and they will be
judged by all that they hear. 25 The secret things in their hearts
will be made known. So they will bow down and worship God
saying, "Truly, God is with you."

# September 5

# The Debt Is Paid

*"Though your sins are like scarlet, they can be as white as snow. Though your sins are deep red, they can be white like wool."*

Isaiah 1:18

when Jesus told us to pray for forgiveness of our debts as we forgive our own debtors, he knew who would be the one to pay the debt. As he would hang on the cross he would say, "It is finished" (John 19:30) … the debt is paid!

There are some facts that will never change. One fact is that you are forgiven. If you are in Christ, when he sees you, your sins are covered—he doesn't see them. He sees you better than you see yourself. And that is a glorious fact of your life.

from *Walking with the Savior*

## Isaiah 1:1—2:22

1 This is the vision Isaiah son of Amoz saw about what would
happen to Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah saw these things while
Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah.

### *God's Case Against His Children*

2 Heaven and earth, listen,
because the LORD is speaking:

"I raised my children and helped them grow up,
but they have turned against me.

3 An ox knows its master,

and a donkey knows where its owner feeds it,

but the people of Israel do not know me;
my people do not understand.”

4How terrible! Israel is a nation of sin,
a people loaded down with guilt,

a group of children doing evil,
children who are full of evil.

They have left the LORD;
they hate God, the Holy One of Israel,
and have turned away from him as if he were a stranger.

5Why should you continue to be punished?
Why do you continue to turn against him?

Your whole head is hurt,
and your whole heart is sick.

6There is no healthy spot
from the bottom of your foot to the top of your head;
you are covered with wounds, hurts, and open sores

that are not cleaned and covered,
and no medicine takes away the pain.

7Your land is ruined;
your cities have been burned with fire.

While you watch,
your enemies are stealing everything from your land;
it is ruined like a country destroyed by enemies.

8Jerusalem is left alone
like an empty shelter in a vineyard,

like a hut left in a field of melons,
like a city surrounded by enemies.

9 The LORD All-Powerful
allowed a few of our people to live.
Otherwise we would have been completely destroyed
like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

10 Jerusalem, your rulers are like those of Sodom,
and your people are like those of Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the LORD;
listen to the teaching of our God!

11 The LORD says,
"I do not want all these sacrifices.

I have had enough of your burnt sacrifices
of male sheep and fat from fine animals.

I am not pleased
by the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats.

12 You come to meet with me,
but who asked you to do
all this running in and out of my Temple's rooms?

13 Don't continue bringing me worthless sacrifices!
I hate the incense you burn.

I can't stand your New Moons, Sabbaths, and other feast days;
I can't stand the evil you do in your holy meetings.

14 I hate your New Moon feasts
and your other yearly feasts.

They have become a heavy weight on me,
and I am tired of carrying it.

15 When you raise your arms to me in prayer,
I will refuse to look at you.

Even if you say many prayers,
I will not listen to you,

because your hands are full of blood.

16 Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean.
Stop doing the evil things I see you do.

Stop doing wrong.
17 Learn to do good.

Seek justice.
Punish those who hurt others.

Help the orphans.
Stand up for the rights of widows.”

18 The LORD says,
“Come, let us talk about these things.

Though your sins are like scarlet,
they can be as white as snow.

Though your sins are deep red,
they can be white like wool.

19 If you become willing and obey me,
you will eat good crops from the land.

[20]But if you refuse to obey and if you turn against me,
you will be destroyed by your enemies' swords."

The LORD himself said these things.

## *Jerusalem Is Not Loyal to God*

[21]The city of Jerusalem once followed the LORD,
but she is no longer loyal to him.

She used to be filled with fairness;
people there lived the way God wanted.
But now, murderers live there.

[22]Jerusalem, you have become like the scum left when silver is purified;
you are like wine mixed with water.

[23]Your rulers are rebels
and friends of thieves.

They all accept money for doing wrong,
and they are paid to cheat people.

They don't seek justice for the orphans
or listen to the widows' needs.

[24]So the Lord God All-Powerful,
the Mighty One of Israel, says:

"You, my enemies, will not cause me any more trouble.
I will pay you back for what you did.

[25]I will turn against you
and clean away all your wrongs as if with soap;
I will take all the worthless things out of you.

[26]I will bring back judges as you had long ago;
your counselors will be like those you had in the beginning.

Then you will be called the City That Is Right with God,
the Loyal City.”

[27]By doing what is fair,
Jerusalem will be free again.

By doing what is right,
her people who come back to the LORD will have freedom.

[28]But sinners and those who turn against him will be destroyed;
those who have left the LORD will die.

[29]“You will be ashamed,
because you have worshiped gods under the oak trees.

You will be disgraced,
because you have worshiped idols in your gardens.

[30]You will be like an oak whose leaves are dying
or like a garden without water.

[31]Powerful people will be like small, dry pieces of wood,
and their works will be like sparks.

They will burn together,
and no one will be able to put out that fire.”

## *The Message About Jerusalem*

[2] Isaiah son of Amoz saw this message about Judah and Jerusalem:
[2] In the last days

the mountain on which the LORD's Temple stands
will become the most important of all mountains.

It will be raised above the hills,
and people from all nations will come streaming to it.

3 Many nations will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the Temple of the God of Jacob.

Then God will teach us his ways,
and we will obey his teachings."

His teachings will go out from Jerusalem;
the message of the LORD will go out from Jerusalem.

4 He will settle arguments among the nations
and will make decisions for many nations.

Then they will make their swords into plows
and their spears into hooks for trimming trees.

Nations will no longer fight other nations,
nor will they train for war anymore.

5 Come, family of Jacob,
and let us follow the way of the LORD.

## *A Terrible Day Is Coming*

6 LORD, you have left your people,
the family of Jacob,

because they have become filled with wrong ideas from people in the East.
They try to tell the future like the Philistines,

and they have completely accepted those foreign ideas.

7 Their land has been filled with silver and gold;
there are a great many treasures there.

Their land has been filled with horses;
there are many chariots there.

8 Their land is full of idols.
The people worship these idols they made with their own hands
and shaped with their own fingers.

9 People will not be proud any longer
but will bow low with shame.
God, do not forgive them.

10 Go into the caves of the cliffs;
dig holes and hide in the ground

from the anger of the LORD
and from his great power!

11 Proud people will be made humble,
and they will bow low with shame.

At that time only the LORD will still be praised.

12 The LORD All-Powerful has a certain day planned
when he will punish the proud and those who brag,
and they will no longer be important.

13 He will bring down the tall cedar trees from Lebanon
and the great oak trees of Bashan,

14 all the tall mountains

and the high hills,

15 every tall tower
and every high, strong wall,

16 all the trading ships
and the beautiful ships.

17 At that time proud people will be made humble,
and they will bow low with shame.

At that time only the LORD will be praised,
18 but all the idols will be gone.

19 People will run to caves in the rocky cliffs
and will dig holes and hide in the ground

from the anger of the LORD
and his great power,
when he stands to shake the earth.

20 At that time people will throw away
their gold and silver idols,

which they made for themselves to worship;
they will throw them away to the bats and moles.

21 Then the people will hide in caves
and cracks in the rocks

from the anger of the LORD
and his great power,
when he stands to shake the earth.

22 You should stop trusting in people to save you,
because people are only human;

they aren’t able to help you.

## Psalm 105:1–7

### *God’s Love for Israel*

105 Give thanks to the LORD and pray to him. Tell the nations
what he has done.

2 Sing to him; sing praises to him.
Tell about all his miracles.

3 Be glad that you are his;
let those who seek the LORD be happy.

4 Depend on the LORD and his strength;
always go to him for help.

5 Remember the miracles he has done;
remember his wonders and his decisions.

6 You are descendants of his servant Abraham,
the children of Jacob, his chosen people.

7 He is the LORD our God.
His laws are for all the world.

## Proverbs 24:23–25

### *More Words of Wisdom*

[23]These are also sayings of the wise:

It is not good to take sides when you are the judge.

[24]Don’t tell the wicked that they are innocent;
people will curse you, and nations will hate you.

[25]But things will go well if you punish the guilty,
and you will receive rich blessings.

## 1 Corinthians 14:26–40

### *Meetings Should Help the Church*

[26]So, brothers and sisters, what should you do? When you meet together, one person has a song, and another has a teaching. Another has a new truth from God. Another speaks in a different language,[n] and another person interprets that language. The purpose of all these things should be to help the church grow strong. [27]When you meet together, if anyone speaks in a different language, it should be only two, or not more than three, who speak. They should speak one after the other, and someone should interpret. [28]But if there is no interpreter, then those who speak in a different language should be quiet in the church meeting. They should speak only to themselves and to God.

[29]Only two or three prophets should speak, and the others should judge what they say. [30]If a message from God comes to another person who is sitting, the first speaker should stop. [31]You can all prophesy one after the other. In this way all the people can be taught and encouraged. [32]The spirits of prophets are under the control of the prophets themselves. [33]God is not a God of confusion but a God of peace.

As is true in all the churches of God’s people, [34]women should keep quiet in the church meetings. They are not allowed to speak, but they must yield to this rule as the law says. [35]If they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home. It is shameful for a woman to speak in the church meeting. [36]Did God’s teaching come from you? Or are you the only ones to whom it has come?

[37]Those who think they are prophets or spiritual persons

should understand that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. [38]Those who ignore this will be ignored by God.[n]

[39]So my brothers and sisters, you should truly want to prophesy. But do not stop people from using the gift of speaking in different kinds of languages. [40]But let everything be done in a right and orderly way.

# September 6

# Is That All There Is?

*Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say.*

1 Corinthians 15:3

Maybe you've gone through the acts of religion and faith and yet found yourself more often than not at a dry well. Prayers seem empty. Goals seem unthinkable. Christianity becomes a warped record full of highs and lows and off-key notes.

Is this all there is? Sunday attendance. Pretty songs. Faithful tithings. Golden crosses. Three-piece suits. Big choirs. Leather Bibles. It is nice and all, but … where is the heart of it? …

Think about these words from Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3. "I passed on to you what I received, of which this was most important: that Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say."

There it is. Almost too simple. Jesus was killed, buried, and resurrected. Surprised? The part that matters is the Cross. No more and no less.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## Isaiah 3:1—4:6

### *God Will Punish Judah and Jerusalem*

3 Understand this: The Lord God All-Powerful

will take away everything Judah and Jerusalem need—
all the food and water,

2 the heroes and great soldiers,
the judges and prophets,

people who do magic and elders,

3 the military leaders and government leaders,
the counselors, the skilled craftsmen, and those who try to tell the future.

4 The LORD says, “I will cause young boys to be your leaders,
and foolish children will rule over you.

5 People will be against each other; everyone will be against his neighbor.
Young people will not respect older people,
and common people will not respect important people.”

6 At that time a man will grab one of his brothers
from his own family and say,

“You have a coat, so you will be our leader.
These ruins will be under your control.”

7 But that brother will stand up and say,
“I cannot help you,

because I do not have food or clothes in my house.
You will not make me your leader.”

8 This will happen because Jerusalem has stumbled,
and Judah has fallen.

The things they say and do are against the LORD;
they turn against him.

9 The look on their faces shows they are guilty;
like the people of Sodom, they are proud of their sin.
They don’t care who sees it.

How terrible it will be for them,
because they have brought much trouble on themselves.

10 Tell those who do what is right that things will go well for them,
because they will receive a reward for what they do.

11 But how terrible it will be for the wicked!
They will be punished for all the wrong they have done.

12 Children treat my people cruelly,
and women rule over them.

My people, your guides lead you in the wrong way
and turn you away from what is right.

13 The LORD takes his place in court
and stands to judge the people.

14 The LORD presents his case
against the elders and other leaders of his people:

"You have burned the vineyard.
Your houses are full of what you took from the poor.

15 What gives you the right to crush my people
and grind the faces of the poor into the dirt?"

The Lord God All-Powerful says this.

## *A Warning to Women of Jerusalem*

16 The LORD says,
"The women of Jerusalem are proud.

They walk around with their heads held high,
and they flirt with their eyes.

They take quick, short steps,
making noise with their ankle bracelets.”

17 So the Lord will put sores on the heads of those women in Jerusalem,
and he will make them lose their hair.

18 At that time the Lord will take away everything that makes them proud: their beautiful ankle bracelets, their headbands, their necklaces shaped like the moon, 19 their earrings, bracelets, and veils, 20 their scarves, ankle chains, the cloth belts worn around their waists, their bottles of perfume, and charms, 21 their signet rings, nose rings, 22 their fine robes, capes, shawls, and purses, 23 their mirrors, linen dresses, turbans, and long shawls.

24 Instead of wearing sweet-smelling perfume, they will stink.
Instead of fine cloth belts, they will wear the ropes of captives.

Instead of having their hair fixed in fancy ways, they will be bald.
Instead of fine clothes, they will wear clothes of sadness.
Instead of being beautiful, they will wear the brand of a captive.

25 At that time your men will be killed with swords,
and your heroes will die in war.

26 There will be crying and sadness near the city gates.
Jerusalem will be like a woman who has lost everything and sits on the ground.

4 At that time seven women will grab one man and say, “We will eat our own bread
and make our own clothes,

but please marry us!
Please, take away our shame."

### *The Branch of the Lord*

2At that time the LORD's branch will be very beautiful and
great. The people still living in Israel will be proud of what the
land grows. 3Those who are still living in Jerusalem will be
called holy; their names are recorded among the living in
Jerusalem. 4The LORD will wash away the filth from the women
of Jerusalem. He will wash the bloodstains out of Jerusalem and
clean the city with the spirit of fairness and the spirit of fire.
5Then the LORD will cover Mount Zion and the people who meet
there with a cloud of smoke during the day and with a bright,
flaming fire at night. There will be a covering over every
person. 6This covering will protect the people from the heat of
the sun and will provide a safe place to hide from the storm and
rain.

## Psalm 105:8–15

8He will keep his agreement forever;
he will keep his promises always.

9He will keep the agreement he made with Abraham
and the promise he made to Isaac.

10He made it a law for the people of Jacob;
he made it an agreement with Israel to last forever.

11The LORD said, "I will give you the land of Canaan,
and it will belong to you."

12Then God's people were few in number.
They were strangers in the land.

13They went from one nation to another,
from one kingdom to another.

14 But the LORD did not let anyone hurt them;
he warned kings not to harm them.

15 He said, “Don’t touch my chosen people,
and don’t harm my prophets.”

## Proverbs 24:26–27

26 An honest answer is as pleasing
as a kiss on the lips.

27 First, finish your outside work
and prepare your fields.
After that, you can build your house.

## 1 Corinthians 15:1–34

### *The Good News About Christ*

15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want you to remember the Good
News I brought to you. You received this Good News and
continue strong in it. 2 And you are being saved by it if you
continue believing what I told you. If you do not, then you
believed for nothing.

3 I passed on to you what I received, of which this was most
important: that Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say;
4 that he was buried and was raised to life on the third day as
the Scriptures say; 5 and that he was seen by Peter and then by
the twelve apostles. 6 After that, Jesus was seen by more than
five hundred of the believers at the same time. Most of them are
still living today, but some have died. 7 Then he was seen by
James and later by all the apostles. 8 Last of all he was seen by
me—as by a person not born at the normal time. 9 All the other
apostles are greater than I am. I am not even good enough to be
called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
10 But God’s grace has made me what I am, and his grace to me
was not wasted. I worked harder than all the other apostles.
(But it was not I really; it was God’s grace that was with me.)

11So if I preached to you or the other apostles preached to you,
we all preach the same thing, and this is what you believed.

## *We Will Be Raised from the Dead*

12Now since we preached that Christ was raised from the
dead, why do some of you say that people will not be raised
from the dead? 13If no one is ever raised from the dead, then
Christ has not been raised. 14And if Christ has not been raised,
then our preaching is worth nothing, and your faith is worth
nothing. 15And also, we are guilty of lying about God, because
we testified of him that he raised Christ from the dead. But if
people are not raised from the dead, then God never raised
Christ. 16If the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised
either. 17And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith has
nothing to it; you are still guilty of your sins. 18And those in
Christ who have already died are lost. 19If our hope in Christ is
for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone else in
the world.

20But Christ has truly been raised from the dead—the first
one and proof that those who sleep in death will also be raised.
21Death has come because of what one man did, but the rising
from death also comes because of one man. 22In Adam all of us
die. In the same way, in Christ all of us will be made alive again.
23But everyone will be raised to life in the right order. Christ
was first to be raised. When Christ comes again, those who
belong to him will be raised to life, 24and then the end will
come. At that time Christ will destroy all rulers, authorities, and
powers, and he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father.
25Christ must rule until he puts all enemies under his control.
26The last enemy to be destroyed will be death. 27The Scripture
says that God put all things under his control.[n] When it says “all
things” are under him, it is clear this does not include God
himself. God is the One who put everything under his control.
28After everything has been put under the Son, then he will put
himself under God, who had put all things under him. Then God
will be the complete ruler over everything.

29If the dead are never raised, what will people do who are
being baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all,
why are people being baptized for them?

30And what about us? Why do we put ourselves in danger
every hour? 31I die every day. That is true, brothers and sisters,
just as it is true that I brag about you in Christ Jesus our Lord.
32If I fought wild animals in Ephesus only with human hopes, I
have gained nothing. If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and
drink, because tomorrow we will die.”[n]

33Do not be fooled: “Bad friends will ruin good habits.”

[34]Come back to your right way of thinking and stop sinning.
Some of you do not know God—I say this to shame you.

# September 7

## Victory Over Death

*“Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your pain?”*

1 Corinthians 15:55

The fire that lit the boiler of the New Testament church was an unquenchable belief that if Jesus had been only a man, he would have stayed in the tomb. The earliest Christians couldn’t stay silent about the fact that the one they saw hung on a cross walked again on the earth and appeared to five hundred people.

Let us ask our Father humbly, yet confidently in the name of Jesus, to remind us of the empty tomb. Let us see the victorious Jesus: the conqueror of the tomb, the one who defied death. And let us be reminded that we, too, will be granted that same victory!

from *Walking with the Savior*

### Isaiah 5:1—6:13

### *Israel, the Lord’s Vineyard*

5 Now I will sing for my friend a song about
his vineyard.

My friend had a vineyard
on a hill with very rich soil.

2 He dug and cleared the field of stones
and planted the best grapevines there.

He built a tower in the middle of it
and cut out a winepress as well.

He hoped good grapes would grow there,
but only bad ones grew.

3 My friend says, “You people living in Jerusalem,
and you people of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.

4 What more could I have done for my vineyard
than I have already done?

Although I expected good grapes to grow,
why were there only bad ones?

5 Now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard:

I will remove the hedge,
and it will be burned.

I will break down the stone wall,
and it will be walked on.

6 I will ruin my field.
It will not be trimmed or hoed,
and weeds and thorns will grow there.

I will command the clouds
not to rain on it.”

7 The vineyard belonging to the LORD All-Powerful
is the nation of Israel;

the garden that he loves
is the people of Judah.

He looked for justice, but there was only killing.
He hoped for right living, but there were only cries of pain.

8 How terrible it will be for you who add more houses to your houses
and more fields to your fields

until there is no room left for other people.
Then you are left alone in the land.

9 The LORD All-Powerful said this to me:

"The fine houses will be destroyed;
the large and beautiful houses will be left empty.

10 At that time a ten-acre vineyard will make only six gallons of wine,
and ten bushels of seed will grow only half a bushel of grain."

11 How terrible it will be for people who rise early in the morning
to look for strong drink,

who stay awake late at night,
becoming drunk with wine.

12 At their parties they have lyres, harps,
tambourines, flutes, and wine.

They don't see what the LORD has done
or notice the work of his hands.

13 So my people will be captured and taken away,
because they don't really know me.

All the great people will die of hunger,
and the common people will die of thirst.

14So the place of the dead wants more and more people,
and it opens wide its mouth.

Jerusalem’s important people and common people will go down into it,
with their happy and noisy ones.

15So the common people and the great people will be brought down;
those who are proud will be humbled.

16The LORD All-Powerful will receive glory by judging fairly;
the holy God will show himself holy by doing what is right.

17Then the sheep will go anywhere they want,
and lambs will feed on the land that rich people once owned.

18How terrible it will be for those people!
They pull their guilt and sins behind them
as people pull wagons with ropes.

19They say, “Let God hurry;
let him do his work soon
so we may see it.

Let the plan of the Holy One of Israel happen soon
so that we will know what it is.”

20How terrible it will be for people who call good things bad
and bad things good,

who think darkness is light
and light is darkness,

who think sour is sweet
and sweet is sour.

21 How terrible it will be for people who think they are wise
and believe they are clever.

22 How terrible it will be for people who are famous for drinking wine
and are champions at mixing drinks.

23 They take money to set the guilty free
and don't allow good people to be judged fairly.

24 They will be destroyed
just as fire burns straw or dry grass.

They will be destroyed
like a plant whose roots rot
and whose flower dies and blows away like dust.

They have refused to obey the teachings of the LORD All-Powerful
and have hated the message from the Holy God of Israel.

25 So the LORD has become very angry with his people,
and he has raised his hand to punish them.

Even the mountains are frightened.
Dead bodies lie in the streets like garbage.

But the LORD is still angry;
his hand is still raised to strike down the people.

26 He raises a banner for the nations far away.
He whistles to call those people from the ends of the earth.

Look! The enemy comes quickly!

27 Not one of them becomes tired or falls down.
Not one of them gets sleepy and falls asleep.

Their weapons are close at hand,
and their sandal straps are not broken.

28 Their arrows are sharp,
and all of their bows are ready to shoot.

The horses' hoofs are hard as rocks,
and their chariot wheels move like a whirlwind.

29 Their shout is like the roar of a lion;
it is loud like a young lion.

They growl as they grab their captives.
There is no one to stop them from taking their captives away.

30 On that day they will roar
like the waves of the sea.

And when people look at the land,
they will see only darkness and pain;
all light will become dark in this thick cloud.

## *Isaiah Becomes a Prophet*

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD sitting on a very high throne. His long robe filled the Temple. 2 Heavenly creatures of fire stood above him. Each creature had six wings: It used two wings to cover its face, two wings to cover its feet, and two wings for flying. 3 Each creature was calling to the others:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD All-Powerful.

His glory fills the whole earth.”

4Their calling caused the frame around the door to shake, as
the Temple filled with smoke.
5I said, “Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure, and I live
among people who are not pure, but I have seen the King, the
LORD All-Powerful.”
6One of the heavenly creatures used a pair of tongs to take a
hot coal from the altar. Then he flew to me with the hot coal in
his hand. 7The creature touched my mouth with the hot coal
and said, “Look, your guilt is taken away, because this hot coal
has touched your lips. Your sin is taken away.”
8Then I heard the Lord’s voice, saying, “Whom can I send?
Who will go for us?”
So I said, “Here I am. Send me!”
9Then the Lord said, “Go and tell this to the people:

‘You will listen and listen, but you will not understand.
You will look and look, but you will not learn.’

10Make the minds of these people dumb.
Shut their ears. Cover their eyes.

Otherwise, they might really understand
what they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears.

They might really understand in their minds
and come back to me and be healed.”

11Then I asked, “Lord, how long should I do this?”
He answered,

“Until the cities are destroyed
and the people are gone,

until there are no people left in the houses,
until the land is destroyed and left empty.

12The LORD will send the people far away,
and the land will be left empty.

13 One-tenth of the people will be left in the land,
but it will be destroyed again.

These people will be like an oak tree
whose stump is left when the tree is chopped down.
The people who remain will be like a stump that will sprout again.”

## Psalm 105:16–36

16 God ordered a time of hunger in the land,
and he destroyed all the food.

17 Then he sent a man ahead of them—
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

18 They put chains around his feet
and an iron ring around his neck.

19 Then the time he had spoken of came,
and the LORD’s words proved that Joseph was right.

20 The king of Egypt sent for Joseph and freed him;
the ruler of the people set him free.

21 He made him the master of his house;
Joseph was in charge of his riches.

22 He could order the princes as he wished.
He taught the older men to be wise.

23 Then his father Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob[n] lived in Egypt.[n]

24 The LORD made his people grow in number,
and he made them stronger than their enemies.

25 He caused the Egyptians to hate his people
and to make plans against his servants.

26 Then he sent his servant Moses,
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.

27 They did many signs among the Egyptians
and worked wonders in Egypt.

28 The LORD sent darkness and made the land dark,
but the Egyptians turned against what he said.

29 So he changed their water into blood
and made their fish die.

30 Then their country was filled with frogs,
even in the bedrooms of their rulers.

31 The LORD spoke and flies came,
and gnats were everywhere in the country.

32 He made hail fall like rain
and sent lightning through their land.

33 He struck down their grapevines and fig trees,
and he destroyed every tree in the country.

34 He spoke and grasshoppers came;
the locusts were too many to count.

35 They ate all the plants in the land
and everything the earth produced.

36 The LORD also killed all the firstborn sons in the land,
the oldest son of each family.

## Proverbs 24:28–29

28 Don't testify against your neighbor for no good reason.
Don't say things that are false.

29 Don't say, "I'll get even;
I'll do to him what he did to me."

## 1 Corinthians 15:35–58

### *What Kind of Body Will We Have?*

35 But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? What
kind of body will they have?" 36 Foolish person! When you sow a
seed, it must die in the ground before it can live and grow.
37 And when you sow it, it does not have the same "body" it will
have later. What you sow is only a bare seed, maybe wheat or
something else. 38 But God gives it a body that he has planned
for it, and God gives each kind of seed its own body. 39 All things
made of flesh are not the same: People have one kind of flesh,
animals have another, birds have another, and fish have another.
40 Also there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. But the
beauty of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the beauty of the
earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of beauty, the
moon has another beauty, and the stars have another. And each
star is different in its beauty.

42 It is the same with the dead who are raised to life. The
body that is "planted" will ruin and decay, but it is raised to a
life that cannot be destroyed. 43 When the body is "planted," it is
without honor, but it is raised in glory. When the body is
"planted," it is weak, but when it is raised, it is powerful. 44 The
body that is "planted" is a physical body. When it is raised, it is
a spiritual body.

There is a physical body, and there is also a spiritual body.
45 It is written in the Scriptures: "The first man, Adam, became a
living person."[n] But the last Adam became a spirit that gives

life. 46The spiritual did not come first, but the physical and then
the spiritual. 47The first man came from the dust of the earth.
The second man came from heaven. 48People who belong to the
earth are like the first man of earth. But those people who
belong to heaven are like the man of heaven. 49Just as we were
made like the man of earth, so we will[n] also be made like the
man of heaven.

50I tell you this, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood cannot
have a part in the kingdom of God. Something that will ruin
cannot have a part in something that never ruins. 51But look! I
tell you this secret: We will not all sleep in death, but we will all
be changed. 52It will take only a second—as quickly as an eye
blinks—when the last trumpet sounds. The trumpet will sound,
and those who have died will be raised to live forever, and we
will all be changed. 53This body that can be destroyed must
clothe itself with something that can never be destroyed. And
this body that dies must clothe itself with something that can
never die. 54So this body that can be destroyed will clothe itself
with that which can never be destroyed, and this body that dies
will clothe itself with that which can never die. When this
happens, this Scripture will be made true:

"Death is destroyed forever in victory."

Isaiah 25:8

55"Death, where is your victory?
Death, where is your pain?"

Hosea 13:14

56Death's power to hurt is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
57But we thank God! He gives us the victory through our Lord
Jesus Christ.

58So my dear brothers and sisters, stand strong. Do not let
anything move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of
the Lord, because you know that your work in the Lord is never
wasted.

# September 8

# God Is With Us

*"She will have a son, and she will name him Immanuel."*

Isaiah 7:14

God's treatment for insignificance won't lead you to a bar or dating service, a spouse or social club. God's ultimate cure for the common life takes you to a manger. The babe of Bethlehem. Immanuel. Remember the promise of the angel? "'The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him Immanuel,' which means 'God is with us'" (Matthew 1:23).

Immanuel. The name appears in the same Hebrew form as it did two thousand years ago.

"Immanu" means "with us." "El" refers to *Elohim,* or God. Not an "above us God" or a "somewhere in the neighborhood God." He came as the "with us God." God is with us.

Not "God is with the rich" or "God is with the religious." But God is with us. All of us. Russians, Germans, Buddhists, Mormons, truck drivers and taxi drivers, librarians. God is with *us.*

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Isaiah 7:1—8:22

### *Trouble with Aram*

7 Now Ahaz was the son of Jotham, who was the son of Uzziah. When Ahaz was king of Judah, Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to fight against it. But they were not able to defeat the city.

2 Ahaz king of Judah received a message saying, "The armies of Aram and Israel[n] have joined together."

When Ahaz heard this, he and the people were frightened. They shook with fear like trees of the forest blown by the wind.

3 Then the LORD told Isaiah, "You and your son Shear-Jashub[n]

should go and meet Ahaz at the place where the water flows into the upper pool, on the road where people do their laundry.
4Tell Ahaz, 'Be careful. Be calm and don't worry. Don't let those two men, Rezin and Pekah son of Remaliah, scare you. Don't be afraid of their anger or Aram's anger, because they are like two barely burning sticks that are ready to go out. 5They have made plans against you, saying, 6"Let's fight against Judah and tear it apart. We will divide the land for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel the new king of Judah." 7But I, the Lord God, say,

"'Their plan will not succeed;
it will not happen,

8because Aram is led by the city of Damascus,
and Damascus is led by its weak king, Rezin.

Within sixty-five years Israel will no longer be a nation.

9Israel is led by the city of Samaria,
and Samaria is led by its weak king, the son of Remaliah.

If your faith is not strong,
you will not have strength enough to last.'"

## *Immanuel—God Is with Us*

10Then the LORD spoke to Ahaz again, saying, 11"Ask for a sign from the LORD your God to prove to yourself that these things are true. It may be a sign from as deep as the place of the dead or as high as the heavens."
12But Ahaz said, "I will not ask for a sign or test the LORD."
13Then Isaiah said, "Ahaz, descendant of David, listen carefully! Isn't it bad enough that you wear out the patience of people? Do you also have to wear out the patience of my God?
14The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin[n] will be pregnant. She will have a son, and she will name him Immanuel.[n] 15He will be eating milk curds and honey when he learns to reject what is evil and to choose what is good. 16You are afraid of the kings of Israel and Aram now. But before the child learns to choose good and reject evil, the lands of Israel and Aram will be empty. 17The LORD will bring troubled times to you, your people, and to the people of your father's family. They

will be worse than anything that has happened since Israel separated from Judah. The LORD will bring the king of Assyria to fight against you.

18 "At that time the LORD will whistle for the Egyptians, and they will come like flies from Egypt's faraway streams. He will call for the Assyrians, and they will come like bees. 19 These enemies will camp in the deep ravines and in the cliffs, by the thornbushes and watering holes. 20 The Lord will hire Assyria and use it like a razor to punish Judah. It will be as if the Lord is shaving the hair from Judah's head and legs and removing Judah's beard.

21 "At that time a person will be able to keep only one young cow and two sheep alive. 22 There will be only enough milk for that person to eat milk curds. All who remain in the land will go back to eating just milk curds and honey. 23 In this land there are now vineyards that have a thousand grapevines, which are worth about twenty-five pounds of silver. But these fields will become full of weeds and thorns. 24 The land will become wild and useful only as a hunting ground. 25 People once worked and grew food on these hills, but at that time people will not go there, because the land will be filled with weeds and thorns. Only sheep and cattle will go to those places."

## *Assyria Will Come Soon*

8 The LORD told me, "Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: 'Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.' 2 I will gather some men to be reliable witnesses: Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberekiah."

3 Then I went to the prophetess, and she became pregnant and had a son. The LORD told me, "Name the boy Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz,[n] 4 because the king of Assyria will take away all the wealth and possessions of Damascus and Samaria before the boy learns to say 'my father' or 'my mother.'"

5 Again the LORD spoke to me, saying,

6 "These people refuse to accept
the slow-moving waters of the pool of Shiloah

and are terrified of Rezin
and Pekah son of Remaliah.

7 So I, the Lord, will bring
the king of Assyria and all his power against them,
like a powerful flood of water from the Euphrates River.

The Assyrians will be like water rising over the banks of the river,
flowing over the land.

8 That water will flow into Judah and pass through it,
rising to Judah's throat.

Immanuel, this army will spread its wings like a bird
until it covers your whole country."

9 Be broken, all you nations,
and be smashed to pieces.

Listen, all you faraway countries.
Prepare for battle and be smashed to pieces!
Prepare for battle and be smashed to pieces!

10 Make your plans for the fight,
but they will be defeated.

Give orders to your armies,
but they will be useless,

because God is with us.

## *Warnings to Isaiah*

11 The LORD spoke to me with his great power and warned me not to follow the lead of the rest of the people. He said,

12 "People are saying that others make plans against them,
but you should not believe them.

Don't be afraid of what they fear;
do not dread those things.

13 But remember that the LORD All-Powerful is holy.

He is the one you should fear;
he is the one you should dread.

14 Then he will be a place of safety for you.
But for the two families of Israel,

he will be like a stone that causes people to stumble,
like a rock that makes them fall.

He will be like a trap for the people of Jerusalem,
and he will catch them in his trap.

15 Many people will fall over this rock.
They will fall and be broken;
they will be trapped and caught."

16 Make an agreement.
Seal up the teaching while my followers are watching.

17 I will wait for the LORD to help us,
the LORD who is ashamed of the family of Israel.

I will wait for him.

18 I am here, and with me are the children the LORD has given me. We are signs and proofs for the people of Israel from the LORD All-Powerful, who lives on Mount Zion.

19 Some people say, "Ask the mediums and fortune-tellers, who whisper and mutter, what to do." But I tell you that people should ask their God for help. Why should people who are still alive ask something from the dead? 20 You should follow the teachings and the agreement with the LORD. The mediums and fortune-tellers do not speak the word of the LORD, so their words are worth nothing.

21 People will wander through the land troubled and hungry. When they become hungry, they will become angry and will look up and curse their king and their God. 22 They will look around them at their land and see only trouble, darkness, and awful gloom. And they will be forced into the darkness.

## Psalm 105:37–45

37 Then he brought his people out,
and they carried with them silver and gold.
Not one of his people stumbled.

38 The Egyptians were glad when they left,
because the Egyptians were afraid of them.

39 The LORD covered them with a cloud
and lit up the night with fire.

40 When they asked, he brought them quail
and filled them with bread from heaven.

41 God split the rock, and water flowed out;
it ran like a river through the desert.

42 He remembered his holy promise
to his servant Abraham.

43 So God brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.

44 He gave them lands of other nations,
so they received what others had worked for.

45 This was so they would keep his orders
and obey his teachings.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 24:30–34

30 I passed by a lazy person's field
and by the vineyard of someone with no sense.

31 Thorns had grown up everywhere.
The ground was covered with weeds,
and the stone walls had fallen down.

32 I thought about what I had seen;
I learned this lesson from what I saw.

33 You sleep a little; you take a nap.
You fold your hands and lie down to rest.

34 Soon you will be as poor as if you had been robbed;
you will have as little as if you had been held up.

## 1 Corinthians 16:1–24

### *The Gift for Other Believers*

16 Now I will write about the collection of money for God's
people. Do the same thing I told the Galatian churches to do:
2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should put
aside money as you have been blessed. Save it up so you will
not have to collect money after I come. 3 When I arrive, I will
send whomever you approve to take your gift to Jerusalem. I
will send them with letters of introduction, 4 and if it seems good
for me to go also, they will go along with me.

### *Paul's Plans*

5 I plan to go through Macedonia, so I will come to you after I
go through there. 6 Perhaps I will stay with you for a time or
even all winter. Then you can help me on my trip, wherever I go.
7 I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to stay a

longer time with you if the Lord allows it. [8]But I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost, [9]because a good opportunity for a great and growing work has been given to me now. And there are many people working against me.

[10]If Timothy comes to you, see to it that he has nothing to fear with you, because he is working for the Lord just as I am. [11]So none of you should treat Timothy as unimportant, but help him on his trip in peace so that he can come back to me. I am expecting him to come with the brothers.

[12]Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly encouraged him to visit you with the other brothers. He did not at all want to come now; he will come when he has the opportunity.

## *Paul Ends His Letter*

[13]Be alert. Continue strong in the faith. Have courage, and be strong. [14]Do everything in love.

[15]You know that the family of Stephanas were the first believers in Southern Greece and that they have given themselves to the service of God's people. I ask you, brothers and sisters, [16]to follow the leading of people like these and anyone else who works and serves with them.

[17]I am happy that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus have come. You are not here, but they have filled your place. [18]They have refreshed my spirit and yours. You should recognize the value of people like these.

[19]The churches in Asia send greetings to you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you in the Lord, as does the church that meets in their house. [20]All the brothers and sisters here send greetings. Give each other a holy kiss when you meet.

[21]I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand.

[22]If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be separated from God—lost forever!

Come, O Lord!

[23]The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

[24]My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus.[n]

# September 9

# A Compassionate God

*He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them.*

2 Corinthians 1:4

My child's feelings are hurt. I tell her she's special. My child is injured. I do whatever it takes to make her feel better. My child is afraid. I won't go to sleep until she is secure.

I'm not a hero … I'm a parent. When a child hurts, a parent does what comes naturally. He helps …

Why don't I let my Father do for me what I am more than willing to do for my own children?

I'm learning … Being a father is teaching me that when I am criticized, injured, or afraid, there is a Father who is ready to comfort me. There is a Father who will hold me until I'm better, help me until I can live with the hurt, and who won't go to sleep when I'm afraid of waking up and seeing the dark.

Ever.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

## Isaiah 9:1—10:34

### *A New Day Is Coming*

9 But suddenly there will be no more gloom for the land that
suffered. In the past God made the lands of Zebulun and
Naphtali hang their heads in shame, but in the future those
lands will be made great. They will stretch from the road along
the Mediterranean Sea to the land beyond the Jordan River and
north to Galilee, the land of people who are not Israelites.

2 Before those people lived in darkness,
but now they have seen a great light.

They lived in a dark land,
but a light has shined on them.

3 God, you have caused the nation to grow
and made the people happy.

And they have shown their happiness to you,
like the joy during harvest time,

like the joy of people
taking what they have won in war.

4 Like the time you defeated Midian,
you have taken away their heavy load

and the heavy pole from their backs
and the rod the enemy used to punish them.

5 Every boot that marched in battle
and every uniform stained with blood
has been thrown into the fire.

6 A child has been born to us;
God has given a son to us.
He will be responsible for leading the people.

His name will be Wonderful Counselor, Powerful God,
Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.

7 Power and peace will be in his kingdom
and will continue to grow forever.

He will rule as king on David’s throne
and over David’s kingdom.

He will make it strong
by ruling with justice and goodness

from now on and forever.

The LORD All-Powerful will do this
because of his strong love for his people.

## *God Will Punish Israel*

8 The Lord sent a message against the people of Jacob;
it says that God will judge Israel.

9 Then everyone in Israel, even the leaders in Samaria,
will know that God has sent it.

Those people are proud and brag by saying,

10 "These bricks have fallen,
but we will build again with cut stones.

These small trees have been chopped down,
but we will put great cedars there."

11 But the LORD has brought the enemies of Rezin against them;
he has stirred up their enemies against them.

12 The Arameans came from the east
and the Philistines from the west,

and they ate up Israel with their armies.

But the LORD was still angry;
his hand was still raised to punish the people.

13 But the people did not return to the one who had struck them;

they did not follow the LORD All-Powerful.

14 So the LORD cut off Israel's head and tail,
taking away both the branch and stalk in one day.

15 The elders and important men were the head,
and the prophets who speak lies were the tail.

16 Those who led the people led them in the wrong direction,
and those who followed them were destroyed.

17 So the Lord is not happy with the young people,
nor will he show mercy to the orphans and widows.

All the people are separated from God and are very evil;
they all speak lies.

But the LORD is still angry;
his hand is still raised to strike down the people.

18 Evil is like a small fire.
First, it burns weeds and thorns.

Next, it burns the larger bushes in the forest,
and they all go up in a column of smoke.

19 The LORD All-Powerful is angry,
so the land will be burned.

The people are like fuel for the fire;
no one will try to save his brother or sister.

20 People will grab something on the right,
but they will still be hungry.

They will eat something on the left,
but they will not be filled.

Then they will each turn and eat their own children.

21 The people of Manasseh will fight against the people of Ephraim,
and Ephraim will fight against Manasseh.
Then both of them will turn against Judah.

But the LORD is still angry;
his hand is still raised to strike down the people.

10 How terrible it will be for those who make unfair laws,
and those who write laws that make life hard for people.

2 They are not fair to the poor,
and they rob my people of their rights.

They allow people to steal from widows
and to take from orphans what really belongs to them.

3 How will you explain the things you have done?
What will you do when your destruction comes from far away?

Where will you run for help?
Where will you hide your riches then?

4 You will have to bow down among the captives
or fall down among the dead bodies.

But the LORD is still angry;
his hand is still raised to strike down the people.

## *God Will Punish Assyria*

5 God says, “How terrible it will be for the king of Assyria.
I use him like a rod to show my anger;
in anger I use Assyria like a club.

6 I send it to fight against a nation that is separated from God.
I am angry with those people,
so I command Assyria to fight against them,

to take their wealth from them,
to trample them down like dirt in the streets.

7 But Assyria’s king doesn’t understand that I am using him;
he doesn’t know he is a tool for me.

He only wants to destroy other people
and to defeat many nations.

8 The king of Assyria says to himself,
‘All of my commanders are like kings.

9 The city Calno is like the city Carchemish.
The city Hamath is like the city Arpad.
The city Samaria is like the city Damascus.

10 I defeated those kingdoms that worship idols,
and those idols were more than the idols of Jerusalem and Samaria.

11 As I defeated Samaria and her idols,
I will also defeat Jerusalem and her idols.’”

12 When the Lord finishes doing what he planned to Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will punish Assyria. The king of Assyria is very proud, and his pride has made him do these evil things, so God will punish him. 13 The king of Assyria says this:

“By my own power I have done these things;
by my wisdom I have defeated many nations.

I have taken their wealth,
and, like a mighty one, I have taken their people.

14 I have taken the riches of all these people,
like a person reaching into a bird's nest.

I have taken these nations,
like a person taking eggs.

Not one raised a hand
or opened its mouth to stop me."

15 An ax is not better than the person who swings it.
A saw is not better than the one who uses it.

A stick cannot control the person who picks it up.
A club cannot pick up the person!

16 So the Lord God All-Powerful
will send a terrible disease upon Assyria's soldiers.

The strength of Assyria will be burned up
like a fire burning until everything is gone.

17 God, the Light of Israel, will be like a fire;
the Holy One will be like a flame.

He will be like a fire
that suddenly burns the weeds and thorns.

18 The fire burns away the great trees and rich farmlands,
destroying everything.
It will be like a sick person who wastes away.

19 The trees left standing will be so few
that even a child could count them.

[20]At that time some people will be left alive in Israel
from the family of Jacob.

They will not continue to depend
on the person who defeated them.

They will learn truly to depend on the LORD,
the Holy One of Israel.

[21]Those who are left alive in Jacob's family
will again follow the powerful God.

[22]Israel, your people are many,
like the grains of sand by the sea.
But only a few of them will be left alive to return to the LORD.

God has announced that he will destroy the land
completely and fairly.

[23]The Lord God All-Powerful will certainly destroy this land,
as he has announced.

[24]This is what the Lord God All-Powerful says:

"My people living in Jerusalem,
don't be afraid of the Assyrians,

who beat you with a rod
and raise a stick against you, as Egypt did.

[25]After a short time my anger against you will stop,
and then I will turn my anger to destroying them."

[26]Then the LORD All-Powerful will beat the Assyrians with a whip

as he defeated Midian at the rock of Oreb.

He will raise his stick over the waters
as he did in Egypt.

27 Then the troubles that Assyria puts on you
will be removed,

and the load they make you carry
will be taken away.

## *Assyria Invades Israel*

28 The army of Assyria will enter near Aiath.
Its soldiers will walk through Migron.
They will store their food in Micmash.

29 The army will go over the pass.
The soldiers will sleep at Geba.

The people of Ramah will be afraid,
and the people at Gibeah of Saul will run away.

30 Cry out, Bath Gallim!
Laishah, listen!
Poor Anathoth!

31 The people of Madmenah are running away;
the people of Gebim are hiding.

32 This day the army will stop at Nob.
They will shake their fist at Mount Zion,
at the hill of Jerusalem.

33 Watch! The Lord God All-Powerful
with his great power will chop them down like a great

tree.

Those who are great will be cut down;
those who are important will fall to the ground.

34 He will cut them down
as a forest is cut down with an ax.

And the great trees of Lebanon
will fall by the power of the Mighty One.

## Psalm 106:1–5

### *Israel's Failure to Trust God*

106 Praise the LORD! Thank the LORD because he is good.
His love continues forever.

2 No one can tell all the mighty things the LORD has done;
no one can speak all his praise.

3 Happy are those who do right,
who do what is fair at all times.

4 LORD, remember me when you are kind to your people;
help me when you save them.

5 Let me see the good things you do for your chosen people.
Let me be happy along with your happy nation;
let me join your own people in praising you.

## Proverbs 25:1–2

## *More Wise Sayings of Solomon*

25 These are more wise sayings of Solomon, copied by the men
of Hezekiah king of Judah.

2 God is honored for what he keeps secret.
Kings are honored for what they can discover.

# 2 Corinthians 1:1—2:4

1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am an apostle because that is what God wanted. Also from Timothy our brother in Christ.

To the church of God in Corinth, and to all of God's people everywhere in Southern Greece:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## *Paul Gives Thanks to God*

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. 4 He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us. 5 We share in the many sufferings of Christ. In the same way, much comfort comes to us through Christ. 6 If we have troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we have comfort, you also have comfort. This helps you to accept patiently the same sufferings we have. 7 Our hope for you is strong, knowing that you share in our sufferings and also in the comfort we receive.

8 Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the trouble we suffered in Asia. We had great burdens there that were beyond our own strength. We even gave up hope of living. 9 Truly, in our own hearts we believed we would die. But this happened so we would not trust in ourselves but in God, who raises people from the dead. 10 God saved us from these great dangers of death, and he will continue to save us. We have put our hope in him, and he will save us again. 11 And you can help us with your prayers. Then many people will give thanks for us —that God blessed us because of their many prayers.

## *The Change in Paul's Plans*

12 This is what we are proud of, and I can say it with a clear

conscience: In everything we have done in the world, and especially with you, we have had an honest[n] and sincere heart from God. We did this by God's grace, not by the kind of wisdom the world has. 13–14We write to you only what you can read and understand. And I hope that as you have understood some things about us, you may come to know everything about us. Then you can be proud of us, as we will be proud of you on the day our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

15I was so sure of all this that I made plans to visit you first so you could be blessed twice. 16I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and again on my way back. I wanted to get help from you for my trip to Judea. 17Do you think that I made these plans without really meaning it? Or maybe you think I make plans as the world does, so that I say yes, yes and at the same time no, no.

18But since you can believe God, you can believe that what we tell you is never both yes and no. 19The Son of God, Jesus Christ, that Silas and Timothy and I preached to you, was not yes and no. In Christ it has always been yes. 20The yes to all of God's promises is in Christ, and through Christ we say yes to the glory of God. 21Remember, God is the One who makes you and us strong in Christ. God made us his chosen people. 22He put his mark on us to show that we are his, and he put his Spirit in our hearts to be a guarantee for all he has promised.

23I tell you this, and I ask God to be my witness that this is true: The reason I did not come back to Corinth was to keep you from being punished or hurt. 24We are not trying to control your faith. You are strong in faith. But we are workers with you for your own joy.

2 So I decided that my next visit to you would not be another one to make you sad. 2If I make you sad, who will make me glad? Only you can make me glad—particularly the person whom I made sad. 3I wrote you a letter for this reason: that when I came to you I would not be made sad by the people who should make me happy. I felt sure of all of you, that you would share my joy. 4When I wrote to you before, I was very troubled and unhappy in my heart, and I wrote with many tears. I did not write to make you sad, but to let you know how much I love you.

# September 10

# A World Without Sin

*Then wolves will live in peace with lambs, and leopards will lie down to rest with goats.*

Isaiah 11:6

can you imagine a world minus sin? Have you done anything recently because of sin? At the very least, you've complained. You've worried. You've grumbled. You've hoarded when you should have shared. You've turned away when you should have helped …

Because of sin, you've snapped at the ones you love and argued with the ones you cherish. You have felt ashamed, guilty, bitter.

Sin has sired a thousand heartaches and broken a million promises. Your addiction can be traced back to sin. Your mistrust can be traced back to sin. Bigotry, robbery, adultery—all because of sin. But in heaven, all of this will end.

Can you imagine a world without sin? If so, you can imagine heaven.

from *When Christ Comes*

## Isaiah 11:1—12:6

### *The King of Peace Is Coming*

11 A new branch will grow
from a stump of a tree;

so a new king will come
from the family of Jesse.[n]

[2]The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon that king.
The Spirit will give him wisdom and understanding,
guidance and power.
The Spirit will teach him to know and respect the LORD.

[3]This king will be glad to obey the LORD.

He will not judge by the way things look
or decide by what he hears.

[4]But he will judge the poor honestly;
he will be fair in his decisions for the poor people of the
land.

At his command evil people will be punished,
and by his words the wicked will be put to death.

[5]Goodness and fairness will give him strength,
like a belt around his waist.

[6]Then wolves will live in peace with lambs,
and leopards will lie down to rest with goats.

Calves, lions, and young bulls will eat together,
and a little child will lead them.

[7]Cows and bears will eat together in peace.
Their young will lie down to rest together.
Lions will eat hay as oxen do.

[8]A baby will be able to play near a cobra’s hole,
and a child will be able to put his hand into the nest of a
poisonous snake.

[9]They will not hurt or destroy each other
on all my holy mountain,

because the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD,
as the sea is full of water.

10 At that time the new king from the family of Jesse will
stand as a banner for all peoples. The nations will come
together around him, and the place where he lives will be filled
with glory. 11 At that time the Lord will again reach out and take
his people who are left alive in Assyria, North Egypt, South
Egypt, Cush, Elam, Babylonia, Hamath, and all the islands of
the sea.

12 God will raise a banner as a sign for all nations,
and he will gather the people of Israel who were forced
from their country.

He will gather the scattered people of Judah
from all parts of the earth.

13 At that time Israel will not be jealous anymore,
and Judah will have no more enemies.

Israel will not be jealous of Judah,
and Judah will not hate Israel.

14 But Israel and Judah will attack the Philistines on the west.
Together they will take the riches from the people of the
east.

They will conquer Edom and Moab,
and the people of Ammon will be under their control.

15 The LORD will dry up
the Red Sea of Egypt.

He will wave his arm over the Euphrates River
and dry it up with a scorching wind.

He will divide it into seven small rivers
so that people can walk across them with their sandals

on.

16 So God's people who are left alive
will have a way to leave Assyria,

just like the time the Israelites
came out of Egypt.

## *A Song of Praise to God*

12 At that time you will say:
"I praise you, LORD!
You were angry with me,

but you are not angry with me now!
You have comforted me.

2 God is the one who saves me;
I will trust him and not be afraid.

The LORD, the LORD gives me strength and makes me sing.
He has saved me."

3 You will receive your salvation with joy
as you would draw water from a well.

4 At that time you will say,

"Praise the LORD and worship him.
Tell everyone what he has done
and how great he is.

5 Sing praise to the LORD, because he has done great things.
Let all the world know what he has done.

6 Shout and sing for joy, you people of Jerusalem,

because the Holy One of Israel does great things before your eyes.”

## Psalm 106:6–18

6 We have sinned just as our ancestors did.
We have done wrong; we have done evil.

7 Our ancestors in Egypt
did not learn from your miracles.

They did not remember all your kindnesses,
so they turned against you at the Red Sea.

8 But the LORD saved them for his own sake,
to show his great power.

9 He commanded the Red Sea, and it dried up.
He led them through the deep sea as if it were a desert.

10 He saved them from those who hated them.
He saved them from their enemies,

11 and the water covered their foes.
Not one of them escaped.

12 Then the people believed what the LORD said,
and they sang praises to him.

13 But they quickly forgot what he had done;
they did not wait for his advice.

14 They became greedy for food in the desert,
and they tested God there.

15 So he gave them what they wanted,
but he also sent a terrible disease among them.

16 The people in the camp were jealous of Moses
and of Aaron, the holy priest of the LORD.

17 Then the ground opened up and swallowed Dathan
and closed over Abiram's group.

18 A fire burned among their followers,
and flames burned up the wicked.

## Proverbs 25:3–5

3 No one can measure the height of the skies or the depth of the earth.
So also no one can understand the mind of a king.

4 Remove the scum from the silver,
so the silver can be used by the silversmith.

5 Remove wicked people from the king's presence;
then his government will be honest and last a long time.

## 2 Corinthians 2:5–17

### *Forgive the Sinner*

5 Someone there among you has caused sadness, not to me, but to all of you. I mean he caused sadness to all in some way. (I do not want to make it sound worse than it really is.) 6 The punishment that most of you gave him is enough for him. 7 But now you should forgive him and comfort him to keep him from having too much sadness and giving up completely. 8 So I beg

you to show that you love him. [9]I wrote you to test you and to see if you obey in everything. [10]If you forgive someone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if I had anything to forgive—I forgave it for you, as if Christ were with me. [11]I did this so that Satan would not win anything from us, because we know very well what Satan's plans are.

## *Paul's Concern in Troas*

[12]When I came to Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the Lord gave me a good opportunity there. [13]But I had no peace, because I did not find my brother Titus. So I said good-bye to them at Troas and went to Macedonia.

## *Victory Through Christ*

[14]But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's victory parade. God uses us to spread his knowledge everywhere like a sweet-smelling perfume. [15]Our offering to God is this: We are the sweet smell of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are being lost. [16]To those who are lost, we are the smell of death that brings death, but to those who are being saved, we are the smell of life that brings life. So who is able to do this work? [17]We do not sell the word of God for a profit as many other people do. But in Christ we speak the truth before God, as messengers of God.

# September 11

## Reflecting God's Glory

*Our faces, then, are not covered. We all show the Lord's glory, and we are being changed to be like him.*

2 Corinthians 3:18

The purpose of worship is to change the face of the worshiper. That is exactly what happened to Christ on the mountain. Jesus' appearance was changed: "His face became bright like the sun" (Matthew 17:2).

The connection between the face and worship is more than coincidental. Our face is the most public part of our bodies, covered less than any other area. It is also the most recognizable part of our bodies. We don't fill a school annual with photos of people's feet but rather with photos of faces. God desires to take our faces, this exposed and memorable part of our bodies, and use them to reflect his goodness.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Isaiah 13:1—14:32

### *God's Message to Babylon*

13 God showed Isaiah son of Amoz this message about Babylon:

2 Raise a flag on the bare mountain.
Call out to the men.

Raise your hand to signal them
to enter through the gates for important people.

[3]I myself have commanded those people
whom I have separated as mine.

I have called those warriors to carry out my anger.
They rejoice and are glad to do my will.

[4]Listen to the loud noise in the mountains,
the sound of many people.

Listen to the noise among the kingdoms,
the sound of nations gathering together.

The LORD All-Powerful is calling
his army together for battle.

[5]This army is coming from a faraway land,
from the edge of the horizon.

In anger the LORD is using this army like a weapon
to destroy the whole country.

[6]Cry, because the LORD's day of judging is near;
the Almighty is sending destruction.

[7]People will be weak with fear,
and their courage will melt away.

[8]Everyone will be afraid.
Pain and hurt will grab them;
they will hurt like a woman giving birth to a baby.

They will look at each other in fear,
with their faces red like fire.

## *God's Judgment Against Babylon*

9 Look, the LORD's day of judging is coming—
a terrible day, a day of God's anger.

He will destroy the land
and the sinners who live in it.

10 The stars will not show their light;
the skies will be dark.

The sun will grow dark as it rises,
and the moon will not give its light.

11 The LORD says, "I will punish the world for its evil
and wicked people for their sins.

I will cause proud people to lose their pride,
and I will destroy the pride of those who are cruel to others.

12 People will be harder to find than pure gold;
there will be fewer people than there is fine gold in Ophir.

13 I will make the sky shake,
and the earth will be moved from its place

by the anger of the LORD All-Powerful
at the time of his burning anger.

14 "Then the people from Babylon will run away like hunted deer
or like sheep who have no shepherd.

Everyone will turn back to his own people;
each will run back to his own land.

15 Everyone who is captured will be killed;
everyone who is caught will be killed with a sword.

16 Their little children will be beaten to death in front of them.
Their houses will be robbed
and their wives raped.

17 “Look, I will cause the armies of Media to attack Babylon.
They do not care about silver
or delight in gold.

18 Their soldiers will shoot the young men with arrows;
they will show no mercy on children,
nor will they feel sorry for little ones.

19 Babylon is the most beautiful of all kingdoms,
and the Babylonians are very proud of it.

But God will destroy it
like Sodom and Gomorrah.

20 No one will ever live there
or settle there again.

No Arab will put a tent there;
no shepherd will bring sheep there.

21 Only desert animals will live there,
and their houses will be full of wild dogs.

Owls will live there,
and wild goats will leap about in the houses.

22 Wolves will howl within the strong walls,
and wild dogs will bark in the beautiful buildings.

The end of Babylon is near;
its time is almost over.”

## *Israel Will Return Home*

14 The LORD will show mercy to the people of Jacob, and he will
again choose the people of Israel. He will settle them in their
own land. Then non-Israelite people will join the Israelites and
will become a part of the family of Jacob. 2Nations will take the
Israelites back to their land. Then those men and women from
the other nations will become slaves to Israel in the LORD’s land.
In the past the Israelites were their slaves, but now the
Israelites will defeat those nations and rule over them.

## *The King of Babylon Will Fall*

3The LORD will take away the Israelites’ hard work and will
comfort them. They will no longer have to work hard as slaves.
4On that day Israel will sing this song about the king of
Babylon:

The cruel king who ruled us is finished;
his angry rule is finished!

5The LORD has broken the scepter of evil rulers
and taken away their power.

6The king of Babylon struck people in anger
again and again.

He ruled nations in anger
and continued to hurt them.

7But now, the whole world rests and is quiet.
Now the people begin to sing.

8Even the pine trees are happy,
and the cedar trees of Lebanon rejoice.

They say, “The king has fallen,

so no one will ever cut us down again.”

9 The place of the dead is excited
to meet you when you come.

It wakes the spirits of the dead,
the leaders of the world.

It makes kings of all nations
stand up from their thrones to greet you.

10 All these leaders will make fun of you
and will say,

“Now you are weak, as we are.
Now you are just like us.”

11 Your pride has been sent down to the place of the dead.
The music from your harps goes with it.

Flies are spread out like your bed beneath you,
and worms cover your body like a blanket.

12 King of Babylon, morning star, you have fallen from heaven,
even though you were as bright as the rising sun!

In the past all the nations on earth bowed down before you,
but now you have been cut down.

13 You told yourself,
“I will go up to heaven.

I will put my throne
above God’s stars.

I will sit on the mountain of the gods,
on the slopes of the sacred mountain.

14 I will go up above the tops of the clouds.
I will be like God Most High.”

15 But you were brought down to the grave,
to the deep places where the dead are.

16 Those who see you stare at you.
They think about what has happened to you

and say, “Is this the same man who caused great fear on earth,
who shook the kingdoms,

17 who turned the world into a desert,
who destroyed its cities,

who captured people in war
and would not let them go home?”

18 Every king of the earth has been buried with honor,
each in his own grave.

19 But you are thrown out of your grave,
like an unwanted branch.

You are covered by bodies
that died in battle,

by bodies to be buried in a rocky pit.
You are like a dead body other soldiers walk on.
20 You will not be buried with those bodies,

because you ruined your own country

and killed your own people.

The children of evil people
will never be mentioned again.

21 Prepare to kill his children,
because their father is guilty.

They will never again take control of the earth;
they will never again fill the world with their cities.

22 The LORD All-Powerful says this:
"I will fight against those people;

I will destroy Babylon and its people,
its children and their descendants," says the LORD.

23 "I will make Babylon fit only for owls
and for swamps.

I will sweep Babylon as with a broom of destruction,"
says the LORD All-Powerful.

## *God Will Punish Assyria*

24 The LORD All-Powerful has made this promise:

"These things will happen exactly as I planned them;
they will happen exactly as I set them up.

25 I will destroy the king of Assyria in my country;
I will trample him on my mountains.

He placed a heavy load on my people,
but that weight will be removed.

[26]“This is what I plan to do for all the earth.
And this is the hand that I have raised over all nations.”

[27]When the LORD All-Powerful makes a plan,
no one can stop it.

When the LORD raises his hand to punish people,
no one can stop it.

## *God’s Message to Philistia*

[28]This message was given in the year that King Ahaz died:

[29]Country of Philistia, don’t be happy
that the king who struck you is now dead.

He is like a snake that will give birth to another dangerous snake.
The new king will be like a quick, dangerous snake to bite you.

[30]Even the poorest of my people will be able to eat safely,
and people in need will be able to lie down in safety.

But I will kill your family with hunger,
and all your people who are left will die.

[31]People near the city gates, cry out!
Philistines, be frightened,

because a cloud of dust comes from the north.
It is an army, full of men ready to fight.

[32]What shall we tell the messengers from Philistia?
Say that the LORD has made Jerusalem strong
and that his poor people will go there for safety.

## Psalm 106:19–23

19 The people made a gold calf at Mount Sinai
and worshiped a metal statue.

20 They exchanged their glorious God
for a statue of a bull that eats grass.

21 They forgot the God who saved them,
who had done great things in Egypt,

22 who had done miracles in Egypt[n]
and amazing things by the Red Sea.

23 So God said he would destroy them.
But Moses, his chosen one, stood before him
and stopped God’s anger from destroying them.

## Proverbs 25:6–8

6 Don’t brag to the king
and act as if you are great.

7 It is better for him to give you a higher position
than to bring you down in front of the prince.

Because of something you have seen,
8 do not quickly take someone to court.

What will you do later
when your neighbor proves you wrong?

# 2 Corinthians 3:1–18

## *Servants of the New Agreement*

3 Are we starting to brag about ourselves again? Do we need
letters of introduction to you or from you, like some other
people? 2You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts,
known and read by everyone. 3You show that you are a letter
from Christ sent through us. This letter is not written with ink
but with the Spirit of the living God. It is not written on stone
tablets[n] but on human hearts.

4We can say this, because through Christ we feel certain
before God. 5We are not saying that we can do this work
ourselves. It is God who makes us able to do all that we do. 6He
made us able to be servants of a new agreement from himself to
his people. This new agreement is not a written law, but it is of
the Spirit. The written law brings death, but the Spirit gives life.

7The law that brought death was written in words on stone.
It came with God's glory, which made Moses' face so bright that
the Israelites could not continue to look at it. But that glory
later disappeared. 8So surely the new way that brings the Spirit
has even more glory. 9If the law that judged people guilty of sin
had glory, surely the new way that makes people right with God
has much greater glory. 10That old law had glory, but it really
loses its glory when it is compared to the much greater glory of
this new way. 11If that law which disappeared came with glory,
then this new way which continues forever has much greater
glory.

12We have this hope, so we are very bold. 13We are not like
Moses, who put a covering over his face so the Israelites would
not see it. The glory was disappearing, and Moses did not want
them to see it end. 14But their minds were closed, and even
today that same covering hides the meaning when they read the
old agreement. That covering is taken away only through
Christ. 15Even today, when they read the law of Moses, there is
a covering over their minds. 16But when a person changes and
follows the Lord, that covering is taken away. 17The Lord is the
Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
18Our faces, then, are not covered. We all show the Lord's glory,
and we are being changed to be like him. This change in us
brings ever greater glory, which comes from the Lord, who is
the Spirit.

## September 12

# God Will Get You Home

*We have troubles all around us, but we are not defeated. We do not know what to do, but we do not give up the hope of living … We are hurt sometimes, but we are not destroyed.*

2 Corinthians 4:8–9

For some of you, the journey has been long. Very long and stormy. In no way do I wish to minimize the difficulties that you have had to face along the way. Some of you have shouldered burdens that few of us could ever carry. You have bid farewell to life-long partners. You have been robbed of life-long dreams. You have been given bodies that can't sustain your spirit. You have spouses who can't tolerate your faith. You have bills that outnumber the paychecks and challenges that outweigh the strength.

And you are tired.

It's hard for you to see the City in the midst of the storms. The desire to pull over to the side of the road and get out entices you. You want to go on, but some days the road seems so long …

Let me encourage you … God never said that the journey would be easy, but he did say that the arrival would be worthwhile.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## Isaiah 15:1—16:14

### *God's Message to Moab*

15 This is a message about Moab:
In one night armies took the wealth from Ar in Moab,
and it was destroyed.

In one night armies took the wealth from Kir in Moab,
and it was destroyed.

2The people of Dibon go to the places of worship to cry.
The people of Moab cry for the cities of Nebo and Medeba.

Every head and beard has been shaved to show how sad Moab is.

3In the streets they wear rough cloth to show their sadness.
On the roofs[n] and in the public squares,

they are crying loudly.

4People in the cities Heshbon and Elealeh cry out loud.
You can hear their voices far away in the city Jahaz.

Even the soldiers are frightened;
they are shaking with fear.

5My heart cries with sorrow for Moab.
Its people run away to Zoar for safety;
they run to Eglath Shelishiyah.

People are going up the mountain road to Luhith,
crying as they go.

People are going on the road to Horonaim,
crying over their destruction.

6But the water of Nimrim has dried up.
The grass has dried up,

and all the plants are dead;
nothing green is left.

[7]So the people gather up what they have saved
and carry it across the Ravine of the Poplars.

[8]Crying is heard everywhere in Moab.
Their crying is heard as far away as the city Eglaim;
it is heard as far away as Beer Elim.

[9]The water of the city Dibon is full of blood,
and I, the LORD, will bring even more troubles to Dibon.

A few people living in Moab have escaped the enemy,
but I will send lions to kill them.

[16] Send the king of the land the payment he demands.

Send a lamb from Sela through the desert
to the mountain of Jerusalem.

[2]The women of Moab
try to cross the river Arnon

like little birds
that have fallen from their nest.

[3]They say: “Help us.
Tell us what to do.

Protect us from our enemies
as shade protects us from the noon sun.

Hide us, because we are running for safety!
Don’t give us to our enemies.

[4]Let those of us who were forced out of Moab live in your land.
Hide us from our enemies.”

The robbing of Moab will stop.
The enemy will be defeated;
those who hurt others will disappear from the land.

5Then a new loyal king will come;
this faithful king will be from the family of David.

He will judge fairly
and do what is right.

6We have heard that the people of Moab are proud
and very conceited.

They are very proud and angry,
but their bragging means nothing.

7So the people of Moab will cry;
they will all be sad.

They will moan and groan
for the raisin cakes they had in Kir Hareseth.

8But the fields of Heshbon and the vines of Sibmah cannot grow grapes;
foreign rulers have destroyed the grapevines.

The grapevines once spread as far as the city of Jazer and into the desert;
they had spread as far as the sea.

9I cry with the people of Jazer
for the grapevines of Sibmah.

I will cry with the people of Heshbon and Elealeh.

There will be no shouts of joy,
because there will be no harvest or ripe fruit.

[10]There will be no joy and happiness in the orchards
and no songs or shouts of joy in the vineyards.

No one makes wine in the winepresses,
because I have put an end to shouts of joy.

[11]My heart cries for Moab like a harp playing a funeral song;
I am very sad for Kir Hareseth.

[12]The people of Moab will go to their places of worship
and will try to pray.

But when they go to their temple to pray,
they will not be able.

[13]Earlier the LORD said these things about Moab. [14]Now the LORD says, “In three years all those people and what they take pride in will be hated. (This is three years as a hired helper would count time.) There will be a few people left, but they will be weak.”

## Psalm 106:24–31

[24]Then they refused to go into the beautiful land of Canaan;
they did not believe what God promised.

[25]They grumbled in their tents
and did not obey the LORD.

[26]So he swore to them
that they would die in the desert.

[27]He said their children would be killed by other nations
and that they would be scattered among other countries.

28 They joined in worshiping Baal at Peor
and ate meat that had been sacrificed to lifeless statues.

29 They made the LORD angry by what they did,
so many people became sick with a terrible disease.

30 But Phinehas prayed to the LORD,
and the disease stopped.

31 Phinehas did what was right,
and it will be remembered from now on.

## Proverbs 25:9–10

9 If you have an argument with your neighbor,
don't tell other people what was said.

10 Whoever hears it might shame you,
and you might not ever be respected again.

## 2 Corinthians 4:1–15

### *Preaching the Good News*

4 God, with his mercy, gave us this work to do, so we don't give
up. 2 But we have turned away from secret and shameful ways.
We use no trickery, and we do not change the teaching of God.
We teach the truth plainly, showing everyone who we are. Then
they can know in their hearts what kind of people we are in
God's sight. 3 If the Good News that we preach is hidden, it is
hidden only to those who are lost. 4 The devil who rules this
world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe. They
cannot see the light of the Good News—the Good News about
the glory of Christ, who is exactly like God. 5 We do not preach
about ourselves, but we preach that Jesus Christ is Lord and
that we are your servants for Jesus. 6 God once said, "Let the

light shine out of the darkness!” This is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts by letting us know the glory of God that is in the face of Christ.

## *Spiritual Treasure in Clay Jars*

7We have this treasure from God, but we are like clay jars
that hold the treasure. This shows that the great power is from
God, not from us. 8We have troubles all around us, but we are
not defeated. We do not know what to do, but we do not give up
the hope of living. 9We are persecuted, but God does not leave
us. We are hurt sometimes, but we are not destroyed. 10We
carry the death of Jesus in our own bodies so that the life of
Jesus can also be seen in our bodies. 11We are alive, but for
Jesus we are always in danger of death so that the life of Jesus
can be seen in our bodies that die. 12So death is working in us,
but life is working in you.

13It is written in the Scriptures, “I believed, so I spoke.”[n] Our
faith is like this, too. We believe, and so we speak. 14God raised
the Lord Jesus from the dead, and we know that God will also
raise us with Jesus. God will bring us together with you, and we
will stand before him. 15All these things are for you. And so the
grace of God that is being given to more and more people will
bring increasing thanks to God for his glory.

# September 13

## Not Perfection, But Forgiveness

*Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

It wasn't the Romans who nailed Jesus to the cross. It wasn't spikes that held Jesus to the cross. What held him to that cross was his conviction that it was necessary that he become sin—that he who is pure become sin and that the wrath of God be poured down, not upon the creation, but upon the Creator.

When the one who knew no sin became sin for us, when the sinless one was covered with all the sins of all the world, God didn't call his army of angels to save him. He didn't, because he knew he would rather give up his Son than give up on us.

Regardless of what you've done, it's not too late. Regardless of how far you've fallen, it's not too late. It doesn't matter how low the mistake is, it's not too late to dig down, pull out that mistake, and then let it go—and be free.

What makes a Christian a Christian is not perfection but forgiveness.

from *Walking with the Savior*

## Isaiah 17:1—18:7

### *God's Message to Aram*

17 This is a message about Damascus: "The city of Damascus will be destroyed;
only ruins will remain.

2People will leave the cities of Aroer.

Flocks will wander freely in those empty towns,
and there will be no one to bother them.

3 The strong, walled cities of Israel will be destroyed.
The government in Damascus will end.

Those left alive of Aram will be
like the glory of Israel," says the LORD All-Powerful.

4 "At that time Israel's wealth will all be gone.
Israel will be like someone who has lost much weight from sickness.

5 That time will be like the grain harvest in the Valley of Rephaim.
The workers cut the wheat.
Then they cut the heads of grain from the plants
and collect the grain.

6 That time will also be like the olive harvest,
when a few olives are left.

Two or three olives are left in the top branches.
Four or five olives are left on full branches," says the LORD, the God of Israel.

7 At that time people will look to God, their Maker;
their eyes will see the Holy One of Israel.

8 They will not trust the altars they have made,
nor will they trust what their hands have made,

not even the Asherah idols and altars.

9 In that day all their strong cities will be empty. They will be like the cities the Hivites and the Amorites left when the Israelites came to take the land. Everything will be ruined.

[10]You have forgotten the God who saves you;
you have not remembered that God is your place of safety.

You plant the finest grapevines
and grapevines from faraway places.

[11]You plant your grapevines one day and try to make them grow,
and the next day you make them blossom.

But at harvest time everything will be dead;
a sickness will kill all the plants.

[12]Listen to the many people!
Their crying is like the noise from the sea.

Listen to the nations!
Their crying is like the crashing of great waves.

[13]The people roar like the waves,
but when God speaks harshly to them, they will run away.

They will be like chaff on the hills being blown by the wind,
or like tumbleweeds blown away by a storm.

[14]At night the people will be very frightened.
Before morning, no one will be left.

So our enemies will come to our land,
but they will become nothing.

## *God's Message to Cush*

[18] How terrible it will be for the land beyond
the rivers of Cush.

It is filled with the sound of wings.

2That land sends messengers across the sea;
they go on the water in boats made of reeds.

Go, quick messengers,
to a people who are tall and smooth-skinned,
who are feared everywhere.

They are a powerful nation that defeats other nations.
Their land is divided by rivers.

3All you people of the world, look!
Everyone who lives in the world, look!

You will see a banner raised on a mountain.
You will hear a trumpet sound.

4The LORD said to me,
"I will quietly watch from where I live,

like heat in the sunshine,
like the dew in the heat of harvest time."

5The time will come, after the flowers have bloomed and before the harvest,
when new grapes will be budding and growing.

The enemy will cut the plants with knives;
he will cut down the vines and take them away.

6They will be left for the birds of the mountains
and for the wild animals.

Birds will feed on them all summer,
and wild animals will eat them that winter."

[7]At that time a gift will be brought to the LORD All-Powerful
from the people who are tall and smooth-skinned,
who are feared everywhere.

They are a powerful nation that defeats other nations.
Their land is divided by rivers.

These gifts will be brought to the place of the LORD All-Powerful,
to Mount Zion.

## Psalm 106:32–39

[32]The people also made the LORD angry at Meribah,
and Moses was in trouble because of them.

[33]The people turned against the Spirit of God,
so Moses spoke without stopping to think.

[34]The people did not destroy the other nations
as the LORD had told them to do.

[35]Instead, they mixed with the other nations
and learned their customs.

[36]They worshiped other nations' idols
and were trapped by them.

[37]They even killed their sons and daughters
as sacrifices to demons.

[38]They killed innocent people,
their own sons and daughters,

as sacrifices to the idols of Canaan.
So the land was made unholy by their blood.

39 The people became unholy by their sins;
they were unfaithful to God in what they did.

## Proverbs 25:11–12

11 The right word spoken at the right time
is as beautiful as gold apples in a silver bowl.

12 A wise warning to someone who will listen
is as valuable as gold earrings or fine gold jewelry.

## 2 Corinthians 4:16—5:21

### *Living by Faith*

16 So we do not give up. Our physical body is becoming older
and weaker, but our spirit inside us is made new every day.
17 We have small troubles for a while now, but they are helping
us gain an eternal glory that is much greater than the troubles.
18 We set our eyes not on what we see but on what we cannot
see. What we see will last only a short time, but what we cannot
see will last forever.
5 We know that our body—the tent we live in here on earth—will
be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a house for
us. It will not be a house made by human hands; instead, it will
be a home in heaven that will last forever. 2 But now we groan in
this tent. We want God to give us our heavenly home, 3 because
it will clothe us so we will not be naked. 4 While we live in this
body, we have burdens, and we groan. We do not want to be
naked, but we want to be clothed with our heavenly home. Then
this body that dies will be fully covered with life. 5 This is what
God made us for, and he has given us the Spirit to be a
guarantee for this new life.
6 So we always have courage. We know that while we live in
this body, we are away from the Lord. 7 We live by what we

believe, not by what we can see. [8]So I say that we have courage. We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord. [9]Our only goal is to please God whether we live here or there, [10]because we must all stand before Christ to be judged. Each of us will receive what we should get—good or bad—for the things we did in the earthly body.

## *Becoming Friends with God*

[11]Since we know what it means to fear the Lord, we try to help people accept the truth about us. God knows what we really are, and I hope that in your hearts you know, too. [12]We are not trying to prove ourselves to you again, but we are telling you about ourselves so you will be proud of us. Then you will have an answer for those who are proud about things that can be seen rather than what is in the heart. [13]If we are out of our minds, it is for God. If we have our right minds, it is for you. [14]The love of Christ controls us, because we know that One died for all, so all have died. [15]Christ died for all so that those who live would not continue to live for themselves. He died for them and was raised from the dead so that they would live for him.

[16]From this time on we do not think of anyone as the world does. In the past we thought of Christ as the world thinks, but we no longer think of him in that way. [17]If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new! [18]All this is from God. Through Christ, God made peace between us and himself, and God gave us the work of telling everyone about the peace we can have with him. [19]God was in Christ, making peace between the world and himself. In Christ, God did not hold the world guilty of its sins. And he gave us this message of peace. [20]So we have been sent to speak for Christ. It is as if God is calling to you through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God. [21]Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God.

# September 14

# A Heavenly Affirmation

*"I will be your father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

2 Corinthians 6:18

Each of us has a fantasy that our family will be like the Waltons, an expectation that our dearest friends will be our next of kin. Jesus didn't have that expectation. Look how he defined his family: "My true brother and sister and mother are those who do what God wants" (Mark 3:35).

When Jesus' brother didn't share his convictions, he didn't try to force them. He recognized that his spiritual family could provide what his physical family didn't …

We can't control the way our family responds to us. When it comes to the behavior of others toward us, our hands are tied. We have to move beyond the naive expectation that if we do good, people will treat us right. The fact is they may and they may not—we cannot control how people respond to us …

Let God give you what your family doesn't. If your earthly father doesn't affirm you, then let your heavenly Father take his place …

[And] don't lose heart. God still changes families.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## Isaiah 19:1—20:6

### *God's Message to Egypt*

19 This is a message about Egypt: Look, the LORD is coming
on a fast cloud
to enter Egypt.

The idols of Egypt will tremble before him,
and Egypt's courage will melt away.

2 The LORD says, "I will cause the Egyptians to fight against themselves.
People will fight with their relatives;
neighbors will fight neighbors;
cities will fight cities;
kingdoms will fight kingdoms.

3 The Egyptians will be afraid,
and I will ruin their plans.

They will ask advice from their idols and spirits of the dead,
from their mediums and fortune-tellers."

4 The Lord God All-Powerful says,

"I will hand Egypt over to a hard master,
and a powerful king will rule over them."

5 The sea will become dry,
and the water will disappear from the Nile River.

6 The canals will stink;
the streams of Egypt will decrease and dry up.

All the water plants will rot;
7 all the plants along the banks of the Nile will die.

Even the planted fields by the Nile
will dry up, blow away, and disappear.

8 The fishermen, all those who catch fish from the Nile,
will groan and cry;

those who fish in the Nile will be sad.

9 All the people who make cloth from flax will be sad,
and those who weave linen will lose hope.

10 Those who weave cloth will be broken.
All those who work for money will be sad.

11 The officers of the city of Zoan are fools;
the wise men who advise the king of Egypt give wrong advice.

How can you say to him, 'I am wise'?
How can you say, 'I am from the old family of the kings'?

12 Egypt, where are your wise men?
Let them show you

what the LORD All-Powerful has planned for Egypt.

13 The officers of Zoan have been fooled;
the leaders of Memphis have believed false things.

So the leaders of Egypt
lead that nation the wrong way.

14 The LORD has made the leaders confused.
They have led Egypt to wander in the wrong ways,
like drunk people stumbling in their own vomit.

15 There is nothing Egypt can do;
no one there can help.

16 In that day the Egyptians will be like women. They will be afraid of the LORD All-Powerful, because he will raise his hand to strike them down. 17 The land of Judah will bring fear to Egypt. Anyone there who hears the name Judah will be afraid, because

the LORD All-Powerful has planned terrible things for them. 18At that time five cities in Egypt will speak Hebrew, the language of Canaan, and they will promise to be loyal to the LORD All-Powerful. One of these cities will be named the City of Destruction. 19At that time there will be an altar for the LORD in the middle of Egypt and a monument to the LORD at the border of Egypt. 20This will be a sign and a witness to the LORD All-Powerful in the land of Egypt. When the people cry to the LORD for help, he will send someone to save and defend them. He will rescue them from those who hurt them.

21So the LORD will show himself to the Egyptians, and then they will know he is the LORD. They will worship God and offer many sacrifices. They will make promises to the LORD and will keep them. 22The LORD will punish the Egyptians, but then he will heal them. They will come back to the LORD, and he will listen to their prayers and heal them.

23At that time there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will go to Egypt, and the Egyptians will go to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship God together. 24At that time Israel, Assyria, and Egypt will join together, which will be a blessing for the earth. 25The LORD All-Powerful will bless them, saying, "Egypt, you are my people. Assyria, I made you. Israel, I own you. You are all blessed!"

### *Assyria Will Defeat Egypt and Cush*

20 Sargon king of Assyria sent a military commander to Ashdod to attack that city. So the commander attacked and captured it. 2Then the LORD spoke through Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, "Take the rough cloth off your body, and take your sandals off your feet." So Isaiah obeyed and walked around naked and barefoot.

3Then the LORD said, "Isaiah my servant has walked around naked and barefoot for three years as a sign against Egypt and Cush. 4The king of Assyria will carry away prisoners from Egypt and Cush. Old people and young people will be led away naked and barefoot, with their buttocks bare. So the Egyptians will be shamed. 5People who looked to Cush for help will be afraid, and those who were amazed by Egypt's glory will be shamed. 6People who live near the sea will say, 'Look at those countries. We trusted them to help us. We ran to them so they would save us from the king of Assyria. So how will we be able to escape?'"

## Psalm 106:40–48

40 So the LORD became angry with his people
and hated his own children.

41 He handed them over to other nations
and let their enemies rule over them.

42 Their enemies were cruel to them
and kept them under their power.

43 The LORD saved his people many times,
but they continued to turn against him.
So they became even more wicked.

44 But God saw their misery
when he heard their cry.

45 He remembered his agreement with them,
and he felt sorry for them because of his great love.

46 He caused them to be pitied
by those who held them captive.

47 LORD our God, save us
and bring us back from other nations.

Then we will thank you
and will gladly praise you.

48 Praise the LORD, the God of Israel.
He always was and always will be.
Let all the people say, “Amen!”

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 25:13

13 Trustworthy messengers refresh those who send them,
like the coolness of snow in the summertime.

## 2 Corinthians 6:1—7:1

6 We are workers together with God, so we beg you: Do not let
the grace that you received from God be for nothing. 2 God says,

"At the right time I heard your prayers.
On the day of salvation I helped you."

Isaiah 49:8

I tell you that the "right time" is now, and the "day of salvation" is now.

3 We do not want anyone to find fault with our work, so nothing we do will be a problem for anyone. 4 But in every way we show we are servants of God: in accepting many hard things, in troubles, in difficulties, and in great problems. 5 We are beaten and thrown into prison. We meet those who become upset with us and start riots. We work hard, and sometimes we get no sleep or food. 6 We show we are servants of God by our pure lives, our understanding, patience, and kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by true love, 7 by speaking the truth, and by God's power. We use our right living to defend ourselves against everything. 8 Some people honor us, but others blame us. Some people say evil things about us, but others say good things. Some people say we are liars, but we speak the truth. 9 We are not known, but we are well known. We seem to be dying, but we continue to live. We are punished, but we are not killed. 10 We have much sadness, but we are always rejoicing. We are poor, but we are making many people rich in faith. We have nothing, but really we have everything.

11 We have spoken freely to you in Corinth and have opened our hearts to you. 12 Our feelings of love for you have not stopped, but you have stopped your feelings of love for us. 13 I speak to you as if you were my children. Do to us as we have done—open your hearts to us.

### *Warning About Non-Christians*

14 You are not the same as those who do not believe. So do not join yourselves to them. Good and bad do not belong

together. Light and darkness cannot share together. 15How can Christ and Belial, the devil, have any agreement? What can a believer have together with a nonbeliever? 16The temple of God cannot have any agreement with idols, and we are the temple of the living God. As God said: “I will live with them and walk with them. And I will be their God, and they will be my people.”[n]

17“Leave those people,
and be separate, says the Lord.

Touch nothing that is unclean,
and I will accept you.”

Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 41

18“I will be your father,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.”

2 Samuel 7:14

7 Dear friends, we have these promises from God, so we should make ourselves pure—free from anything that makes body or soul unclean. We should try to become holy in the way we live, because we respect God.

# September 15

## God Warrants Our Worship

*Thank the LORD because he is good. His love continues forever.*

Psalm 107:1

The chief reason for applauding God? He deserves it. If singing did nothing but weary your voice, if giving only emptied your wallet—if worship did nothing for you—it would still be right to do. God warrants our worship.

How else do you respond to a Being of blazing, blistering, unadulterated, unending holiness? What do you do with such holiness if not adore it?

And his power. He churns forces that launch meteors, orbit planets, and ignite stars. Commanding whales to spout salty air, petunias to perfume the night, and songbirds to chirp joy into spring. Above the earth, flotillas of clouds endlessly shape and reshape; within the earth, strata of groaning rocks shift and turn. Who are we to sojourn on a trembling, wonderful orb so shot through with wonder?

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Isaiah 21:1—22:25

### *God's Message to Babylon*

21 This is a message about the Desert by the Sea:[n]

Disaster is coming from the desert
like wind blowing in the south.
It is coming from a terrible country.

2 I have seen a terrible vision.
I see traitors turning against you

and people taking your wealth.

Elam, attack the people!
Media, surround the city and attack it!
I will bring an end to the pain the city causes.

3 I saw those terrible things, and now I am in pain;
my pains are like the pains of giving birth.

What I hear makes me very afraid;
what I see causes me to shake with fear.

4 I am worried,
and I am shaking with fear.

My pleasant evening
has become a night of fear.

5 They set the table;
they spread the rugs;
they eat and drink.

Leaders, stand up.
Prepare the shields for battle!

6 The Lord said to me,

“Go, place a lookout for the city
and have him report what he sees.

7 If he sees chariots and teams of horses,
donkeys, or camels,

he should pay very close attention.”

[8]Then the lookout called out,

“My master, each day I stand in the watchtower watching;
every night I have been on guard.

[9]Look, I see a man coming in a chariot
with a team of horses.”

The man gives back the answer,
“Babylon has fallen. It has fallen!

All the statues of her gods
lie broken on the ground.”

[10]My people are crushed like grain on the threshing floor.
My people, I tell you what I have heard

from the LORD All-Powerful,
from the God of Israel.

## *God’s Message to Edom*

[11]This is a message about Dumah:[n]

Someone calls to me from Edom,
“Watchman, how much of the night is left?
Watchman, how much longer will it be night?”

[12]The watchman answers,
“Morning is coming, but then night will come again.

If you have something to ask,
then come back and ask.”

## *God’s Message to Arabia*

[13]This is a message about Arabia:

A group of traders from Dedan
spent the night near some trees in Arabia.
14 They gave water to thirsty travelers;

the people of Tema gave food
to those who were escaping.

15They were running from swords,
from swords ready to kill,

from bows ready to shoot,
from a hard battle.

16This is what the Lord said to me: “In one year all the glory of the country of Kedar will be gone. (This is a year as a hired helper counts time.) 17At that time only a few of the archers, the soldiers of Kedar, will be left alive.” The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.

## *God’s Message to Jerusalem*

22 This is a message about the Valley of Vision:[n]
What is wrong with you people?
Why are you on your roofs?[n]

2This city was a very busy city,
full of noise and wild parties.

Now your people have been killed,
but not with swords,
nor did they die in battle.

3All your leaders ran away together,
but they have been captured without using a bow.

All you who were captured
tried to run away before the enemy came.

4So I say, “Don’t look at me.
Let me cry loudly.

Don’t hurry to comfort me
about the destruction of Jerusalem.”

5The Lord God All-Powerful has chosen a special day
of riots and confusion.
People will trample each other in the Valley of Vision.

The city walls will be knocked down,
and the people will cry out to the mountain.

6The soldiers from Elam will gather their arrows
and their chariots and men on horses.
Kir will prepare their shields.

7Your nicest valleys will be filled with chariots.
Horsemen will be ordered to guard the gates of the city.
8 The walls protecting Judah will fall.

At that time the people of Jerusalem depended on
the weapons kept at the Palace of the Forest.

9You saw that the walls of Jerusalem
had many cracks that needed repairing.
You stored up water in the lower pool.

10You counted the houses of Jerusalem,
and you tore down houses to repair the walls with their stones.

11You made a pool between the two walls
to save water from the old pool,

but you did not trust the God who made these things;
you did not respect the One who planned them long ago.

12 The Lord God All-Powerful told the people
to cry and be sad,
to shave their heads and wear rough cloth.

13 But look, the people are happy
and are having wild parties.

They kill the cattle and the sheep;
they eat the food and drink the wine.

They say, “Let us eat and drink,
because tomorrow we will die.”

14 The LORD All-Powerful said to me: “You people will die before this guilt is forgiven.” The Lord God All-Powerful said this.

## *God’s Message to Shebna*

15 This is what the Lord God All-Powerful says:

“Go to this servant Shebna,
the manager of the palace.

16 Say to him, ‘What are you doing here?
Who said you could cut out a tomb for yourself here?

Why are you preparing your tomb in a high place?
Why are you carving out a tomb from the rock?

17 Look, mighty one! The LORD will throw you away.
He will take firm hold of you

18 and roll you tightly into a ball
and throw you into another country.

There you will die,
and there your fine chariots will remain.
You are a disgrace to your master’s house.

19 I will force you out of your important job,
and you will be thrown down from your important place.’

20 “At that time I will call for my servant Eliakim son of
Hilkiah. 21 I will take your robe and put it on him and give him
your belt. I will hand over to him the important job you have,
and he will be like a father to the people of Jerusalem and the
family of Judah. 22 I will put the key to the house of David
around his neck. If he opens a door, no one will be able to close
it; if he closes a door, no one will be able to open it. 23 He will be
like an honored chair in his father’s house. I will make him
strong like a peg that is hammered into a strong board. 24 All the
honored and important things of his family will depend on him;
all the adults and little children will depend on him. They will be
like bowls and jars hanging on him.
25 “At that time,” says the LORD All-Powerful, “the peg
hammered into the strong board will weaken. It will break and
fall, and everything hanging on it will be destroyed.” The LORD
says this.

## Psalm 107:1–9

## Book 5

### *God Saves from Many Dangers*

107 Thank the LORD because he is good. His love continues
forever.

2 That is what those whom the LORD has saved should say.
He has saved them from the enemy

3 and has gathered them from other lands,
from east and west, north and south.

4 Some people had wandered in the desert lands.
They found no city in which to live.

5 They were hungry and thirsty,
and they were discouraged.

6 In their misery they cried out to the LORD,
and he saved them from their troubles.

7 He led them on a straight road
to a city where they could live.

8 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his love
and for the miracles he does for people.

9 He satisfies the thirsty
and fills up the hungry.

## Proverbs 25:14–15

14 People who brag about gifts they never give
are like clouds and wind that give no rain.

15 With patience you can convince a ruler,
and a gentle word can get through to the hard-headed.

## 2 Corinthians 7:2–16

### *Paul's Joy*

2 Open your hearts to us. We have not done wrong to anyone,
we have not ruined the faith of anyone, and we have not
cheated anyone. 3 I do not say this to blame you. I told you
before that we love you so much we would live or die with you.
4 I feel very sure of you and am very proud of you. You give me
much comfort, and in all of our troubles I have great joy.
5 When we came into Macedonia, we had no rest. We found

trouble all around us. We had fighting on the outside and fear on the inside. [6]But God, who comforts those who are troubled, comforted us when Titus came. [7]We were comforted, not only by his coming but also by the comfort you gave him. Titus told us about your wish to see me and that you are very sorry for what you did. He also told me about your great care for me, and when I heard this, I was much happier.

[8]Even if my letter made you sad, I am not sorry I wrote it. At first I was sorry, because it made you sad, but you were sad only for a short time. [9]Now I am happy, not because you were made sad, but because your sorrow made you change your lives. You became sad in the way God wanted you to, so you were not hurt by us in any way. [10]The kind of sorrow God wants makes people change their hearts and lives. This leads to salvation, and you cannot be sorry for that. But the kind of sorrow the world has brings death. [11]See what this sorrow—the sorrow God wanted you to have—has done to you: It has made you very serious. It made you want to restore yourselves. It made you angry and afraid. It made you want to see me. It made you care. It made you want to do the right thing. In every way you have regained your innocence. [12]I wrote that letter, not because of the one who did the wrong or because of the person who was hurt. I wrote the letter so you could see, before God, the great care you have for us. [13]That is why we were comforted.

Not only were we very comforted, we were even happier to see that Titus was so happy. All of you made him feel much better. [14]I bragged to Titus about you, and you showed that I was right. Everything we said to you was true, and you have proved that what we bragged about to Titus is true. [15]And his love for you is stronger when he remembers that you were all ready to obey. You welcomed him with respect and fear. [16]I am very happy that I can trust you fully.

## September 16

# Saying “Thank You”

*He brought them out of their gloom and darkness and broke their chains. Let them give thanks to the* LORD.

Psalm 107:14–15

worship is when you’re aware that what you’ve been given is far greater than what you can give. Worship is the awareness that were it not for his touch, you’d still be hobbling and hurting, bitter and broken. Worship is the half-glazed expression on the parched face of a desert pilgrim as he discovers that the oasis is not a mirage.

Worship is the “thank you” that refuses to be silenced.

We have tried to make a science out of worship. We can’t do that. We can’t do that any more than we can “sell love” or “negotiate peace.”

Worship is a voluntary act of gratitude offered by the saved to the Savior, by the healed to the Healer, and by the delivered to the Deliverer.

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## Isaiah 23:1—24:23

### *God’s Message to Lebanon*

23 This is a message about Tyre: You trading ships, cry!
The houses and harbor of Tyre are destroyed.

This news came to the ships
from the land of Cyprus.

[2]Be silent, you who live on the island of Tyre;
you merchants of Sidon, be silent.
Sailors have made you rich.

[3]They traveled the sea to bring grain from Egypt;
the sailors of Tyre brought grain from the Nile Valley
and sold it to other nations.

[4]Sidon, be ashamed.
Strong city of the sea, be ashamed, because the sea says:

“I have not felt the pain of giving birth;
I have not reared young men or women.”

[5]Egypt will hear the news about Tyre,
and it will make Egypt hurt with sorrow.

[6]You ships should return to Tarshish.
You people living near the sea should be sad.

[7]Look at your once happy city!
Look at your old, old city!

People from that city have traveled
far away to live.

[8]Who planned Tyre’s destruction?
Tyre made others rich.

Its merchants were treated like princes,
and its traders were greatly respected.

[9]It was the LORD All-Powerful who planned this.
He decided to make these proud people unimportant;
he decided to disgrace those who were greatly respected.

[10]Go through your land, people of Tarshish,
like the Nile goes through Egypt.
There is no harbor for you now!

[11]The LORD has stretched his hand over the sea
and made its kingdoms tremble.

He commands that Canaan's
strong, walled cities be destroyed.

[12]He said, "Sidon, you will not rejoice any longer,
because you are destroyed.

Even if you cross the sea to Cyprus,
you will not find a place to rest."

[13]Look at the land of the Babylonians;
it is not a country now.

Assyria has made it a place for wild animals.
Assyria built towers to attack it;

the soldiers took all the treasures from its cities,
and they turned it into ruins.

[14]So be sad, you trading ships,
because your strong city is destroyed.

[15]At that time people will forget about Tyre for seventy years, which is the length of a king's life. After seventy years, Tyre will be like the prostitute in this song:

[16]"Oh woman, you are forgotten.
Take your harp and walk through the city.

Play your harp well. Sing your song often.
Then people will remember you."

17 After seventy years the LORD will deal with Tyre, and it will
again have trade. It will be like a prostitute for all the nations of
the earth. 18 The profits will be saved for the LORD. Tyre will not
keep the money she earns but will give them to the people who
serve the LORD, so they will have plenty of food and nice clothes.

## *The Lord Will Punish the World*

24 Look! The LORD will destroy the earth and
leave it empty;
he will ruin the surface of the land and scatter its people.

2 At that time the same thing will happen to everyone:
to common people and priests,
to slaves and masters,
to women slaves and their women masters,
to buyers and sellers,
to those who borrow and those who lend,
to bankers and those who owe the bank.

3 The earth will be completely empty.
The wealth will all be taken,
because the LORD has commanded it.

4 The earth will dry up and die;
the world will grow weak and die;
the great leaders in this land will become weak.

5 The people of the earth have ruined it,
because they do not follow God's teachings

or obey God's laws
or keep their agreement with God that was to last
forever.

6 So a curse will destroy the earth.
The people of the world are guilty,

so they will be burned up;
only a few will be left.

7 The new wine will be bad, and the grapevines will die.
People who were happy will be sad.

8 The happy music of the tambourines will end.
The happy sounds of wild parties will stop.
The joyful music from the harps will end.

9 People will no longer sing while they drink their wine.
The beer will taste bitter to those who drink it.

10 The ruined city will be empty,
and people will hide behind closed doors.

11 People in the streets will ask for wine,
but joy will have turned to sadness;
all the happiness will have left.

12 The city will be left in ruins,
and its gates will be smashed to pieces.

13 This is what will happen all over the earth
and to all the nations.

The earth will be like an olive tree after the harvest
or like the few grapes left on a vine after harvest.

14 The people shout for joy.
From the west they praise the greatness of the LORD.

15 People in the east, praise the LORD.
People in the islands of the sea,
praise the name of the LORD, the God of Israel.

16 We hear songs from every part of the earth
praising God, the Righteous One.

But I said, “I am dying! I am dying!
How terrible it will be for me!

Traitors turn against people;
with their dishonesty, they turn against people.”

17 There are terrors, holes, and traps
for the people of the earth.

18 Anyone who tries to escape from the sound of terror
will fall into a hole.

Anyone who climbs out of the hole
will be caught in a trap.

The clouds in the sky will pour out rain,
and the foundations of the earth will shake.

19 The earth will be broken up;
the earth will split open;
the earth will shake violently.

20 The earth will stumble around like someone who is drunk;
it will shake like a hut in a storm.

Its sin is like a heavy weight on its back;
it will fall and never rise again.

21 At that time the LORD will punish
the powers in the sky above
and the rulers on earth below.

22 They will be gathered together

like prisoners thrown into a dungeon;

they will be shut up in prison.
After much time they will be punished.

23 The moon will be embarrassed,
and the sun will be ashamed,

because the LORD All-Powerful will rule as king
on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.
Jerusalem's leaders will see his greatness.

## Psalm 107:10–22

10 Some sat in gloom and darkness;
they were prisoners suffering in chains.

11 They had turned against the words of God
and had refused the advice of God Most High.

12 So he broke their pride by hard work.
They stumbled, and no one helped.

13 In their misery they cried out to the LORD,
and he saved them from their troubles.

14 He brought them out of their gloom and darkness
and broke their chains.

15 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his love
and for the miracles he does for people.

16 He breaks down bronze gates
and cuts apart iron bars.

17 Some fools turned against God
and suffered for the evil they did.

18 They refused to eat anything,
so they almost died.

19 In their misery they cried out to the LORD,
and he saved them from their troubles.

20 God gave the command and healed them,
so they were saved from dying.

21 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his love
and for the miracles he does for people.

22 Let them offer sacrifices to thank him.
With joy they should tell what he has done.

## Proverbs 25:16–17

16 If you find honey, don't eat too much,
or it will make you throw up.

17 Don't go to your neighbor's house too often;
too much of you will make him hate you.

## 2 Corinthians 8:1–24

### *Christian Giving*

8 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace God gave the churches in Macedonia. 2 They have been tested by great troubles, and they are very poor. But they gave

much because of their great joy. 3I can tell you that they gave as much as they were able and even more than they could afford. No one told them to do it. 4But they begged and pleaded with us to let them share in this service for God's people. 5And they gave in a way we did not expect: They first gave themselves to the Lord and to us. This is what God wants. 6So we asked Titus to help you finish this special work of grace since he is the one who started it. 7You are rich in everything—in faith, in speaking, in knowledge, in truly wanting to help, and in the love you learned from us.[n] In the same way, be strong also in the grace of giving.

8I am not commanding you to give. But I want to see if your love is true by comparing you with others that really want to help. 9You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that Christ was rich, but for you he became poor so that by his becoming poor you might become rich.

10This is what I think you should do: Last year you were the first to want to give, and you were the first who gave. 11So now finish the work you started. Then your "doing" will be equal to your "wanting to do." Give from what you have. 12If you want to give, your gift will be accepted. It will be judged by what you have, not by what you do not have. 13We do not want you to have troubles while other people are at ease, but we want everything to be equal. 14At this time you have plenty. What you have can help others who are in need. Then later, when they have plenty, they can help you when you are in need, and all will be equal. 15As it is written in the Scriptures, "The person who gathered more did not have too much, nor did the person who gathered less have too little."[n]

## *Titus and His Companions Help*

16I thank God because he gave Titus the same love for you that I have. 17Titus accepted what we asked him to do. He wanted very much to go to you, and this was his own idea. 18We are sending with him the brother who is praised by all the churches because of his service in preaching the Good News. 19Also, this brother was chosen by the churches to go with us when we deliver this gift of money. We are doing this service to bring glory to the Lord and to show that we really want to help.

20We are being careful so that no one will criticize us for the way we are handling this large gift. 21We are trying hard to do what the Lord accepts as right and also what people think is right.

22Also, we are sending with them our brother, who is always ready to help. He has proved this to us in many ways, and he wants to help even more now, because he has much faith in you.

[23]Now about Titus—he is my partner who is working with me to help you. And about the other brothers—they are sent from the churches, and they bring glory to Christ. [24]So show these men the proof of your love and the reason we are proud of you. Then all the churches can see it.

# September 17

# God’s Great Gifts

*Thanks be to God for his gift that is too wonderful for words.*

2 Corinthians 9:15

why did he do it? A shack would have sufficed, but he gave us a mansion. Did he have to give the birds a song and the mountains a peak? Was he required to put stripes on the zebra and the hump on the camel? ... Why wrap creation in such splendor? Why go to such trouble to give such gifts?

Why do you? You do the same. I’ve seen you searching for a gift. I’ve seen you stalking the malls and walking the aisles. I’m not talking about the obligatory gifts ... I’m talking about that extra-special person and that extra-special gift ... Why do you do it? ... You do it so the heart will stop. You do it so the jaw will drop. You do it to hear those words of disbelief, “You did this for *me*?”

That’s why you do it. And that is why God did it. Next time a sunrise steals your breath or a meadow of flowers leaves you speechless, remain that way. Say nothing and listen as heaven whispers, “Do you like it? I did it just for you.”

from *The Great House of God*

## Isaiah 25:1—26:21

### *A Song of Praise to God*

25 LORD, you are my God.
I honor you and praise you,

because you have done amazing things.
You have always done what you said you would do;

you have done what you planned long ago.

2You have made the city a pile of rocks
and have destroyed her walls.

The city our enemies built with strong walls is gone;
it will never be built again.

3People from powerful nations will honor you;
cruel people from strong cities will fear you.

4You protect the poor;
you protect the helpless when they are in danger.

You are like a shelter from storms,
like shade that protects them from the heat.

The cruel people attack
like a rainstorm beating against the wall,
5 like the heat in the desert.

But you, God, stop their violent attack.
As a cloud cools a hot day,
you silence the songs of those who have no mercy.

## *God's Banquet for His Servants*

6The LORD All-Powerful will prepare a feast
on this mountain for all people.

It will be a feast with all the best food and wine,
the finest meat and wine.

7On this mountain God will destroy
the veil that covers all nations,

the veil that stretches over all peoples;
[8] he will destroy death forever.

The Lord God will wipe away every tear from every face.
He will take away the shame of his people from the earth.

The LORD has spoken.

[9]At that time people will say,
"Our God is doing this!

We have waited for him, and he has come to save us.
This is the LORD. We waited for him,

so we will rejoice and be happy when he saves us."

[10]The LORD will protect Jerusalem,
but he will crush our enemy Moab

like straw that is trampled down in the manure.

[11]They will spread their arms in it
like a person who is swimming.

But God will bring down their pride,
and all the clever things they have made will mean nothing.

[12]Moab's high walls protect them,
but God will destroy these walls.

He will throw them down to the ground,
even to the dust.

## *A Song of Praise to God*

26 At that time people will sing this song in Judah:

We have a strong city.
God protects us with its strong walls and defenses.

2 Open the gates,
and the good people will enter,
those who follow God.

3 You, LORD, give true peace
to those who depend on you,
because they trust you.

4 So, trust the LORD always,
because he is our Rock forever.

5 He will destroy the proud city,
and he will punish the people living there.

He will bring that high city down to the ground
and throw it down into the dust.

6 Then those who were hurt by the city will walk on its ruins;
those who were made poor by the city will trample it under their feet.

7 The path of life is level for those who are right with God;
LORD, you make the way of life smooth for those people.

8 But, LORD, we are waiting
for your way of justice.

Our souls want to remember
you and your name.

9 My soul wants to be with you at night,

and my spirit wants to be with you at the dawn of every day.

When your way of justice comes to the land,
people of the world will learn the right way of living.

10 Evil people will not learn to do good
even if you show them kindness.

They will continue doing evil, even if they live in a good world;
they never see the LORD's greatness.

11 LORD, you are ready to punish those people,
but they do not see that.

Show them your strong love for your people.
Then those who are evil will be ashamed.

Burn them in the fire
you have prepared for your enemies.

12 LORD, all our success is because of what you have done,
so give us peace.

13 LORD, our God, other masters besides you have ruled us,
but we honor only you.

14 Those masters are now dead;
their ghosts will not rise from death.

You punished and destroyed them
and erased any memory of them.

15 LORD, you multiplied the number of your people;
you multiplied them and brought honor to yourself.

You made the borders of the land wide.

16 LORD, people remember you when they are in trouble;
they say quiet prayers to you when you punish them.

17 LORD, when we are with you,
we are like a woman giving birth to a baby;
she cries and has pain from the birth.

18 In the same way, we had pain.
We gave birth, but only to wind.

We don't bring salvation to the land
or make new people for the world.

19 Your people have died, but they will live again;
their bodies will rise from death.

You who lie in the ground,
wake up and be happy!

The dew covering you is like the dew of a new day;
the ground will give birth to the dead.

## *Judgment: Reward or Punishment*

20 My people, go into your rooms
and shut your doors behind you.

Hide in your rooms for a short time
until God's anger is finished.

21 The LORD will leave his place
to punish the people of the world for their sins.

The earth will show the blood of the people who have been killed;
it will not cover the dead any longer.

## Psalm 107:23–32

23 Others went out to sea in ships
and did business on the great oceans.

24 They saw what the LORD could do,
the miracles he did in the deep oceans.

25 He spoke, and a storm came up,
which blew up high waves.

26 The ships were tossed as high as the sky and fell low to the depths.
The storm was so bad that they lost their courage.

27 They stumbled and fell like people who were drunk.
They did not know what to do.

28 In their misery they cried out to the LORD,
and he saved them from their troubles.

29 He stilled the storm
and calmed the waves.

30 They were happy that it was quiet,
and God guided them to the port they wanted.

31 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his love
and for the miracles he does for people.

[32]Let them praise his greatness in the meeting of the people;
let them praise him in the meeting of the elders.

## Proverbs 25:18–19

[18]When you lie about your neighbors,
it hurts them as much as a club, a sword, or a sharp arrow.

[19]Trusting unfaithful people when you are in trouble
is like eating with a broken tooth or walking with a crippled foot.

## 2 Corinthians 9:1–15

### *Help for Fellow Christians*

9 I really do not need to write you about this help for God's people. [2]I know you want to help. I have been bragging about this to the people in Macedonia, telling them that you in Southern Greece have been ready to give since last year. And your desire to give has made most of them ready to give also. [3]But I am sending the brothers to you so that our bragging about you in this will not be empty words. I want you to be ready, as I said you would be. [4]If any of the people from Macedonia come with me and find that you are not ready, we will be ashamed that we were so sure of you. (And you will be ashamed, too!) [5]So I thought I should ask these brothers to go to you before we do. They will finish getting in order the generous gift you promised so it will be ready when we come. And it will be a generous gift—not one that you did not want to give.

[6]Remember this: The person who plants a little will have a small harvest, but the person who plants a lot will have a big harvest. [7]Each of you should give as you have decided in your heart to give. You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily. [8]And God can give you more blessings than you need. Then you will always have plenty of

everything—enough to give to every good work. [9]It is written in the Scriptures:

> “He gives freely to the poor.
> The things he does are right and will continue forever.”
>
> Psalm 112:9

[10]God is the One who gives seed to the farmer and bread for food. He will give you all the seed you need and make it grow so there will be a great harvest from your goodness. [11]He will make you rich in every way so that you can always give freely. And your giving through us will cause many to give thanks to God. [12]This service you do not only helps the needs of God’s people, it also brings many more thanks to God. [13]It is a proof of your faith. Many people will praise God because you obey the Good News of Christ—the gospel you say you believe—and because you freely share with them and with all others. [14]And when they pray, they will wish they could be with you because of the great grace that God has given you. [15]Thanks be to God for his gift that is too wonderful for words.

# September 18

## Captured Thoughts

*We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ.*

2 Corinthians 10:5

Capturing thoughts is serious business. It was for Jesus. Remember the thoughts that came his way courtesy of the mouth of Peter? Jesus had just prophesied his death, burial, and Resurrection, but Peter couldn't bear the thought of it. "Peter took Jesus aside and told him not to talk like that … Jesus said to Peter, 'Go away from me, Satan! You are not helping me! You don't care about the things of God, but only about the things people think are important'" (Matthew 16:22–23).

See the decisiveness of Jesus? A trashy thought comes his way. He is tempted to entertain it. A cross-less life would be nice. But what does he do? He stands at the gangplank of the dock and says, "Get away from me." As if to say, "You are not allowed to enter my mind."

What if you did that? What if you took every thought captive?

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### Isaiah 27:1—28:29

27 At that time the LORD will punish Leviathan,
the gliding snake.

He will punish Leviathan, the coiled snake,
with his great and hard and powerful sword.

He will kill the monster in the sea.

2 At that time
people will sing about the pleasant vineyard.

3 “I, the LORD, will care for that vineyard;
I will water it at the right time.

No one will hurt it,
because I will guard it day and night.

4 I am not angry.

If anyone builds a wall of thornbushes in war,
I will march to it and burn it.

5 But if anyone comes to me for safety
and wants to make peace with me,
he should come and make peace with me.”

6 In the days to come, the people of Jacob will be like a plant with good roots;
Israel will grow like a plant beginning to bloom.
Then the world will be filled with their children.

## *The Lord Will Send Israel Away*

7 The LORD has not hurt his people as he hurt their enemies;
his people have not been killed like those who tried to kill them.

8 He will settle his argument with Israel by sending it far away.
Like a hot desert wind, he will drive it away.

9 This is how Israel’s guilt will be forgiven;
this is how its sins will be taken away:

Israel will crush the rocks of the altar to dust,
and no statues or altars will be left standing for the Asherah idols.

10 At that time the strong, walled city will be empty
like a desert.

Calves will eat grass there.
They will lie down there
and eat leaves from the branches.

11 The limbs will become dry and break off,
so women will use them for firewood.

The people refuse to understand,
so God will not comfort them;
their Maker will not be kind to them.

12 At that time the LORD will begin gathering his people one by one from the Euphrates River to the brook of Egypt. He will separate them from others as grain is separated from chaff. 13 Many of my people are now lost in Assyria. Some have run away to Egypt. But at that time a great trumpet will be blown, and all those people will come and worship the LORD on that holy mountain in Jerusalem.

## *Warnings to Israel*

28 How terrible it will be for Samaria, the pride
of Israel's drunken people!
That beautiful crown of flowers is just a dying plant

set on a hill above a rich valley where drunkards live.

2 Look, the Lord has someone who is strong and powerful.
Like a storm of hail and strong wind,

like a sudden flood of water pouring over the country,
he will throw Samaria down to the ground.

[3]That city, the pride of Israel's drunken people,
will be trampled underfoot.

[4]That beautiful crown of flowers is just a dying plant
set on a hill above a rich valley.

That city will be like the first fig of summer.
Anyone who sees it
quickly picks it and eats it.

[5]At that time the LORD All-Powerful
will be like a beautiful crown,

like a wonderful crown of flowers
for his people who are left alive.

[6]Then he will give wisdom to the judges who must decide cases
and strength to those who battle at the city gate.

[7]But now those leaders are drunk with wine;
they stumble from drinking too much beer.

The priests and prophets are drunk with beer
and are filled with wine.

They stumble from too much beer.
The prophets are drunk when they see their visions;
the judges stumble when they make their decisions.

[8]Every table is covered with vomit,
so there is not a clean place anywhere.

[9]The LORD is trying to teach the people a lesson;
he is trying to make them understand his teachings.

But the people are like babies too old for breast milk,
like those who no longer nurse at their mother's breast.

10 So they make fun of the LORD's prophet and say:
"A command here, a command there.
A rule here, a rule there.
A little lesson here, a little lesson there."

11 So the LORD will use strange words and foreign languages
to speak to these people.

12 God said to them,

"Here is a place of rest;
let the tired people come and rest.

This is the place of peace."
But the people would not listen.

13 So the words of the LORD will be,

"A command here, a command there.
A rule here, a rule there.
A little lesson here, a little lesson there."

They will fall back and be defeated;
they will be trapped and captured.

14 So listen to the LORD's message, you who brag,
you leaders in Jerusalem.

15 You say, "We have made an agreement with death;
we have a contract with death.

When terrible punishment passes by,
it won't hurt us.

Our lies will keep us safe,
and our tricks will hide us.”

16 Because of these things, this is what the Lord God says:

“I will put a stone in the ground in Jerusalem,
a tested stone.

Everything will be built on this important and precious rock.
Anyone who trusts in it will never be disappointed.

17 I will use justice as a measuring line
and goodness as the standard.

The lies you hide behind will be destroyed as if by hail.
They will be washed away as if in a flood.

18 Your agreement with death will be erased;
your contract with death will not help you.

When terrible punishment comes,
you will be crushed by it.

19 Whenever punishment comes, it will take you away.
It will come morning after morning;
it will defeat you by day and by night.

Those who understand this punishment will be terrified.”

20 You will be like the person who tried to sleep
on a bed that was too short

and with a blanket that was too narrow
to wrap around himself.

21 The LORD will fight as he did at Mount Perazim.

He will be angry as he was in the Valley of Gibeon.

He will do his work, his strange work.
He will finish his job, his strange job.

22 Now, you must not make fun of these things,
or the ropes around you will become tighter.

The Lord God All-Powerful has told me
how the whole earth will be destroyed.

## *The Lord Punishes Fairly*

23 Listen closely to what I tell you;
listen carefully to what I say.

24 A farmer does not plow his field all the time;
he does not go on working the soil.

25 He makes the ground flat and smooth.
Then he plants the dill and scatters the cumin.

He plants the wheat in rows,
the barley in its special place,
and other wheat as a border around the field.

26 His God teaches him
and shows him the right way.

27 A farmer doesn't use heavy boards to crush dill;
he doesn't use a wagon wheel to crush cumin.

He uses a small stick to break open the dill,
and with a stick he opens the cumin.

[28]The grain is ground to make bread.
People do not ruin it by crushing it forever.

The farmer separates the wheat from the chaff with his cart,
but he does not let his horses grind it.

[29]This lesson also comes from the LORD All-Powerful,
who gives wonderful advice, who is very wise.

## Psalm 107:33–43

[33]He changed rivers into a desert
and springs of water into dry ground.

[34]He made fertile land salty,
because the people there did evil.

[35]He changed the desert into pools of water
and dry ground into springs of water.

[36]He had the hungry settle there
so they could build a city in which to live.

[37]They planted seeds in the fields and vineyards,
and they had a good harvest.

[38]God blessed them, and they grew in number.
Their cattle did not become fewer.

[39]Because of disaster, troubles, and sadness,
their families grew smaller and weaker.

[40]He showed he was displeased with their leaders
and made them wander in a pathless desert.

41 But he lifted the poor out of their suffering
and made their families grow like flocks of sheep.

42 Good people see this and are happy,
but the wicked say nothing.

43 Whoever is wise will remember these things
and will think about the love of the LORD.

## Proverbs 25:20

20 Singing songs to someone who is sad
is like taking away his coat on a cold day
or pouring vinegar on soda.

## 2 Corinthians 10:1–18

### *Paul Defends His Ministry*

10 I, Paul, am begging you with the gentleness and the kindness
of Christ. Some people say that I am easy on you when I am
with you and bold when I am away. 2 They think we live in a
worldly way, and I plan to be very bold with them when I come.
I beg you that when I come I will not need to use that same
boldness with you. 3 We do live in the world, but we do not fight
in the same way the world fights. 4 We fight with weapons that
are different from those the world uses. Our weapons have
power from God that can destroy the enemy's strong places. We
destroy people's arguments 5 and every proud thing that raises
itself against the knowledge of God. We capture every thought
and make it give up and obey Christ. 6 We are ready to punish
anyone there who does not obey, but first we want you to obey
fully.

7 You must look at the facts before you. If you feel sure that
you belong to Christ, you must remember that we belong to
Christ just as you do. 8 It is true that we brag freely about the
authority the Lord gave us. But this authority is to build you up,
not to tear you down. So I will not be ashamed. 9 I do not want

you to think I am trying to scare you with my letters. [10]Some people say, “Paul’s letters are powerful and sound important, but when he is with us, he is weak. And his speaking is nothing.” [11]They should know this: We are not there with you now, so we say these things in letters. But when we are there with you, we will show the same authority that we show in our letters.

[12]We do not dare to compare ourselves with those who think they are very important. They use themselves to measure themselves, and they judge themselves by what they themselves are. This shows that they know nothing. [13]But we will not brag about things outside the work that was given us to do. We will limit our bragging to the work that God gave us, and this includes our work with you. [14]We are not bragging too much, as we would be if we had not already come to you. But we have come to you with the Good News of Christ. [15]We limit our bragging to the work that is ours, not what others have done. We hope that as your faith continues to grow, you will help our work to grow much larger. [16]We want to tell the Good News in the areas beyond your city. We do not want to brag about work that has already been done in another person’s area. [17]But, “If people want to brag, they should brag only about the Lord.”[n] [18]It is not those who say they are good who are accepted but those the Lord thinks are good.

# September 19

## Prepared Like a Bride

*I promised to give you to Christ, as your only husband. I want to give you as his pure bride.*

2 Corinthians 11:2

John's descriptions of the future [in the Book of Revelation] steal your breath. His depiction of the final battle is graphic. Good clashes with evil. The sacred encounters the sinful. The pages howl with the shrieks of dragons and smolder with the coals of fiery pits. But in the midst of the battlefield there is a rose. John describes it in Revelation 21:2 …

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband" …

In this final mountaintop encounter, God pulls back the curtain and allows the warrior to peek into the homeland. When given the task of writing down what he sees, John chooses the most beautiful comparison earth has to offer. The Holy City, John says, is like "a bride dressed for her husband."

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Isaiah 29:1–24

#### *Warnings to Jerusalem*

29 How terrible it will be for you, Jerusalem,
the city where David camped.

Your festivals have continued
year after year.

2 I will attack Jerusalem,
and that city will be filled with sadness and crying.
It will be like an altar to me.

3 I will put armies all around you, Jerusalem;
I will surround you with towers
and with devices to attack you.

4 You will be pulled down and will speak from the ground;
I will hear your voice rising from the ground.

It will sound like the voice of a ghost;
your words will come like a whisper from the dirt.

5 Your many enemies will become like fine dust;
the many cruel people will be like chaff that is blown away.

Everything will happen very quickly.
6 The LORD All-Powerful will come

with thunder, earthquakes, and great noises,
with storms, strong winds, and a fire that destroys.

7 Then all the nations that fight against Jerusalem
will be like a dream;

all the nations that attack her
will be like a vision in the night.

8 They will be like a hungry man who dreams he is eating,
but when he awakens, he is still hungry.

They will be like a thirsty man who dreams he is drinking,
but when he awakens, he is still weak and thirsty.

It will be the same way with all the nations
who fight against Mount Zion.

9 Be surprised and amazed.
Blind yourselves so that you cannot see.

Become drunk, but not from wine.
Trip and fall, but not from beer.

10 The LORD has made you go into a deep sleep.
He has closed your eyes. (The prophets are your eyes.)
He has covered your heads. (The seers are your heads.)

11 This vision is like the words of a book that is closed and sealed. You may give the book to someone who can read and tell that person to read it. But he will say, "I can't read the book, because it is sealed." 12 Or you may give the book to someone who cannot read and tell him to read it. But he will say, "I don't know how to read."

13 The Lord says:

"These people worship me with their mouths,
and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship is based on
nothing but human rules.

14 So I will continue to amaze these people
by doing more and more miracles.

Their wise men will lose their wisdom;
their wise men will not be able to understand."

## *Warnings About Other Nations*

15 How terrible it will be for those who try
to hide things from the LORD

and who do their work in darkness.
They think no one will see them or know what they do.

16 You are confused.
You think the clay is equal to the potter.

You think that an object can tell the one who made it,
"You didn't make me."

This is like a pot telling its maker,
"You don't know anything."

## *A Better Time Is Coming*

17 In a very short time, Lebanon will become rich farmland,
and the rich farmland will seem like a forest.

18 At that time the deaf will hear the words in a book.
Instead of having darkness and gloom, the blind will see.

19 The LORD will make the poor people happy;
they will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

20 Then the people without mercy will come to an end;
those who do not respect God will disappear.
Those who enjoy doing evil will be gone:

21 those who lie about others in court,
those who trap people in court,
those who lie and take justice from innocent people in court.

22 This is what the LORD who set Abraham free says to the family of Jacob:

"Now the people of Jacob will not be ashamed
or disgraced any longer.

23 When they see all their children,
the children I made with my hands,

they will say my name is holy.
They will agree that the Holy One of Jacob is holy,
and they will respect the God of Israel.

24 People who do wrong will now understand.
Those who complain will accept being taught.”

## Psalm 108:1–5

### *A Prayer for Victory*

**A song. A psalm of David.**

108 God, my heart is steady. I will sing and praise you with all
my being.

2 Wake up, harp and lyre!
I will wake up the dawn.

3 LORD, I will praise you among the nations;
I will sing songs of praise about you to all the nations.

4 Your great love reaches to the skies,
your truth to the heavens.

5 God, you are supreme above the skies.
Let your glory be over all the earth.

## Proverbs 25:21–22

21If your enemy is hungry, feed him.
If he is thirsty, give him a drink.

22Doing this will be like pouring burning coals on his head,
and the LORD will reward you.

## 2 Corinthians 11:1–15

### *Paul and the False Apostles*

11 I wish you would be patient with me even when I am a little
foolish, but you are already doing that. 2I am jealous over you
with a jealousy that comes from God. I promised to give you to
Christ, as your only husband. I want to give you as his pure
bride. 3But I am afraid that your minds will be led away from
your true and pure following of Christ just as Eve was tricked
by the snake with his evil ways. 4You are very patient with
anyone who comes to you and preaches a different Jesus from
the one we preached. You are very willing to accept a spirit or
gospel that is different from the Spirit and Good News you
received from us.

5I do not think that those “great apostles” are any better
than I am. 6I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have
knowledge. We have shown this to you clearly in every way.

7I preached God’s Good News to you without pay. I made
myself unimportant to make you important. Do you think that
was wrong? 8I accepted pay from other churches, taking their
money so I could serve you. 9If I needed something when I was
with you, I did not trouble any of you. The brothers who came
from Macedonia gave me all that I needed. I did not allow
myself to depend on you in any way, and I will never depend on
you. 10No one in Southern Greece will stop me from bragging
about that. I say this with the truth of Christ in me. 11And why
do I not depend on you? Do you think it is because I do not love
you? God knows that I love you.

12And I will continue doing what I am doing now, because I
want to stop those people from having a reason to brag. They
would like to say that the work they brag about is the same as
ours. 13Such men are not true apostles but are workers who lie.
They change themselves to look like apostles of Christ. 14This
does not surprise us. Even Satan changes himself to look like an
angel of light.[n] 15So it does not surprise us if Satan’s servants
also make themselves look like servants who work for what is

right. But in the end they will be punished for what they do.

# September 20

## Reliability

*I have done hard and tiring work, and many times I did not sleep. I have been hungry and thirsty … Besides all this, there is on me every day the load of my concern for all the churches.*

2 Corinthians 11:27–28

There is a common denominator in any form of greatness—reliability. It's the bread and butter characteristic of achievement. It's the shared ingredient behind retirement pens, Hall of Fame awards, and golden anniversaries. It is the quality that produces not momentary heroics but monumental lives.

The Bible has its share … Consistent and predictable, these saints were spurred by a gut-level conviction that they had been called by no one less than God himself. As a result, their work wasn't affected by moods, cloudy days, or rocky trails. Their performance graph didn't rise and fall with roller-coaster irregularity. They weren't addicted to accolades or applause nor deterred by grumpy bosses or empty wallets … And since their loyalty was not determined by their comfort, they were just as faithful in dark prisons as they were in spotlighted pulpits.

from *God Came Near*

### Isaiah 30:1—32:20

#### *Warnings to the Stubborn Nation*

30 The LORD said,
"How terrible it will be for these stubborn children.

They make plans, but they don't ask me to help them.
They make agreements with other nations, without

asking my Spirit.
They are adding more and more sins to themselves.

[2]They go down to Egypt for help
without asking me about it first.

They hope they will be saved by the king of Egypt;
they want Egypt to protect them.

[3]But hiding in Egypt will bring you only shame;
Egypt’s protection will only disappoint you.

[4]Your officers have gone to Zoan,
and your messengers have gone to Hanes,

[5]but they will be put to shame,
because Egypt is useless to them.

It will give no help and will be of no use;
it will cause them only shame and embarrassment.”

## *God’s Message to Judah*

[6]This is a message about the animals in southern Judah:

Southern Judah is a dangerous place
full of lions and lionesses,
poisonous snakes and darting snakes.

The messengers travel through there with their wealth on the backs of donkeys
and their treasure on the backs of camels.

They carry them to a nation that cannot help them,
[7] to Egypt whose help is useless.

So I call that country Rahab the Do-Nothing.

8 Now write this on a sign for the people,
write this on a scroll,

so that for the days to come
this will be a witness forever.

9 These people are like children who lie and refuse to obey;
they refuse to listen to the LORD's teachings.

10 They tell the seers,
"Don't see any more visions!"

They say to the prophets,
"Don't tell us the truth!

Say things that will make us feel good;
see only good things for us.

11 Stop blocking our path.
Get out of our way.

Stop telling us
about God, the Holy One of Israel."

12 So this is what the Holy One of Israel says:

"You people have refused to accept this message
and have depended on cruelty and lies to help you.

13 You are guilty of these things.
So you will be like a high wall with cracks in it
that falls suddenly and breaks into small pieces.

14 You will be like a clay jar that breaks,
smashed into many pieces.

Those pieces will be too small
to take coals from the fire
or to get water from a well.”

15This is what the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, says:

“If you come back to me and trust me, you will be saved.
If you will be calm and trust me, you will be strong.”
But you don’t want to do that.

16You say, “No, we need horses to run away on.”
So you will run away on horses.

You say, “We will ride away on fast horses.”
So those who chase you will be fast.

17One enemy will make threats,
and a thousand of your men will run away.

Five enemies will make threats,
and all of you will run from them.

You will be left alone like a flagpole on a hilltop,
like a banner on a hill.

18The LORD wants to show his mercy to you.
He wants to rise and comfort you.

The LORD is a fair God,
and everyone who waits for his help will be happy.

## *The Lord Will Help His People*

19You people who live on Mount Zion in Jerusalem will not cry anymore. The LORD will hear your crying, and he will comfort you. When he hears you, he will help you. 20The Lord has given you sorrow and hurt like the bread and water you ate every day. He is your teacher; he will not continue to hide from you, but you will see your teacher with your own eyes. 21If you

go the wrong way—to the right or to the left—you will hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the right way. You should go this way.” 22You have statues covered with silver and gold, but you will ruin them for further use. You will throw them away like filthy rags and say, “Go away!”

23At that time the LORD will send rain for the seeds you plant in the ground, and the ground will grow food for you. The harvest will be rich and great, and you will have plenty of food in the fields for your animals. 24Your oxen and donkeys that work the soil will have all the food they need. You will have to use shovels and pitchforks to spread all their food. 25Every mountain and hill will have streams filled with water. These things will happen after many people are killed and the towers are pulled down. 26At that time the light from the moon will be bright like the sun, and the light from the sun will be seven times brighter than now, like the light of seven days. These things will happen when the LORD bandages his broken people and heals the hurts he gave them.

27Look! The LORD comes from far away.
His anger is like a fire with thick clouds of smoke.

His mouth is filled with anger,
and his tongue is like a burning fire.

28His breath is like a rushing river,
which rises to the throat.

He will judge the nations as if he is sifting them through the strainer of destruction.
He will place in their mouths a bit that will lead them the wrong way.

29You will sing happy songs
as on the nights you begin a festival.

You will be happy like people listening to flutes
as they come to the mountain of the LORD,
to the Rock of Israel.

30The LORD will cause all people to hear his great voice

and to see his powerful arm come down with anger,

like a great fire that burns everything,
and like a great storm with much rain and hail.

31 Assyria will be afraid when it hears the voice of the LORD,
because he will strike Assyria with a rod.

32 When the LORD punishes Assyria with a rod,
he will beat them to the music of tambourines and harps;
he will fight against them with his mighty weapons.

33 Topheth[n] has been made ready for a long time;
it is ready for the king.

It was made deep and wide
with much wood and fire.

And the LORD's breath will come
like a stream of burning sulfur and set it on fire.

## *Warnings About Relying on Egypt*

31 How terrible it will be for those people
who go down to Egypt for help.
They think horses will save them.

They think their many chariots
and strong horsemen will save them.

But they don't trust God, the Holy One of Israel,
or ask the LORD for help.

2 But he is wise and can bring them disaster.
He does not change his warnings.

He will rise up and fight against the evil people
and against those who try to help evil people.

3 The Egyptians are only people and are not God.
Their horses are only animals and are not spirit.

The LORD will stretch out his arm,
and the one who helps will stumble,
and the people who wanted help will fall.
All of them will be destroyed together.

4 The LORD says this to me:

"When a lion or a lion's cub kills an animal to eat,
it stands over the dead animal and roars.

A band of shepherds
may be assembled against it,

but the lion will not be afraid of their yelling
or upset by their noise.

So the LORD All-Powerful will come down
to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill.

5 The LORD All-Powerful will defend Jerusalem
like birds flying over their nests.

He will defend and save it;
he will 'pass over' and save Jerusalem."

6 You children of Israel, come back to the God you fought against. 7 The time is coming when each of you will stop worshiping idols of gold and silver, which you sinned by making.

8 "Assyria will be defeated by a sword, but not the sword of a person;
Assyria will be destroyed, but not by a person's sword.

Assyria will run away from the sword of God,
but its young men will be caught and made slaves.

9 They will panic, and their protection will be destroyed.
Their commanders will be terrified when they see God's
battle flag,"

says the LORD,
whose fire is in Jerusalem
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

## *A Good Kingdom Is Coming*

32 A king will rule in a way that brings justice,
and leaders will make fair decisions.

2 Then each ruler will be like a shelter from the wind,
like a safe place in a storm,

like streams of water in a dry land,
like a cool shadow from a large rock in a hot land.

3 People will look to the king for help,
and they will truly listen to what he says.

4 People who are now worried will be able to understand.
Those who cannot speak clearly now will then be able to
speak clearly and quickly.

5 Fools will not be called great,
and people will not respect the wicked.

6 A fool says foolish things,
and in his mind he plans evil.

A fool does things that are wicked,

and he says wrong things about the LORD.

A fool does not feed the hungry
or let thirsty people drink water.

7The wicked person uses evil like a tool.
He plans ways to take everything from the poor.

He destroys the poor with lies,
even when the poor person is in the right.

8But a good leader plans to do good,
and those good things make him a good leader.

## *Hard Times Are Coming*

9You women who are calm now,
stand up and listen to me.

You women who feel safe now,
hear what I say.

10You women feel safe now,
but after one year you will be afraid.

There will be no grape harvest
and no summer fruit to gather.

11Women, you are calm now, but you should shake with fear.
Women, you feel safe now, but you should tremble.

Take off your nice clothes
and put rough cloth around your waist to show your sadness.

12 Beat your breasts in grief, because the fields that were pleasant are now empty.
Cry, because the vines that once had fruit now have no more grapes.

13 Cry for the land of my people,
in which only thorns and weeds now grow.

Cry for the city that once was happy
and for all the houses that once were filled with joy.

14 The palace will be empty;
people will leave the noisy city.

Strong cities and towers will be empty.
Wild donkeys will love to live there, and sheep will go there to eat.

## *Things Will Get Better*

15 This will continue until God pours his Spirit from above upon us.
Then the desert will be like a fertile field
and the fertile field like a forest.

16 Justice will be found even in the desert,
and fairness will be found in the fertile fields.

17 That fairness will bring peace,
and it will bring calm and safety forever.

18 My people will live in peaceful places
and in safe homes
and in calm places of rest.

19 Hail will destroy the forest,
and the city will be completely destroyed.

[20]But you will be happy as you plant seeds near every stream
and as you let your cattle and donkeys wander freely.

## Psalm 108:6–13

[6]Answer us and save us by your power
so the people you love will be rescued.

[7]God has said from his Temple,
“When I win, I will divide Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Succoth.

[8]Gilead and Manasseh are mine.
Ephraim is like my helmet.
Judah holds my royal scepter.

[9]Moab is like my washbowl.
I throw my sandals at Edom.
I shout at Philistia.”

[10]Who will bring me to the strong, walled city?
Who will lead me to Edom?

[11]God, surely you have rejected us;
you do not go out with our armies.

[12]Help us fight the enemy.
Human help is useless,

[13]but we can win with God’s help.
He will defeat our enemies.

## Proverbs 25:23–24

23 As the north wind brings rain,
    telling gossip brings angry looks.

24 It is better to live in a corner on the roof[n]
    than inside the house with a quarreling wife.

## 2 Corinthians 11:16–33

### *Paul Tells About His Sufferings*

16 I tell you again: No one should think I am a fool. But if you
think so, accept me as you would accept a fool. Then I can brag
a little, too. 17 When I brag because I feel sure of myself, I am
not talking as the Lord would talk but as a fool. 18 Many people
are bragging about their lives in the world. So I will brag too.
19 You are wise, so you will gladly be patient with fools! 20 You
are even patient with those who order you around, or use you,
or trick you, or think they are better than you, or hit you in the
face. 21 It is shameful to me to say this, but we were too "weak"
to do those things to you!

But if anyone else is brave enough to brag, then I also will be
brave and brag. (I am talking as a fool.) 22 Are they Hebrews?[n]
So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they from Abraham's
family? So am I. 23 Are they serving Christ? I am serving him
more. (I am crazy to talk like this.) I have worked much harder
than they. I have been in prison more often. I have been hurt
more in beatings. I have been near death many times. 24 Five
times the Jews have given me their punishment of thirty-nine
lashes with a whip. 25 Three different times I was beaten with
rods. One time I was almost stoned to death. Three times I was
in ships that wrecked, and one of those times I spent a night
and a day in the sea. 26 I have gone on many travels and have
been in danger from rivers, thieves, my own people, the Jews,
and those who are not Jews. I have been in danger in cities, in
places where no one lives, and on the sea. And I have been in
danger with false Christians. 27 I have done hard and tiring
work, and many times I did not sleep. I have been hungry and
thirsty, and many times I have been without food. I have been
cold and without clothes. 28 Besides all this, there is on me every
day the load of my concern for all the churches. 29 I feel weak
every time someone is weak, and I feel upset every time
someone is led into sin.

30 If I must brag, I will brag about the things that show I am

weak. [31]God knows I am not lying. He is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is to be praised forever. [32]When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas wanted to arrest me, so he put guards around the city. [33]But my friends lowered me in a basket through a hole in the city wall. So I escaped from the governor.

# September 21

## God’s Mountains

*“My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you.”*

2 Corinthians 12:9

There are certain mountains only God can climb … It’s not that you aren’t welcome to try, it’s just that you aren’t able … If the word *Savior* is in your job description, it’s because you put it there. Your role is to help the world, not save it. Mount Messiah is one mountain you weren’t made to climb.

Nor is Mount Self-Sufficient. You aren’t able to run the world, nor are you able to sustain it. Some of you think you can. You are self-made. You don’t bow your knees, you just roll up your sleeves and put in another twelve-hour day … which may be enough when it comes to making a living or building a business. But when you face your own grave or your own guilt, your power will not do the trick.

from *The Great House of God*

## Isaiah 33:1—34:17

### *Warnings to Assyria and Promises to God’s People*

33 How terrible it will be for you who destroy
others
but have not been destroyed yet.

How terrible it will be for you, traitor,
whom no one has turned against yet.

When you stop destroying,
others will destroy you.

When you stop turning against others,
they will turn against you.

2 LORD, be kind to us.
We have waited for your help.

Give us strength every morning.
Save us when we are in trouble.

3 Your powerful voice makes people run away in fear;
your greatness causes the nations to run away.

4 Like locusts, your enemies will take away the things you stole in war.
Like locusts rushing about, they will take your wealth.

5 The LORD is very great, and he lives in a high place.
He fills Jerusalem with fairness and justice.

6 He will be your safety.
He is full of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge.
Respect for the LORD is the greatest treasure.

7 See, brave people are crying out in the streets;
those who tried to bring peace are weeping loudly.

8 There is no one on the roads,
no one walking in the paths.

People have broken the agreements they made.
They refuse to believe the proof from witnesses.
No one respects other people.

9 The land is sick and dying;
Lebanon is ashamed and dying.

The Plain of Sharon is dry like the desert,
and the trees of Bashan and Carmel are dying.

10 The LORD says, “Now, I will stand up
and show my greatness.
Now, I will become important to the people.

11 You people do useless things
that are like hay and straw.
A destructive wind will burn you like fire.

12 People will be burned until their bones become like lime;
they will burn quickly like dry thornbushes.”

13 You people in faraway lands, hear what I have done.
You people who are near me, learn about my power.

14 The sinners in Jerusalem are afraid;
those who are separated from God shake with fear.

They say, “Can any of us live through this fire that destroys?
Who can live near this fire that burns on and on?”

15 A person who does what is right
and speaks what is right,

who refuses to take money unfairly,
who refuses to take money to hurt others,

who does not listen to plans of murder,
who refuses to think about evil—

16 this is the kind of person who will be safe.

He will be protected as he would be in a high, walled city.

He will always have bread,
and he will not run out of water.

17 Your eyes will see the king in his beauty.
You will see the land that stretches far away.

18 You will think about the terror of the past:
"Where is that officer?
Where is the one who collected the taxes?
Where is the officer in charge of our defense towers?"

19 No longer will you see those proud people from other countries,
whose strange language you couldn't understand.

## *God Will Protect Jerusalem*

20 Look at Jerusalem, the city of our festivals.
Look at Jerusalem, that beautiful place of rest.

It is like a tent that will never be moved;
the pegs that hold her in place will never be pulled up,
and her ropes will never be broken.

21 There the LORD will be our Mighty One.
That land is a place with streams and wide rivers,

but there will be no enemy boats on those rivers;
no powerful ship will sail on them.

22 This is because the LORD is our judge.
The LORD makes our laws.

The LORD is our king.

He will save us.

[23]You sailors from other lands, hear:
The ropes on your boats hang loose.
The mast is not held firm.
The sails are not spread open.

Then your great wealth will be divided.
There will be so much wealth that even the crippled people will carry off a share.

[24]No one living in Jerusalem will say, “I am sick.”
The people who live there will have their sins forgiven.

## *God Will Punish His Enemies*

[34] All you nations, come near and listen.
Pay attention, you peoples!

The earth and all the people in it should listen,
the world and everything in it.

[2]The LORD is angry with all the nations;
he is angry with their armies.
He will destroy them and kill them all.

[3]Their bodies will be thrown outside.
The stink will rise from the bodies,
and the blood will flow down the mountains.

[4]The sun, moon, and stars will dissolve,
and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll.

The stars will fall
like dead leaves from a vine
or dried-up figs from a fig tree.

[5]The LORD's sword in the sky is covered with blood.
It will cut through Edom
and destroy those people as an offering to the LORD.

[6]The LORD's sword will be covered with blood;
it will be covered with fat,

with the blood from lambs and goats,
with the fat from the kidneys of sheep.

This is because the LORD decided there will be a sacrifice in Bozrah
and much killing in Edom.

[7]The oxen will be killed,
and the cattle and the strong bulls.

The land will be filled with their blood,
and the dirt will be covered with their fat.

[8]The LORD has chosen a time for punishment.
He has chosen a year when people must pay for the wrongs they did to Jerusalem.

[9]Edom's rivers will be like hot tar.
Its dirt will be like burning sulfur.
Its land will be like burning tar.

[10]The fires will burn night and day;
the smoke will rise from Edom forever.

Year after year that land will be empty;
no one will ever travel through that land again.

[11]Birds and small animals will own that land,
and owls and ravens will live there.

God will make it an empty wasteland;
it will have nothing left in it.

12 The important people will have no one left to rule them;
the leaders will all be gone.

13 Thorns will take over the strong towers,
and wild bushes will grow in the walled cities.

It will be a home for wild dogs
and a place for owls to live.

14 Desert animals will live with the hyenas,
and wild goats will call to their friends.

Night animals will live there
and find a place of rest.

15 Owls will nest there and lay eggs.
When they hatch open, the owls will gather their young under their wings.

Hawks will gather
with their own kind.

16 Look at the LORD's scroll and read what is written there:

None of these will be missing;
none will be without its mate.

God has given the command,
so his Spirit will gather them together.

17 God has divided the land among them,
and he has given them each their portion.

So they will own that land forever
and will live there year after year.

## Psalm 109:1–5

### *A Prayer Against an Enemy*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

109 God, I praise you. Do not be silent.

2 Wicked people and liars have spoken against me;
they have told lies about me.

3 They have said hateful things about me
and attack me for no reason.

4 They attacked me, even though I loved them
and prayed for them.

5 I was good to them, but they repay me with evil.
I loved them, but they hate me in return.

## Proverbs 25:25–26

25 Good news from a faraway place
is like a cool drink when you are tired.

26 A good person who gives in to evil
is like a muddy spring or a dirty well.

## 2 Corinthians 12:1–21

## *A Special Blessing in Paul's Life*

12 I must continue to brag. It will do no good, but I will talk now
about visions and revelations[n] from the Lord. 2I know a man in
Christ who was taken up to the third heaven fourteen years ago.
I do not know whether the man was in his body or out of his
body, but God knows. 3–4And I know that this man was taken up
to paradise.[n] I don't know if he was in his body or away from his
body, but God knows. He heard things he is not able to explain,
things that no human is allowed to tell. 5I will brag about a man
like that, but I will not brag about myself, except about my
weaknesses. 6But if I wanted to brag about myself, I would not
be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. But I will not
brag about myself. I do not want people to think more of me
than what they see me do or hear me say.

7So that I would not become too proud of the wonderful
things that were shown to me, a painful physical problem[n] was
given to me. This problem was a messenger from Satan, sent to
beat me and keep me from being too proud. 8I begged the Lord
three times to take this problem away from me. 9But he said to
me, "My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my
power is made perfect in you." So I am very happy to brag
about my weaknesses. Then Christ's power can live in me. 10For
this reason I am happy when I have weaknesses, insults, hard
times, sufferings, and all kinds of troubles for Christ. Because
when I am weak, then I am truly strong.

## *Paul's Love for the Christians*

11I have been talking like a fool, but you made me do it. You
are the ones who should say good things about me. I am worth
nothing, but those "great apostles" are not worth any more than
I am!

12When I was with you, I patiently did the things that prove I
am an apostle—signs, wonders, and miracles. 13So you received
everything that the other churches have received. Only one
thing was different: I was not a burden to you. Forgive me for
this!

14I am now ready to visit you the third time, and I will not be
a burden to you. I want nothing from you, except you. Children
should not have to save up to give to their parents. Parents
should save to give to their children. 15So I am happy to give
everything I have for you, even myself. If I love you more, will
you love me less?

[16]It is clear I was not a burden to you, but you think I was tricky and lied to catch you. [17]Did I cheat you by using any of the messengers I sent to you? No, you know I did not. [18]I asked Titus to go to you, and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not cheat you, did he? No, you know that Titus and I did the same thing and with the same spirit.

[19]Do you think we have been defending ourselves to you all this time? We have been speaking in Christ and before God. You are our dear friends, and everything we do is to make you stronger. [20]I am afraid that when I come, you will not be what I want you to be, and I will not be what you want me to be. I am afraid that among you there may be arguing, jealousy, anger, selfish fighting, evil talk, gossip, pride, and confusion. [21]I am afraid that when I come to you again, my God will make me ashamed before you. I may be saddened by many of those who have sinned because they have not changed their hearts or turned from their sexual sins and the shameful things they have done.

# September 22

## The Intersection of Love

*It is true that he was weak when he was killed on the cross, but he lives now by God's power.*

2 Corinthians 13:4

The cross. Can you turn any direction without seeing one? Perched atop a chapel. Carved into a graveyard headstone. Engraved in a ring or suspended on a chain. The Cross is the universal symbol of Christianity. An odd choice, don't you think? Strange that a tool of torture would come to embody a movement of hope. The symbols of other faiths are more upbeat: the six-pointed star of David, the crescent moon of Islam, a lotus blossom for Buddhism. Yet a cross for Christianity? An instrument of execution? …

Why is the Cross the symbol of our faith? To find the answer look no farther than the cross itself. Its design couldn't be simpler. One beam horizontal—the other vertical. One reaches out—like God's love. The other reaches up—as does God's holiness. One represents the width of his love; the other reflects the height of his holiness. The Cross is the intersection. The Cross is where God forgave his children without lowering his standards.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### Isaiah 35:1—36:22

### *God Will Comfort His People*

35 The desert and dry land will become happy;
the desert will be glad and will produce flowers.

Like a flower, [2]it will have many blooms.
    It will show its happiness, as if it were shouting with joy.

It will be beautiful like the forest of Lebanon,
    as beautiful as the hill of Carmel and the Plain of Sharon.

Everyone will see the glory of the LORD
    and the splendor of our God.

[3]Make the weak hands strong
    and the weak knees steady.

[4]Say to people who are frightened,
    “Be strong. Don’t be afraid.

Look, your God will come,
    and he will punish your enemies.

He will make them pay for the wrongs they did,
    but he will save you.”

[5]Then the blind people will see again,
    and the deaf will hear.

[6]Crippled people will jump like deer,
    and those who can’t talk now will shout with joy.

Water will flow in the desert,
    and streams will flow in the dry land.

[7]The burning desert will have pools of water,
    and the dry ground will have springs.

Where wild dogs once lived,
    grass and water plants will grow.

8 A road will be there;
this highway will be called “The Road to Being Holy.”

Evil people will not be allowed to walk on that road;
only good people will walk on it.
No fools will go on it.

9 No lions will be there,
nor will dangerous animals be on that road.
They will not be found there.

That road will be for the people God saves;
10 the people the LORD has freed will return there.

They will enter Jerusalem with joy,
and their happiness will last forever.

Their gladness and joy will fill them completely,
and sorrow and sadness will go far away.

## *The Assyrians Invade Judah*

36 During Hezekiah’s fourteenth year as king, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the strong, walled cities of Judah and captured them. 2 The king of Assyria sent out his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. When the commander came near the waterway from the upper pool on the road where people do their laundry, he stopped. 3 Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah went out to meet him. Eliakim son of Hilkiah was the palace manager, Shebna was the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph was the recorder.

4 The field commander said to them, “Tell Hezekiah this:

“‘The great king, the king of Assyria, says: What can you trust in now? 5 You say you have battle plans and power for war, but your words mean nothing. Whom are you trusting for help so that you turn against me? 6 Look, you are depending on Egypt to help you, but Egypt is like a splintered walking stick. If you lean on it for help, it will stab your hand and hurt you. The king of Egypt will hurt all those who depend on him. 7 You might say, “We are depending on the LORD our God,” but Hezekiah destroyed the LORD’s altars and the places of worship. Hezekiah told Judah and Jerusalem, “You must worship only at this one altar.”

[8]"'Now make an agreement with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses if you can find enough men to ride them. [9]You cannot defeat one of my master's least important officers, so why do you depend on Egypt to give you chariots and horsemen? [10]I have not come to attack and destroy this country without an order from the LORD. The LORD himself told me to come to this country and destroy it.'"

[11]Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the field commander, "Please speak to us in the Aramaic language. We understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew, because the people on the city wall can hear you."

[12]But the commander said, "My master did not send me to tell these things only to you and your king. He sent me to speak also to those people sitting on the wall who will have to eat their own dung and drink their own urine like you."

[13]Then the commander stood and shouted loudly in the Hebrew language, "Listen to what the great king, the king of Assyria says, [14]The king says you should not let Hezekiah fool you, because he can't save you. [15]Don't let Hezekiah talk you into trusting the LORD by saying, 'The LORD will surely save us. This city won't be handed over to the king of Assyria.'

[16]"Don't listen to Hezekiah. The king of Assyria says, 'Make peace with me, and come out of the city to me. Then everyone will be free to eat the fruit from his own grapevine and fig tree and to drink water from his own well. [17]After that I will come and take you to a land like your own—a land with grain and new wine, bread and vineyards.'

[18]"Don't let Hezekiah fool you, saying, 'The LORD will save us.' Has a god of any other nation saved his people from the power of the king of Assyria? [19]Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? They did not save Samaria from my power. [20]Not one of all the gods of these countries has saved his people from me. Neither can the LORD save Jerusalem from my power."

[21]The people were silent. They didn't answer the commander at all, because King Hezekiah had ordered, "Don't answer him."

[22]Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah tore their clothes to show how upset they were. (Eliakim son of Hilkiah was the palace manager, Shebna was the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph was the recorder.) The three men went to Hezekiah and told him what the field commander had said.

## Psalm 109:6–15

6 They say about me, “Have an evil person work against him,
and let an accuser stand against him.

7 When he is judged, let him be found guilty,
and let even his prayers show his guilt.

8 Let his life be cut short,
and let another man replace him as leader.

9 Let his children become orphans
and his wife a widow.

10 Make his children wander around, begging for food.
Let them be forced out of the ruins in which they live.

11 Let the people to whom he owes money take everything he owns,
and let strangers steal everything he has worked for.

12 Let no one show him love
or have mercy on his orphaned children.

13 Let all his descendants die
and be forgotten by those who live after him.

14 LORD, remember how wicked his ancestors were,
and don’t let the sins of his mother be wiped out.

15 LORD, always remember their sins.
Then make people forget about them completely.

## Proverbs 25:27–28

27 It is not good to eat too much honey,

nor does it bring you honor to brag about yourself.

28 Those who do not control themselves
are like a city whose walls are broken down.

## 2 Corinthians 13:1–14

### *Final Warnings and Greetings*

13 I will come to you for the third time. “Every case must be
proved by two or three witnesses.”[n] 2 When I was with you the
second time, I gave a warning to those who had sinned. Now I
am away from you, and I give a warning to all the others. When
I come to you again, I will not be easy with them. 3 You want
proof that Christ is speaking through me. My proof is that he is
not weak among you, but he is powerful. 4 It is true that he was
weak when he was killed on the cross, but he lives now by God’s
power. It is true that we are weak in Christ, but for you we will
be alive in Christ by God’s power.

5 Look closely at yourselves. Test yourselves to see if you are
living in the faith. You know that Jesus Christ is in you—unless
you fail the test. 6 But I hope you will see that we ourselves have
not failed the test. 7 We pray to God that you will not do
anything wrong. It is not important to see that we have passed
the test, but it is important that you do what is right, even if it
seems we have failed. 8 We cannot do anything against the truth,
but only for the truth. 9 We are happy to be weak, if you are
strong, and we pray that you will become complete. 10 I am
writing this while I am away from you so that when I come I will
not have to be harsh in my use of authority. The Lord gave me
this authority to build you up, not to tear you down.

11 Now, brothers and sisters, I say good-bye. Live in harmony.
Do what I have asked you to do. Agree with each other, and live
in peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

12 Greet each other with a holy kiss. 13 All of God’s holy people
send greetings to you.

14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

# September 23

## The Cost of His Gift

*Jesus gave himself for our sins to free us.*

Galatians 1:4

Christ came to earth for one reason: to give his life as a ransom for you, for me, for all of us. He sacrificed himself to give us a second chance. He would have gone to any lengths to do so. And he did. He went to the Cross, where man's utter despair collided with God's unbending grace. And in that moment when God's great gift was complete, the compassionate Christ showed the world the cost of his gift …

He who was perfect gave that perfect record to us, and our imperfect record was given to him … As a result, God's holiness is honored, and his children are forgiven.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Isaiah 37:1—38:22

#### *Hezekiah Asks God to Help*

37 When King Hezekiah heard the message, he tore his clothes
and put on rough cloth to show how sad he was. Then he went
into the Temple of the LORD. 2Hezekiah sent Eliakim, the palace
manager, and Shebna, the royal secretary, and the older priests
to Isaiah. They were all wearing rough cloth when they came to
Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. 3They told Isaiah, "This is
what Hezekiah says: Today is a day of sorrow and punishment
and disgrace, as when a child should be born, but the mother is
not strong enough to give birth to it. 4The king of Assyria sent
his field commander to make fun of the living God. Maybe the
LORD your God will hear what the commander said and will
punish him for it. So pray for the few of us who are left alive."

5When Hezekiah's officers came to Isaiah, 6he said to them,
"Tell your master this: The LORD says, 'Don't be afraid of what

you have heard. Don't be frightened by the words the servants of the king of Assyria have spoken against me. [7]Listen! I am going to put a spirit in the king of Assyria. He will hear a report that will make him return to his own country, and I will cause him to die by the sword there.'"

[8]The field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish. When he went back, he found the king fighting against the city of Libnah.

[9]The king received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was coming to attack him. When the king of Assyria heard this, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, [10]"Tell Hezekiah king of Judah: Don't be fooled by the god you trust. Don't believe him when he says Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria. [11]You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done. They have completely defeated every country, so do not think you will be saved. [12]Did the gods of those people save them? My ancestors destroyed them, defeating the cities of Gozan, Haran, and Rezeph, and the people of Eden living in Tel Assar. [13]Where are the kings of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the kings of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?"

## *Hezekiah Prays to the Lord*

[14]When Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the Temple of the LORD. He spread the letter out before the LORD [15]and prayed to the LORD: [16]"LORD All-Powerful, you are the God of Israel, whose throne is between the gold creatures with wings, only you are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. [17]Hear, LORD, and listen. Open your eyes, LORD, and see. Listen to all the words Sennacherib has said to insult the living God.

[18]"It is true, LORD, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these countries and their lands. [19]They have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire, but they were only wood and rock statues that people made. So the kings have destroyed them. [20]Now, LORD our God, save us from the king's power so that all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you, LORD, are the only God."

## *The Lord Answers Hezekiah*

[21]Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah that said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'You prayed to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria. [22]So this is what the LORD has said against Sennacherib:

The people of Jerusalem
hate you and make fun of you;

the people of Jerusalem
laugh at you as you run away.

23You have insulted me and spoken against me;
you have raised your voice against me.

You have a proud look on your face,
which is against me, the Holy One of Israel!

24You have sent your messengers to insult the Lord.
You have said, “With my many chariots

I have gone to the tops of the mountains,
to the highest mountains of Lebanon.

I have cut down its tallest cedars
and its best pine trees.

I have gone to its greatest heights
and its best forests.

25I have dug wells in foreign countries
and drunk water there.

By the soles of my feet,
I have dried up all the rivers of Egypt.”

26“‘King of Assyria, surely you have heard.
Long ago I, the LORD, planned these things.

Long ago I designed them,
and now I have made them happen.

I allowed you to turn those strong, walled cities
into piles of rocks.

27 The people in those cities were weak;
they were frightened and put to shame.

They were like grass in the field,
like tender, young grass,

like grass on the housetop
that is burned by the wind before it can grow.

28 "'I know when you rest,
when you come and go,
and how you rage against me.

29 Because you rage against me,
and because I have heard your proud words,

I will put my hook in your nose
and my bit in your mouth.

Then I will force you to leave my country
the same way you came.'

30 "Then the LORD said, 'Hezekiah, I will give you this sign:

This year you will eat the grain that grows wild,
and the second year you will eat what grows wild from that.

But in the third year, plant grain and harvest it.
Plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

31 Some of the people in the family of Judah
will escape.

Like plants that take root,
they will grow strong and have many children.

32 A few people will come out of Jerusalem alive;
a few from Mount Zion will live.

The strong love of the LORD All-Powerful
will make this happen.'

33 "So this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria:

'He will not enter this city
or even shoot an arrow here.

He will not fight against it with shields
or build a ramp to attack the city walls.

34 He will return to his country the same way he came,
and he will not enter this city,'
says the LORD.

35 'I will defend and save this city
for my sake and for David, my servant.'"

36 Then the angel of the LORD went out and killed one hundred eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up early the next morning, they saw all the dead bodies. 37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria left and went back to Nineveh and stayed there.

38 One day as Sennacherib was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with a sword. Then they escaped to the land of Ararat. So Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon became king of Assyria.

## *Hezekiah's Illness*

38 At that time Hezekiah became very sick; he was almost dead. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to see him and told him, "This is what the LORD says: Make arrangements, because you are not going to live, but die."

2 Hezekiah turned toward the wall and prayed to the LORD, 3 "LORD, please remember that I have always obeyed you. I have

given myself completely to you and have done what you said was right." Then Hezekiah cried loudly.

4Then the LORD spoke his word to Isaiah: 5"Go to Hezekiah and tell him: 'This is what the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. So I will add fifteen years to your life. 6I will save you and this city from the king of Assyria; I will defend this city.

7"'The LORD will do what he says. This is the sign from the LORD to show you: 8The sun has made a shadow go down the stairway of Ahaz, but I will make it go back ten steps.'" So the shadow made by the sun went back up the ten steps it had gone down.

9After Hezekiah king of Judah got well, he wrote this song:

10I said, "I am in the middle of my life.
Do I have to go through the gates of death?
Will I have the rest of my life taken away from me?"

11I said, "I will not see the LORD
in the land of the living again.

I will not again see the people
who live on the earth.

12Like a shepherd's tent,
my home has been pulled down and taken from me.

I am finished
like the cloth a weaver rolls up and cuts from the loom.[n]
In one day you brought me to this end.

13All night I cried loudly.
Like a lion, he crushed all my bones.
In one day you brought me to this end.

14I cried like a bird
and moaned like a dove.

My eyes became tired as I looked to the heavens.
Lord, I have troubles. Please help me."

15 What can I say?
The Lord told me what would happen and then made it happen.

I have had these troubles in my soul,
so now I will be humble all my life.

16 Lord, because of you, people live.
Because of you, my spirit also lives;

you made me well and let me live.

17 It was for my own good
that I had such troubles.

Because you love me very much,
you did not let me die

but threw my sins
far away.

18 People in the place of the dead cannot praise you;
those who have died cannot sing praises to you;

those who die don't trust you
to help them.

19 The people who are alive are the ones who praise you.
They praise you as I praise you today.

A father should tell his children
that you provide help.

20 The LORD saved me,
so we will play songs on stringed instruments

in the Temple of the LORD
all the days of our lives.

21Then Isaiah said, “Make a paste from figs and put it on Hezekiah’s boil. Then he will get well.” 22Hezekiah then asked Isaiah, “What will be the sign? What will show that I will go up to the Temple of the LORD?”

## Psalm 109:16–20

16“He did not remember to be loving.
He hurt the poor, the needy, and those who were sad
until they were nearly dead.

17He loved to put curses on others,
so let those same curses fall on him.

He did not like to bless others,
so do not let good things happen to him.

18He cursed others as often as he wore clothes.
Cursing others filled his body and his life,
like drinking water and using olive oil.

19So let curses cover him like clothes
and wrap around him like a belt.”

20May the LORD do these things to those who accuse me,
to those who speak evil against me.

## Proverbs 26:1

26 It shouldn’t snow in summer or rain at
harvest.

Neither should a foolish person ever be honored.

## Galatians 1:1–24

1 From Paul, an apostle. I was not chosen to be an apostle by
human beings, nor was I sent from human beings. I was made
an apostle through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised
Jesus from the dead. 2This letter is also from all those of God's
family[n] who are with me.

To the churches in Galatia:[n]

3Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ. 4Jesus gave himself for our sins to free us from this
evil world we live in, as God the Father planned. 5The glory
belongs to God forever and ever. Amen.

### *The Only Good News*

6God, by his grace through Christ, called you to become his
people. So I am amazed that you are turning away so quickly
and believing something different than the Good News. 7Really,
there is no other Good News. But some people are confusing
you; they want to change the Good News of Christ. 8We
preached to you the Good News. So if we ourselves, or even an
angel from heaven, should preach to you something different,
we should be judged guilty! 9I said this before, and now I say it
again: You have already accepted the Good News. If anyone is
preaching something different to you, let that person be judged
guilty!

10Do you think I am trying to make people accept me? No,
God is the One I am trying to please. Am I trying to please
people? If I still wanted to please people, I would not be a
servant of Christ.

### *Paul's Authority Is from God*

11Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the Good
News I preached to you was not made up by human beings. 12I
did not get it from humans, nor did anyone teach it to me, but
Jesus Christ showed it to me.

13You have heard about my past life in the Jewish religion. I
attacked the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14I was
becoming a leader in the Jewish religion, doing better than most
other Jews of my age. I tried harder than anyone else to follow
the teachings handed down by our ancestors.

15But God had special plans for me and set me apart for his
work even before I was born. He called me through his grace
16and showed his son to me so that I might tell the Good News
about him to those who are not Jewish. When God called me, I
did not get advice or help from any person. 17I did not go to
Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was. But,
without waiting, I went away to Arabia and later went back to
Damascus.

18After three years I went to Jerusalem to meet Peter and
stayed with him for fifteen days. 19I met no other apostles,
except James, the brother of the Lord. 20God knows that these
things I write are not lies. 21Later, I went to the areas of Syria
and Cilicia.

22In Judea the churches in Christ had never met me. 23They
had only heard it said, “This man who was attacking us is now
preaching the same faith that he once tried to destroy.” 24And
these believers praised God because of me.

# September 24

## God Gets Into Our Lives

*I do not live anymore—it is Christ who lives in me.*

Galatians 2:20

You have leaves to rake. A steering wheel to grip. A neighbor's hand to shake. Simply put, you have things to do. So does God. Babies need hugs. Children need good-night tucks. AIDS orphans need homes. Stressed-out executives need hope. God has work to do. And he uses our hands to do it.

What the hand is to the glove, the Spirit is to the Christian … God gets into us. At times, imperceptibly. Other times, disruptively. God gets his fingers into our lives, inch by inch reclaiming the territory that is rightfully his.

Your tongue. He claims it for his message.

Your feet. He requisitions them for his purpose.

Your mind? He made it and intends to use it for his glory.

Your eyes, face, and hands? Through them he will weep, smile, and touch.

from *Come Thirsty*

### Isaiah 39:1—40:31

### *Messengers from Babylon*

39 At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan was king of Babylon. He sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick and was now well.
2 Hezekiah was pleased and showed the messengers what was in his storehouses: the silver, gold, spices, expensive perfumes, his swords and shields, and all his wealth. He showed them everything in his palace and in his kingdom.

3 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked him, "What did these men say? Where did they come from?"

Hezekiah said, "They came from a faraway country—from

Babylon.”
4So Isaiah asked him, “What did they see in your palace?”
Hezekiah said, “They saw everything in my palace. I showed them all my wealth.”
5Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah: “Listen to the words of the LORD All-Powerful: 6‘In the future everything in your palace and everything your ancestors have stored up until this day will be taken away to Babylon. Nothing will be left,’ says the LORD. 7Some of your own children, those who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become servants in the palace of the king of Babylon.”
8Hezekiah told Isaiah, “These words from the LORD are good.” He said this because he thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime.”

## *Israel’s Punishment Will End*

40 Your God says, “Comfort, comfort my people.

2Speak kindly to the people of Jerusalem
and tell them

that their time of service is finished,
that they have paid for their sins,

that the LORD has punished Jerusalem
twice for every sin they did.”

3This is the voice of one who calls out:

“Prepare in the desert
the way for the LORD.

Make a straight road in the dry lands
for our God.

4Every valley should be raised up,
and every mountain and hill should be made flat.

The rough ground should be made level,
and the rugged ground should be made smooth.

5 Then the glory of the LORD will be shown,
and all people together will see it.

The LORD himself said these things."

6 A voice says, "Cry out!"
Then I said, "What shall I cry out?"

"Say all people are like the grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

7 The grass dies and the flowers fall
when the breath of the LORD blows on them.
Surely the people are like grass.

8 The grass dies and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God will live forever."

9 Jerusalem, you have good news to tell.
Go up on a high mountain.

Jerusalem, you have good news to tell.
Shout out loud the good news.

Shout it out and don't be afraid.
Say to the towns of Judah,

"Here is your God."

10 Look, the Lord God is coming with power
to rule all the people.

Look, he will bring reward for his people;

he will have their payment with him.

[11]He takes care of his people like a shepherd.
He gathers them like lambs in his arms
and carries them close to him.

He gently leads the mothers of the lambs.

## *God Is Supreme*

[12]Who has measured the oceans in the palm of his hand?
Who has used his hand to measure the sky?

Who has used a bowl to measure all the dust of the earth
and scales to weigh the mountains and hills?

[13]Who has known the mind of the LORD
or been able to give him advice?

[14]Whom did he ask for help?
Who taught him the right way?

Who taught him knowledge
and showed him the way to understanding?

[15]The nations are like one small drop in a bucket;
they are no more than the dust on his measuring scales.
To him the islands are no more than fine dust on his scales.

[16]All the trees in Lebanon are not enough for the altar fires,
and all the animals in Lebanon are not enough for burnt offerings.

[17]Compared to the LORD all the nations are worth nothing;
to him they are less than nothing.

[18]Can you compare God to anything?
Can you compare him to an image of anything?

[19]An idol is formed by a craftsman,
and a goldsmith covers it with gold
and makes silver chains for it.

[20]A poor person cannot buy those expensive statues,
so he finds a tree that will not rot.

Then he finds a skilled craftsman
to make it into an idol that will not fall over.

[21]Surely you know. Surely you have heard.
Surely from the beginning someone told you.
Surely you understand how the earth was created.

[22]God sits on his throne above the circle of the earth,
and compared to him, people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the skies like a piece of cloth
and spreads them out like a tent to sit under.

[23]He makes rulers unimportant
and the judges of this world worth nothing.

[24]They are like plants that are placed in the ground,
like seeds that are planted.

As soon as they begin to grow strong,
he blows on them and they die,
and the wind blows them away like chaff.

[25]God, the Holy One, says, “Can you compare me to anyone?
Is anyone equal to me?”

[26]Look up to the skies.
Who created all these stars?

He leads out the army of heaven one by one
and calls all the stars by name.

Because he is strong and powerful,
not one of them is missing.

[27]People of Jacob, why do you complain?
People of Israel, why do you say,

“The LORD does not see what happens to me;
he does not care if I am treated fairly”?

[28]Surely you know.
Surely you have heard.

The LORD is the God who lives forever,
who created all the world.

He does not become tired or need to rest.
No one can understand how great his wisdom is.

[29]He gives strength to those who are tired
and more power to those who are weak.

[30]Even children become tired and need to rest,
and young people trip and fall.

[31]But the people who trust the LORD will become strong again.

They will rise up as an eagle in the sky;
they will run and not need rest;
they will walk and not become tired.

## Psalm 109:21–25

21 But you, Lord God,
be kind to me so others will know you are good.
Because your love is good, save me.

22 I am poor and helpless
and very sad.

23 I am dying like an evening shadow;
I am shaken off like a locust.

24 My knees are weak from fasting,
and I have grown thin.

25 My enemies insult me;
they look at me and shake their heads.

## Proverbs 26:2

2 Curses will not harm someone who is innocent;
they are like sparrows or swallows that fly around and never land.

## Galatians 2:1–21

### *Other Apostles Accepted Paul*

2 After fourteen years I went to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas. I also took Titus with me. 2 I went because God showed me I should go. I met with the believers there, and in private I told their leaders the Good News that I preach to the

non-Jewish people. I did not want my past work and the work I am now doing to be wasted. [3]Titus was with me, but he was not forced to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. [4]We talked about this problem because some false believers had come into our group secretly. They came in like spies to overturn the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to make us slaves. [5]But we did not give in to those false believers for a minute. We wanted the truth of the Good News to continue for you.

[6]Those leaders who seemed to be important did not change the Good News that I preach. (It doesn't matter to me if they were "important" or not. To God everyone is the same.) [7]But these leaders saw that I had been given the work of telling the Good News to those who are not Jewish, just as Peter had the work of telling the Jews. [8]God gave Peter the power to work as an apostle for the Jewish people. But he also gave me the power to work as an apostle for those who are not Jews. [9]James, Peter, and John, who seemed to be the leaders, understood that God had given me this special grace, so they accepted Barnabas and me. They agreed that they would go to the Jewish people and that we should go to those who are not Jewish. [10]The only thing they asked us was to remember to help the poor—something I really wanted to do.

## *Paul Shows that Peter Was Wrong*

[11]When Peter came to Antioch, I challenged him to his face, because he was wrong. [12]Peter ate with the non-Jewish people until some Jewish people sent from James came to Antioch. When they arrived, Peter stopped eating with those who weren't Jewish, and he separated himself from them. He was afraid of the Jews. [13]So Peter was a hypocrite, as were the other Jewish believers who joined with him. Even Barnabas was influenced by what these Jewish believers did. [14]When I saw they were not following the truth of the Good News, I spoke to Peter in front of them all. I said, "Peter, you are a Jew, but you are not living like a Jew. You are living like those who are not Jewish. So why do you now try to force those who are not Jewish to live like Jews?"

[15]We were not born as non-Jewish "sinners," but as Jews. [16]Yet we know that a person is made right with God not by following the law, but by trusting in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we might be made right with God because we trusted in Christ. It is not because we followed the law, because no one can be made right with God by following the law.

[17]We Jews came to Christ, trying to be made right with God, and it became clear that we are sinners, too. Does this mean

that Christ encourages sin? No! [18]But I would really be wrong to begin teaching again those things that I gave up. [19]It was the law that put me to death, and I died to the law so that I can now live for God. [20]I was put to death on the cross with Christ, and I do not live anymore—it is Christ who lives in me. I still live in my body, but I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself to save me. [21]By saying these things I am not going against God's grace. Just the opposite, if the law could make us right with God, then Christ's death would be useless.

# September 25

## If Only …

*So now you are not a slave; you are God's child, and God will give you the blessing he promised, because you are his child.*

Galatians 4:7

Maybe your past isn't much to brag about. Maybe you've seen raw evil. And now you … have to make a choice. Do you rise above the past and make a difference? Or do you remain controlled by the past and make excuses? …

Many choose the convalescent homes of the heart. Healthy bodies. Sharp minds. But retired dreams. Back and forth they rock in the chair of regret, repeating the terms of surrender. Lean closely, and you will hear them: "If only."

"If only I'd been born somewhere else …"

"If only I'd been treated fairly …"

Maybe you've used those words. Maybe you have every right to use them … If such is the case … go to John's Gospel, and read Jesus' words: "Human life comes from human parents, but spiritual life comes from the Spirit" (John 3:6).

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

### Isaiah 41:1—42:25

#### *The Lord Will Help Israel*

41 The LORD says, "Faraway countries, listen
to me.
Let the nations become strong.

Come to me and speak;
we will meet together to decide who is right.

[2]“Who caused the one to come from the east?
Who gives him victories everywhere he goes?

The one who brought him gives nations over to him
and defeats kings.

He uses his sword, and kings become like dust.
He uses his bow, and they are blown away like chaff.

[3]He chases them and is never hurt,
going places he has never been before.

[4]Who caused this to happen?
Who has controlled history since the beginning?

I, the LORD, am the one. I was here at the beginning,
and I will be here when all things are finished.”

[5]All you faraway places, look and be afraid;
all you places far away on the earth, shake with fear.

Come close and listen to me.
[6] The workers help each other
and say to each other, “Be strong!”

[7]The craftsman encourages the goldsmith,
and the workman who smooths the metal with a hammer encourages the one who shapes the metal.

He says, “This metal work is good.”
He nails the statue to a base so it can’t fall over.

## *Only the Lord Can Save Us*

[8]The LORD says, “People of Israel, you are my servants.
People of Jacob, I chose you.

You are from the family of my friend Abraham.

9 I took you from places far away on the earth
and called you from a faraway country.

I said, 'You are my servants.'
I have chosen you and have not turned against you.

10 So don't worry, because I am with you.
Don't be afraid, because I am your God.

I will make you strong and will help you;
I will support you with my right hand that saves you.

11 "All those people who are angry with you
will be ashamed and disgraced.

Those who are against you
will disappear and be lost.

12 You will look for your enemies,
but you will not find them.

Those who fought against you
will vanish completely.

13 I am the LORD your God,
who holds your right hand,

and I tell you, 'Don't be afraid.
I will help you.'

14 You few people of Israel who are left,
do not be afraid even though you are weak as a worm.

I myself will help you,” says the LORD.
“The one who saves you is the Holy One of Israel.

15 Look, I have made you like a new threshing board
with many sharp teeth.

So you will walk on mountains and crush them;
you will make the hills like chaff.

16 You will throw them into the air, and the wind will carry them away;
a windstorm will scatter them.

Then you will be happy in the LORD;
you will be proud of the Holy One of Israel.

17 “The poor and needy people look for water,
but they can’t find any.
Their tongues are dry with thirst.

But I, the LORD, will answer their prayers;
I, the God of Israel, will not leave them to die.

18 I will make rivers flow on the dry hills
and springs flow through the valleys.

I will change the desert into a lake of water
and the dry land into fountains of water.

19 I will make trees grow in the desert—
cedars, acacia, myrtle, and olive trees.

I will put pine, fir, and cypress trees
growing together in the desert.

20 People will see these things and understand;

they will think carefully about these things and learn

that the LORD's power did this,
that the Holy One of Israel made these things."

## *The Lord Challenges False Gods*

21 The LORD says, "Present your case."
The King of Jacob says, "Tell me your arguments.

22 Bring in your idols to tell us
what is going to happen.

Have them tell us what happened in the beginning.
Then we will think about these things,
and we will know how they will turn out.

Or tell us what will happen in the future.
23 Tell us what is coming next
so we will believe that you are gods.

Do something, whether it is good or bad,
and make us afraid.

24 You gods are less than nothing;
you can't do anything.
Those who worship you should be hated.

25 "I have brought someone to come out of the north[n]
I have called by name a man from the east, and he knows me.

He walks on kings as if they were mud,
just as a potter walks on the clay.

26 Who told us about this before it happened?

Who told us ahead of time so we could say, ‘He was right’?

None of you told us anything;
none of you told us before it happened;
no one heard you tell about it.

27 I, the LORD, was the first one to tell Jerusalem that the people were coming home.
I sent a messenger to Jerusalem with the good news.

28 I look at the idols, but there is not one that can answer.
None of them can give advice;
none of them can answer my questions.

29 Look, all these idols are false.
They cannot do anything;
they are worth nothing.

## *The Lord’s Special Servant*

42 “Here is my servant, the one I support.
He is the one I chose, and I am pleased with him.

I have put my Spirit upon him,
and he will bring justice to all nations.

2 He will not cry out or yell
or speak loudly in the streets.

3 He will not break a crushed blade of grass
or put out even a weak flame.

He will truly bring justice;
4 he will not lose hope or give up

until he brings justice to the world.
And people far away will trust his teachings.”

5 God, the LORD, said these things.

He created the skies and stretched them out.
He spread out the earth and everything on it.

He gives life to all people on earth,
to everyone who walks on the earth.

6 The LORD says, “I, the LORD, called you to do right,
and I will hold your hand

and protect you.
You will be the sign of my agreement with the people,
a light to shine for all people.

7 You will help the blind to see.
You will free those who are in prison,
and you will lead those who live in darkness out of their prison.

8 “I am the LORD. That is my name.
I will not give my glory to another;
I will not let idols take the praise that should be mine.

9 The things I said would happen have happened,
and now I tell you about new things.

Before those things happen,
I tell you about them.”

## *A Song of Praise to the Lord*

10 Sing a new song to the LORD;

sing his praise everywhere on the earth.

Praise him, you people who sail on the seas and you animals who live in them.
Praise him, you people living in faraway places.

[11]The deserts and their cities should praise him.
The settlements of Kedar should praise him.

The people living in Sela should sing for joy;
they should shout from the mountaintops.

[12]They should give glory to the LORD.
People in faraway lands should praise him.

[13]The LORD will march out like a strong soldier;
he will be excited like a man ready to fight a war.

He will shout out the battle cry
and defeat his enemies.

[14]The LORD says, “For a long time I have said nothing;
I have been quiet and held myself back.

But now I will cry out
and strain like a woman giving birth to a child.

[15]I will destroy the hills and mountains
and dry up all their plants.

I will make the rivers become dry land
and dry up the pools of water.

[16]Then I will lead the blind along a way they never knew;
I will guide them along paths they have not known.

I will make the darkness become light for them,
and the rough ground smooth.

These are the things I will do;
I will not leave my people.

17 But those who trust in idols,
who say to their statues,

‘You are our gods’
will be rejected in disgrace.

### *Israel Refused to Listen to the Lord*

18 “You who are deaf, hear me.
You who are blind, look and see.

19 No one is more blind than my servant Israel
or more deaf than the messenger I send.

No one is more blind than the person I own
or more blind than the servant of the LORD.

20 Israel, you have seen much, but you have not obeyed.
You hear, but you refuse to listen.”

21 The LORD made his teachings wonderful,
because he is good.

22 These people have been defeated and robbed.
They are trapped in pits
or locked up in prison.

Like robbers, enemies have taken them away,
and there is no one to save them.

Enemies carried them off,
and no one said, “Bring them back.”

23 Will any of you listen to this?
Will you listen carefully in the future?

24 Who let the people of Jacob be carried off?
Who let robbers take Israel away?

The LORD allowed this to happen,
because we sinned against him.

We did not live the way he wanted us to live
and did not obey his teaching.

25 So he became very angry with us
and brought terrible wars against us.

It was as if the people of Israel had fire all around them,
but they didn’t know what was happening.

It was as if they were burning,
but they didn’t pay any attention.

## Psalm 109:26–31

26 LORD my God, help me;
because you are loving, save me.

27 Then they will know that your power has done this;
they will know that you have done it, LORD.

28 They may curse me, but you bless me.
They may attack me, but they will be disgraced.

Then I, your servant, will be glad.

29 Let those who accuse me be disgraced
and covered with shame like a coat.

30 I will thank the LORD very much;
I will praise him in front of many people.

31 He defends the helpless
and saves them from those who accuse them.

## Proverbs 26:3–4

3 Whips are for horses, and harnesses are for donkeys,
so paddles are good for fools.

4 Don't answer fools when they speak foolishly,
or you will be just like them.

## Galatians 3:1—4:7

### *Blessing Comes Through Faith*

3 You people in Galatia were told very clearly about the death of
Jesus Christ on the cross. But you were foolish; you let someone
trick you. 2 Tell me this one thing: How did you receive the Holy
Spirit? Did you receive the Spirit by following the law? No, you
received the Spirit because you heard the Good News and
believed it. 3 You began your life in Christ by the Spirit. Now are
you trying to make it complete by your own power? That is
foolish. 4 Were all your experiences wasted? I hope not! 5 Does
God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you because
you follow the law? No, he does these things because you heard
the Good News and believed it.

6 The Scriptures say the same thing about Abraham:
"Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham's faith, and

that faith made him right with God."[n] 7So you should know that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith. 8The Scriptures, telling what would happen in the future, said that God would make the non-Jewish people right through their faith. This Good News was told to Abraham beforehand, as the Scripture says: "All nations will be blessed through you."[n] 9So all who believe as Abraham believed are blessed just as Abraham was. 10But those who depend on following the law to make them right are under a curse, because the Scriptures say, "Anyone will be cursed who does not always obey what is written in the Book of the Law."[n] 11Now it is clear that no one can be made right with God by the law, because the Scriptures say, "Those who are right with God will live by faith."[n] 12The law is not based on faith. It says, "A person who obeys these things will live because of them."[n] 13Christ took away the curse the law put on us. He changed places with us and put himself under that curse. It is written in the Scriptures, "Anyone whose body is displayed on a tree[n] is cursed." 14Christ did this so that God's blessing promised to Abraham might come through Jesus Christ to those who are not Jews. Jesus died so that by our believing we could receive the Spirit that God promised.

## *The Law and the Promise*

15Brothers and sisters, let us think in human terms: Even an agreement made between two persons is firm. After that agreement is accepted by both people, no one can stop it or add anything to it. 16God made promises both to Abraham and to his descendant. God did not say, "and to your descendants." That would mean many people. But God said, "and to your descendant." That means only one person; that person is Christ. 17This is what I mean: God had an agreement with Abraham and promised to keep it. The law, which came four hundred thirty years later, cannot change that agreement and so destroy God's promise to Abraham. 18If the law could give us Abraham's blessing, then the promise would not be necessary. But that is not possible, because God freely gave his blessings to Abraham through the promise he had made.

19So what was the law for? It was given to show that the wrong things people do are against God's will. And it continued until the special descendant, who had been promised, came. The law was given through angels who used Moses for a mediator[n] to give the law to people. 20But a mediator is not needed when there is only one side, and God is only one.

## *The Purpose of the Law of Moses*

21Does this mean that the law is against God's promises?

Never! That would be true only if the law could make us right with God. But God did not give a law that can bring life. 22Instead, the Scriptures showed that the whole world is bound by sin. This was so the promise would be given through faith to people who believe in Jesus Christ.

23Before this faith came, we were all held prisoners by the law. We had no freedom until God showed us the way of faith that was coming. 24In other words, the law was our guardian leading us to Christ so that we could be made right with God through faith. 25Now the way of faith has come, and we no longer live under a guardian.

26–27You were all baptized into Christ, and so you were all clothed with Christ. This means that you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 28In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free person, male and female. You are all the same in Christ Jesus. 29You belong to Christ, so you are Abraham's descendants. You will inherit all of God's blessings because of the promise God made to Abraham.

4 I want to tell you this: While those who will inherit their fathers' property are still children, they are no different from slaves. It does not matter that the children own everything. 2While they are children, they must obey those who are chosen to care for them. But when the children reach the age set by their fathers, they are free. 3It is the same for us. We were once like children, slaves to the useless rules of this world. 4But when the right time came, God sent his Son who was born of a woman and lived under the law. 5God did this so he could buy freedom for those who were under the law and so we could become his children.

6Since you are God's children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and the Spirit cries out, "Father."[n] 7So now you are not a slave; you are God's child, and God will give you the blessing he promised, because you are his child.

# September 26

## God's Ways Are Right

*"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you cross rivers, you will not drown."*

Isaiah 43:2–3

God knows what is best. No struggle will come your way apart from his purpose, presence, and permission. What encouragement this brings! You are never the victim of nature or the prey of fate. Chance is eliminated. You are more than a weather vane whipped about by the winds of fortune. Would God truly abandon you to the whims of drug-crazed thieves, greedy corporate raiders, or evil leaders? Perish the thought!

We live beneath the protective palm of a sovereign King who superintends every circumstance of our lives and delights in doing us good.

Nothing comes your way that has not first passed through the filter of his love.

from *Come Thirsty*

### Isaiah 43:1—44:28

#### *God Is Always with His People*

43 Now this is what the LORD says.
He created you, people of Jacob;
he formed you, people of Israel.

He says, "Don't be afraid, because I have saved you.
I have called you by name, and you are mine.

2When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.
When you cross rivers, you will not drown.

When you walk through fire, you will not be burned,
nor will the flames hurt you.

3This is because I, the LORD, am your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I gave Egypt to pay for you,
and I gave Cush and Seba to make you mine.

4Because you are precious to me,
because I give you honor and love you,

I will give other people in your place;
I will give other nations to save your life.

5Don’t be afraid, because I am with you.
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.

6I will tell the north: Give my people to me.
I will tell the south: Don’t keep my people in prison.

Bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from faraway places.

7Bring to me all the people who are mine,
whom I made for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”

## *Judah Is God’s Witness*

8Bring out the people who have eyes but don’t see
and those who have ears but don’t hear.

9 All the nations gather together,
and all the people come together.

Which of their gods said this would happen?
Which of their gods can tell what happened in the beginning?

Let them bring their witnesses to prove they were right.
Then others will say, “It is true.”

10 The LORD says, “You are my witnesses
and the servant I chose.

I chose you so you would know and believe me,
so you would understand that I am the true God.

There was no God before me,
and there will be no God after me.

11 I myself am the LORD;
I am the only Savior.

12 I myself have spoken to you, saved you, and told you these things.
It was not some foreign god among you.

You are my witnesses, and I am God,”
says the LORD.
13 “I have always been God.

No one can save people from my power;
when I do something, no one can change it.”

14 This is what the LORD, who saves you,
the Holy One of Israel, says:

“I will send armies to Babylon for you,
and I will knock down all its locked gates.

The Babylonians will shout their cries of sorrow.

15 I am the LORD, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King.”

## *God Will Save His People Again*

16 This is what the LORD says.
He is the one who made a road through the sea
and a path through rough waters.

17 He is the one who defeated the chariots and horses
and the mighty armies.

They fell together and will never rise again.
They were destroyed as a flame is put out.

18 The LORD says, “Forget what happened before,
and do not think about the past.

19 Look at the new thing I am going to do.
It is already happening. Don’t you see it?

I will make a road in the desert
and rivers in the dry land.

20 Even the wild animals will be thankful to me—
the wild dogs and owls.

They will honor me when I put water in the desert
and rivers in the dry land

to give water to my people, the ones I chose.

21 The people I made
will sing songs to praise me.

22 “People of Jacob, you have not called to me;
people of Israel, you have become tired of me.

23 You have not brought me your sacrifices of sheep
nor honored me with your sacrifices.

I did not weigh you down with sacrifices to offer
or make you tired with incense to burn.

24 So you did not buy incense for me;
you did not freely bring me fat from your sacrifices.

Instead you have weighed me down with your many sins;
you have made me tired of your many wrongs.

25 “I, I am the One who erases all your sins, for my sake;
I will not remember your sins.

26 But you should remind me.
Let’s meet and decide what is right.
Tell what you have done and show you are right.

27 Your first father sinned,
and your leaders have turned against me.

28 So I will make your holy rulers unholy.
I will bring destruction on the people of Jacob,
and I will let Israel be insulted.”

## *The Lord Is the Only God*

44 The LORD says, “People of Jacob, you are my
servants. Listen to me!
People of Israel, I chose you.”

2This is what the LORD says, who made you,
who formed you in your mother’s body,
who will help you:

“People of Jacob, my servants, don’t be afraid.
Israel, I chose you.

3I will pour out water for the thirsty land
and make streams flow on dry land.

I will pour out my Spirit into your children
and my blessing on your descendants.

4Your children will grow like a tree in the grass,
like poplar trees growing beside streams of water.

5One person will say, ‘I belong to the LORD,’
and another will use the name Jacob.

Another will sign his name ‘I am the LORD’s,’
and another will use the name Israel.”

6The LORD, the king of Israel,
is the LORD All-Powerful, who saves Israel.

This is what he says: “I am the beginning and the end.
I am the only God.

7Who is a god like me?
That god should come and prove it.

Let him tell and explain all that has happened since I set up

my ancient people.
He should also tell what will happen in the future.

[8]Don’t be afraid! Don’t worry!
I have always told you what will happen.

You are my witnesses.
There is no other God but me.
I know of no other Rock; I am the only One.”

## *Idols Are Useless*

[9]Some people make idols, but they are worth nothing.
People treasure them, but they are useless.

Those people are witnesses for the statues, but those people cannot see.
They know nothing, so they will be ashamed.

[10]Who made these gods?
Who made these useless idols?

[11]The workmen who made them will be ashamed,
because they are only human.

If they all would come together,
they would all be ashamed and afraid.

[12]One workman uses tools to heat iron,
and he works over hot coals.

With his hammer he beats the metal and makes a statue,
using his powerful arms.

But when he becomes hungry, he loses his power.
If he does not drink water, he becomes tired.

[13]Another workman uses a line and a compass
to draw on the wood.

Then he uses his chisels to cut a statue
and his calipers to measure the statue.

In this way, the workman makes the wood look exactly like a person,
and this statue of a person sits in the house.

[14]He cuts down cedars
or cypress or oak trees.

Those trees grew by their own power in the forest.
Or he plants a pine tree, and the rain makes it grow.

[15]Then he burns the tree.
He uses some of the wood for a fire to keep himself warm.
He also starts a fire to bake his bread.

But he uses part of the wood to make a god, and then he worships it!
He makes the idol and bows down to it!

[16]The man burns half of the wood in the fire.
He uses the fire to cook his meat,
and he eats the meat until he is full.

He also burns the wood to keep himself warm. He says,
“Good! Now I am warm. I can see because of the fire’s light.”

[17]But he makes a statue from the wood that is left and calls it his god.
He bows down to it and worships it.

He prays to it and says,

“You are my god. Save me!”

18 Those people don’t know what they are doing. They don’t understand!
It is as if their eyes are covered so they can’t see.
Their minds don’t understand.

19 They have not thought about these things;
they don’t understand.

They have never thought to themselves,
“I burned half of the wood in the fire
and used the hot coals to bake my bread.
I cooked and ate my meat.

And I used the wood that was left to make this hateful thing.
I am worshiping a block of wood!”

20 He doesn’t know what he is doing;
his confused mind leads him the wrong way.

He cannot save himself
or say, “This statue I am holding is a false god.”

## *The Lord Is the True God*

21 “People of Jacob, remember these things!
People of Israel, remember you are my servants.

I made you, and you are my servants.
So Israel, I will not forget you.

22 I have swept away your sins like a big cloud;
I have removed your sins like a cloud that disappears into the air.

Come back to me because I saved you.”

[23]Skies, sing for joy because the LORD did great things!
Earth, shout for joy, even in your deepest parts!

Sing, you mountains, with thanks to God.
Sing, too, you trees in the forest!

The LORD saved the people of Jacob!
He showed his glory when he saved Israel.

[24]This is what the LORD says, who saved you,
who formed you in your mother’s body:

“I, the LORD, made everything,
stretching out the skies by myself
and spreading out the earth all alone.

[25]I show that the signs of the lying prophets are false;
I make fools of those who do magic.

I confuse even the wise;
they think they know much, but I make them look foolish.

[26]I make the messages of my servants come true;
I make the advice of my messengers come true.

I say to Jerusalem,
‘People will live in you again!’

I say to the towns of Judah,
‘You will be built again!’

I say to Jerusalem’s ruins,
‘I will repair you.’

27 I tell the deep waters, ‘Become dry!
I will make your streams become dry!’

28 I say of Cyrus,[n] ‘He is my shepherd
and will do all that I want him to do.
He will say to Jerusalem, “You will be built again!”
He will tell the Temple, “Your foundations will be rebuilt.”’”

## Psalm 110:1–7

### *The Lord Appoints a King*

**A psalm of David.**

110 The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit by me at my right side
until I put your enemies under your control.”

2 The LORD will enlarge your kingdom beyond Jerusalem,
and you will rule over your enemies.

3 Your people will join you on your day of battle.
You have been dressed in holiness from birth;
you have the freshness of a child.

4 The LORD has made a promise
and will not change his mind.

He said, “You are a priest forever,
a priest like Melchizedek.”

5 The Lord is beside you to help you.
When he becomes angry, he will crush kings.

6 He will judge those nations, filling them with dead bodies;

he will defeat rulers all over the world.

7 The king will drink from the brook on the way.
Then he will be strengthened.

## Proverbs 26:5–9

5 Answer fools when they speak foolishly,
or they will think they are really wise.

6 Sending a message by a foolish person
is like cutting off your feet or drinking poison.

7 A wise saying spoken by a fool
is as useless as the legs of a crippled person.

8 Giving honor to a foolish person
is like tying a stone in a slingshot.

9 A wise saying spoken by a fool
is like a thorn stuck in the hand of a drunk.

## Galatians 4:8–31

### *Paul's Love for the Christians*

8 In the past you did not know God. You were slaves to gods that were not real. 9 But now you know the true God. Really, it is God who knows you. So why do you turn back to those weak and useless rules you followed before? Do you want to be slaves to those things again? 10 You still follow teachings about special days, months, seasons, and years. 11 I am afraid for you, that my work for you has been wasted.

12 Brothers and sisters, I became like you, so I beg you to

become like me. You were very good to me before. 13You remember that it was because of an illness that I came to you the first time, preaching the Good News. 14Though my sickness was a trouble for you, you did not hate me or make me leave. But you welcomed me as an angel from God, as if I were Jesus Christ himself! 15You were very happy then, but where is that joy now? I am ready to testify that you would have taken out your eyes and given them to me if that were possible. 16Now am I your enemy because I tell you the truth?

17Those people[n] are working hard to persuade you, but this is not good for you. They want to persuade you to turn against us and follow only them. 18It is good for people to show interest in you, but only if their purpose is good. This is always true, not just when I am with you. 19My little children, again I feel the pain of childbirth for you until you truly become like Christ. 20I wish I could be with you now and could change the way I am talking to you, because I do not know what to think about you.

## *The Example of Hagar and Sarah*

21Some of you still want to be under the law. Tell me, do you know what the law says? 22The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons. The mother of one son was a slave woman, and the mother of the other son was a free woman. 23Abraham's son from the slave woman was born in the normal human way. But the son from the free woman was born because of the promise God made to Abraham.

24This story teaches something else: The two women are like the two agreements between God and his people. One agreement is the law that God made on Mount Sinai,[n] and the people who are under this agreement are like slaves. The mother named Hagar is like that agreement. 25She is like Mount Sinai in Arabia and is a picture of the earthly city of Jerusalem. This city and its people are slaves to the law. 26But the heavenly Jerusalem, which is above, is like the free woman. She is our mother. 27It is written in the Scriptures:

"Be happy, Jerusalem.
    You are like a woman who never gave birth to children.

Start singing and shout for joy.
    You never felt the pain of giving birth,

but you will have more children
    than the woman who has a husband."

28 My brothers and sisters, you are God's children because of
his promise, as Isaac was then. 29 The son who was born in the
normal way treated the other son badly. It is the same today.
30 But what does the Scripture say? "Throw out the slave woman
and her son. The son of the slave woman should not inherit
anything. The son of the free woman should receive it all."[n]
31 So, my brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave
woman, but of the free woman.

# September 27

## Patience Freely Offered

*The Spirit produces … patience.*

Galatians 5:22

If you find patience hard to give, you might ask this question. How infiltrated are you with God's patience? You've heard about it. Read about it. Perhaps underlined Bible passages regarding it. But have you received it? The proof is in your patience. Patience deeply received results in patience freely offered …

God does more than demand patience from us; he offers it to us. Patience is a fruit of his Spirit. It hangs from the tree of Galatians 5:22: "The Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Have you asked God to give you some fruit? *Well I did once, but …* But what? Did you, h'm, grow impatient? Ask him again and again and again. He won't grow impatient with your pleading, and you will receive patience in your praying.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Isaiah 45:1—46:13

### *God Chooses Cyrus to Free Israel*

45 This is what the LORD says to Cyrus, his appointed king:
"I hold your right hand

and will help you defeat nations
and take away other kings' power.

I will open doors for you
so city gates will not stop you.

2 I will go before you
and make the mountains flat.

I will break down the bronze gates of the cities
and cut through their iron bars.

3 I will give you the wealth that is stored away
and the hidden riches

so you will know I am the LORD,
the God of Israel, who calls you by name.

4 I do these things for my servants, the people of Jacob,
and for my chosen people, the Israelites.

Cyrus, I call you by name,
and I give you a title of honor even though you don't know me.

5 I am the LORD. There is no other God;
I am the only God.

I will make you strong,
even though you don't know me,

6 so that everyone will know
there is no other God.

From the east to the west they will know
I alone am the LORD.

7 I made the light and the darkness.
I bring peace, and I cause troubles.

I, the LORD, do all these things.

8 “Sky above, make victory fall like rain;
clouds, pour down victory.

Let the earth receive it,
and let salvation grow,

and let victory grow with it.
I, the LORD, have created it.

9 “How terrible it will be for those who argue with the God who made them.
They are like a piece of broken pottery among many pieces.

The clay does not ask the potter,
‘What are you doing?’

The thing that is made doesn’t say to its maker,
‘You have no hands.’

10 How terrible it will be for the child who says to his father,
‘Why are you giving me life?’

How terrible it will be for the child who says to his mother,
‘Why are you giving birth to me?’”

11 This is what the LORD,
the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker, says:

“You ask me about what will happen.
You question me about my children.
You give me orders about what I have made.

12 I made the earth
and all the people living on it.

With my own hands I stretched out the skies,
and I commanded all the armies in the sky.

13 I will bring Cyrus to do good things,
and I will make his work easy.

He will rebuild my city
and set my people free

without any payment or reward.
The LORD All-Powerful says this.”

14 The LORD says,

“The goods made in Egypt and Cush
and the tall people of Seba

will come to you
and will become yours.

The Sabeans will walk behind you,
coming along in chains.

They will bow down before you
and pray to you, saying,

‘God is with you,
and there is no other God.’”

15 God and Savior of Israel,
you are a God that people cannot see.

16 All the people who make idols will be put to great shame;
they will go off together in disgrace.

[17]But Israel will be saved by the LORD,
and that salvation will continue forever.
Never again will Israel be put to shame.

[18]The LORD created the heavens.
He is the God who formed the earth and made it.

He did not want it to be empty,
but he wanted life on the earth.

This is what the LORD says:
"I am the LORD. There is no other God.

[19]I did not speak in secret
or hide my words in some dark place.

I did not tell the family of Jacob
to look for me in empty places.

I am the LORD, and I speak the truth;
I say what is right.

[20]"You people who have escaped from other nations,
gather together and come before me;
come near together.

People who carry idols of wood don't know what they are doing.
They pray to a god who cannot save them.

[21]Tell these people to come to me.
Let them talk about these things together.

Who told you long ago that this would happen?
Who told about it long ago?

I, the LORD, said these things.

There is no other God besides me.

I am the only good God. I am the Savior.
There is no other God.

22 “All people everywhere,
follow me and be saved.
I am God. There is no other God.

23 I will make a promise by my own power,
and my promise is true;
what I say will not be changed.

I promise that everyone will bow before me
and will promise to follow me.

24 People will say about me, ‘Goodness and power
come only from the LORD.’”

Everyone who has been angry with him
will come to him and be ashamed.

25 But with the LORD’s help, the people of Israel
will be found to be good,
and they will praise him.

## *False Gods Are Useless*

46 Bel and Nebo bow down.
Their idols are carried by animals.

The statues are only heavy loads that must be carried;
they only make people tired.

2 These gods will all bow down.
They cannot save themselves

but will all be carried away like prisoners.

3 “Family of Jacob, listen to me!
All you people from Israel who are still alive, listen!

I have carried you since you were born;
I have taken care of you from your birth.

4 Even when you are old, I will be the same.
Even when your hair has turned gray, I will take care of you.

I made you and will take care of you.
I will carry you and save you.

5 “Can you compare me to anyone?
No one is equal to me or like me.

6 Some people are rich with gold
and weigh their silver on the scales.

They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god.
Then they bow down and worship it.

7 They put it on their shoulders and carry it.
They set it in its place, and there it stands;
it cannot move from its place.

People may yell at it, but it cannot answer.
It cannot save them from their troubles.

8 “Remember this, and do not forget it!
Think about these things, you who turn against God.

9 Remember what happened long ago.
Remember that I am God, and there is no other God.

I am God, and there is no one like me.

10 From the beginning I told you what would happen in the end.
A long time ago I told you things that have not yet happened.

When I plan something, it happens.
What I want to do, I will do.

11 I am calling a man from the east to carry out my plan;
he will come like a hawk from a country far away.

I will make what I have said come true;
I will do what I have planned.

12 Listen to me, you stubborn people,
who are far from what is right.

13 I will soon do the things that are right.
I will bring salvation soon.

I will save Jerusalem
and bring glory to Israel."

## Psalm 111:1–6

### *Praise the Lord's Goodness*

111 Praise the LORD! I will thank the LORD with all my heart
in the meeting of his good people.

2 The LORD does great things;
those who enjoy them seek them.

3What he does is glorious and splendid,
and his goodness continues forever.

4His miracles are unforgettable.
The LORD is kind and merciful.

5He gives food to those who fear him.
He remembers his agreement forever.

6He has shown his people his power
when he gave them the lands of other
nations.

## Proverbs 26:10

10Hiring a foolish person or anyone just passing by
is like an archer shooting at just anything.

## Galatians 5:1–26

### *Keep Your Freedom*

5 We have freedom now, because Christ made us free. So stand strong. Do not change and go back into the slavery of the law.
2Listen, I Paul tell you that if you go back to the law by being circumcised, Christ does you no good. 3Again, I warn every man: If you allow yourselves to be circumcised, you must follow all the law. 4If you try to be made right with God through the law, your life with Christ is over—you have left God's grace.
5But we have the true hope that comes from being made right with God, and by the Spirit we wait eagerly for this hope.
6When we are in Christ Jesus, it is not important if we are circumcised or not. The important thing is faith—the kind of faith that works through love.

7You were running a good race. Who stopped you from following the true way? 8This change did not come from the One who chose you. 9Be careful! "Just a little yeast makes the whole

batch of dough rise.” [10]But I trust in the Lord that you will not
believe those different ideas. Whoever is confusing you with
such ideas will be punished.

[11]My brothers and sisters, I do not teach that a man must be
circumcised. If I teach circumcision, why am I still being
attacked? If I still taught circumcision, my preaching about the
cross would not be a problem. [12]I wish the people who are
bothering you would castrate[n] themselves!

[13]My brothers and sisters, God called you to be free, but do
not use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your
sinful self. Serve each other with love. [14]The whole law is made
complete in this one command: “Love your neighbor as you love
yourself.”[n] [15]If you go on hurting each other and tearing each
other apart, be careful, or you will completely destroy each
other.

## *The Spirit and Human Nature*

[16]So I tell you: Live by following the Spirit. Then you will not
do what your sinful selves want. [17]Our sinful selves want what
is against the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is against our
sinful selves. The two are against each other, so you cannot do
just what you please. [18]But if the Spirit is leading you, you are
not under the law.

[19]The wrong things the sinful self does are clear: being
sexually unfaithful, not being pure, taking part in sexual sins,
[20]worshiping gods, doing witchcraft, hating, making trouble,
being jealous, being angry, being selfish, making people angry
with each other, causing divisions among people, [21]feeling envy,
being drunk, having wild and wasteful parties, and doing other
things like these. I warn you now as I warned you before: Those
who do these things will not inherit God’s kingdom. [22]But the
Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, [23]gentleness, self-control. There is no
law that says these things are wrong. [24]Those who belong to
Christ Jesus have crucified their own sinful selves. They have
given up their old selfish feelings and the evil things they
wanted to do. [25]We get our new life from the Spirit, so we
should follow the Spirit. [26]We must not be proud or make
trouble with each other or be jealous of each other.

# September 28

## The Greenhouse of the Heart

*People harvest only what they plant.*

Galatians 6:7

Think for a moment of your heart as a greenhouse ... And your heart, like a greenhouse, has to be managed. Consider for a moment your thoughts as seed. Some thoughts become flowers. Others become weeds. Sow seeds of hope, and enjoy optimism. Sow seeds of doubt, and expect insecurity ...

The proof is everywhere you look. Ever wonder why some people have the Teflon capacity to resist negativism and remain patient, optimistic, and forgiving? Could it be that they have diligently sown seeds of goodness and are enjoying the harvest?

Ever wonder why others have such a sour outlook? Such a gloomy attitude? You would, too, if your heart were a greenhouse of weeds and thorns.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Isaiah 47:1—48:22

### *God Will Destroy Babylon*

47 The LORD says, “City of Babylon, go down
and sit in the dirt.

People of Babylon, sit on the ground.
You are no longer the ruler.

You will no longer be called
tender or beautiful.

2 You must use large stones to grind grain into flour.

Remove your veil and your nice skirts.
Uncover your legs and cross the rivers.

3 People will see your nakedness;
they will see your shame.

I will punish you;
I will punish every one of you.”

4 Our Savior is named the LORD All-Powerful;
he is the Holy One of Israel.

5 “Babylon, sit in darkness and say nothing.
You will no longer be called the queen of kingdoms.

6 I was angry with my people,
so I rejected those who belonged to me.

I gave them to you,
but you showed them no mercy.

You even made the old people
work very hard.

7 You said, ‘I will live forever
as the queen.’

But you did not think about these things
or consider what would happen.

8 “Now, listen, you lover of pleasure.
You think you are safe.

You tell yourself,
‘I am the only important person.

I will never be a widow
or lose my children.’

9 Two things will happen to you suddenly, in a single day.
You will lose your children and your husband.

These things will truly happen to you,
in spite of all your magic,
in spite of your powerful tricks.

10 You do evil things, but you feel safe
and say, ‘No one sees what I do.’

Your wisdom and knowledge
have fooled you.

You say to yourself,
‘I am God, and no one is equal to me.’

11 But troubles will come to you,
and you will not know how to stop them.

Disaster will fall on you,
and you will not be able to keep it away.

You will be destroyed quickly;
you will not even see it coming.

12 “Keep on using your tricks
and doing all your magic
that you have used since you were young.

Maybe they will help you;
maybe you will be able to scare someone.

13 You are tired of the advice you have received.
So let those who study the sky—

those who tell the future by looking at the stars and the new moons—
let them save you from what is about to happen to you.

14 But they are like straw;
fire will quickly burn them up.

They cannot save themselves
from the power of the fire.

They are not like coals that give warmth
nor like a fire that you may sit beside.

15 You have worked with these people,
and they have been with you since you were young,
but they will not be able to help you.

Everyone will go his own way,
and there will be no one left to save you.”

## *God Controls the Future*

48 The LORD says, “Family of Jacob, listen to me.
You are called Israel,
and you come from the family of Judah.

You swear by the LORD’s name
and praise the God of Israel,
but you are not honest or sincere.

2 You call yourselves people of the holy city,
and you depend on the God of Israel,
who is named the LORD All-Powerful.

[3]Long ago I told you what would happen.
I said these things and made them known;
suddenly I acted, and these things happened.

[4]I knew you were stubborn;
your neck was like an iron muscle,
and your head was like bronze.

[5]So a long time ago I told you about these things;
I told you about them before they happened

so you couldn’t say, ‘My idols did this,
and my wooden and metal statues made these things happen.’

[6]“You heard and saw everything that happened,
so you should tell this news to others.

Now I will tell you about new things,
hidden things that you don’t know yet.

[7]These things are happening now, not long ago;
you have not heard about them before today.

So you cannot say, ‘We already knew about that.’

[8]But you have not heard me; you have not understood.
Even long ago you did not listen to me.

I knew you would surely turn against me;
you have fought against me since you were born.

[9]But for my own sake I will be patient.
People will praise me for not becoming angry
and destroying you.

10 I have made you pure, but not by fire, as silver is made pure.
I have purified you by giving you troubles.

11 I do this for myself, for my own sake.
I will not let people speak evil against me,
and I will not let some god take my glory.

## *Israel Will Be Free*

12 "People of Jacob, listen to me.
People of Israel, I have called you to be my people.

I am God;
I am the beginning and the end.

13 I made the earth with my own hands.
With my right hand I spread out the skies.

When I call them,
they come together before me."

14 All of you, come together and listen.
None of the gods said these things would happen.

The LORD has chosen someone
to attack the Babylonians;
he will carry out his wishes against Babylon.

15 "I have spoken; I have called him.[n]
I have brought him, and I will make him successful.

16 Come to me and listen to this.
From the beginning I have spoken openly.
From the time it began, I was there."

Now, the Lord God
has sent me with his Spirit.

17 This is what the LORD, who saves you,
the Holy One of Israel, says:

"I am the LORD your God,
who teaches you to do what is good,
who leads you in the way you should go.

18 If you had obeyed me,
you would have had peace like a full-flowing river.
Good things would have flowed to you like the waves of the sea.

19 You would have had many children,
as many as the grains of sand.

They would never have died out
nor been destroyed."

20 My people, leave Babylon!
Run from the Babylonians!

Tell this news with shouts of joy to the people;
spread it everywhere on earth.

Say, "The LORD has saved his servants, the people of Jacob."

21 They did not become thirsty when he led them through the deserts.
He made water flow from a rock for them.

He split the rock,
and water flowed out.

22 “There is no peace for evil people,” says the LORD.

## Psalm 111:7–10

7 Everything he does is good and fair;
all his orders can be trusted.

8 They will continue forever.
They were made true and right.

9 He sets his people free.
He made his agreement everlasting.
He is holy and wonderful.

10 Wisdom begins with respect for the LORD;
those who obey his orders have good understanding.
He should be praised forever.

## Proverbs 26:11–12

11 A fool who repeats his foolishness
is like a dog that goes back to what it has thrown up.

12 There is more hope for a foolish person
than for those who think they are wise.

## Galatians 6:1–18

### *Help Each Other*

6 Brothers and sisters, if someone in your group does something

wrong, you who are spiritual should go to that person and gently help make him right again. But be careful, because you might be tempted to sin, too. 2By helping each other with your troubles, you truly obey the law of Christ. 3If anyone thinks he is important when he really is not, he is only fooling himself. 4Each person should judge his own actions and not compare himself with others. Then he can be proud for what he himself has done. 5Each person must be responsible for himself.

6Anyone who is learning the teaching of God should share all the good things he has with his teacher.

## *Life Is like Planting a Field*

7Do not be fooled: You cannot cheat God. People harvest only what they plant. 8If they plant to satisfy their sinful selves, their sinful selves will bring them ruin. But if they plant to please the Spirit, they will receive eternal life from the Spirit. 9We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of eternal life at the right time if we do not give up. 10When we have the opportunity to help anyone, we should do it. But we should give special attention to those who are in the family of believers.

## *Paul Ends His Letter*

11See what large letters I use to write this myself. 12Some people are trying to force you to be circumcised so the Jews will accept them. They are afraid they will be attacked if they follow only the cross of Christ.[n] 13Those who are circumcised do not obey the law themselves, but they want you to be circumcised so they can brag about what they forced you to do. 14I hope I will never brag about things like that. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is my only reason for bragging. Through the cross of Jesus my world was crucified, and I died to the world. 15It is not important if a man is circumcised or uncircumcised. The important thing is being the new people God has made. 16Peace and mercy to those who follow this rule—and to all of God's people.

17So do not give me any more trouble. I have scars on my body that show[n] I belong to Christ Jesus.

18My brothers and sisters, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

# September 29

## Governed by Love

*In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins.*

Ephesians 1:7

Jesus spoke of freedom, but he spoke of a different kind of freedom: the type of freedom that comes not through power but through submission. Not through control but through surrender. Not through possessions but through open hands.

God wants to emancipate his people; he wants to set them free. He wants his people to be not slaves but sons. He wants them governed not by law but by love.

We have been liberated from our own guilt and our own legalism. We have the freedom to pray and the freedom to love the God of our heart. And we have been forgiven by the only one who could condemn us. We are truly free!

from *Walking with the Savior*

## Isaiah 49:1—50:11

### *God Calls His Special Servant*

49 All of you people in faraway places, listen to
me.
Listen, all you nations far away.

Before I was born, the LORD called me to serve him.
The LORD named me while I was still in my mother's womb.

[2]He made my tongue like a sharp sword.
He hid me in the shadow of his hand.

He made me like a sharp arrow.
He hid me in the holder for his arrows.

[3]He told me, “Israel, you are my servant.
I will show my glory through you.”

[4]But I said, “I have worked hard for nothing;
I have used all my power, but I did nothing useful.

But the LORD will decide what my work is worth;
God will decide my reward.”

[5]The LORD made me in the body of my mother
to be his servant,

to lead the people of Jacob back to him
so that Israel might be gathered to him.

The LORD will honor me,
and I will get my strength from my God.

[6]Now he told me,

“You are an important servant to me
to bring back the tribes of Jacob,
to bring back the people of Israel who are left alive.

But, more importantly, I will make you a light for all nations
to show people all over the world the way to be saved.”

[7]The LORD who saves you
is the Holy One of Israel.

He speaks to the one who is hated by the people,
to the servant of rulers.

This is what he says: “Kings will see you and stand to honor you;
great leaders will bow down before you,

because the LORD can be trusted.
He is the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

## *The Day of Salvation*

8 This is what the LORD says:

“At the right time I will hear your prayers.
On the day of salvation I will help you.

I will protect you,
and you will be the sign of my agreement with the people.

You will bring back the people to the land
and give the land that is now ruined back to its owners.

9 You will tell the prisoners, ‘Come out of your prison.’
You will tell those in darkness, ‘Come into the light.’

The people will eat beside the roads,
and they will find food even on bare hills.

10 They will not be hungry or thirsty.
Neither the hot sun nor the desert wind will hurt them.

The God who comforts them will lead them
and guide them by springs of water.

11 I will make my mountains into roads,
and the roads will be raised up.

12 Look, people are coming to me from far away,
from the north and from the west,
from Aswan in southern Egypt.”

13 Heavens and earth, be happy.
Mountains, shout with joy,

because the LORD comforts his people
and will have pity on those who suffer.

## *Jerusalem and Her Children*

14 But Jerusalem said, “The LORD has left me;
the Lord has forgotten me.”

15 The LORD answers, “Can a woman forget the baby she nurses?
Can she feel no kindness for the child to which she gave birth?

Even if she could forget her children,
I will not forget you.

16 See, I have written your name on my hand.
Jerusalem, I always think about your walls.

17 Your children will soon return to you,
and the people who defeated you and destroyed you will leave.

18 Look up and look around you.
All your children are gathering to return to you.”

The LORD says, “As surely as I live,
your children will be like jewels
that a bride wears proudly.

19 “You were destroyed and defeated,
and your land was made useless.

But now you will have more people than the land can hold,
and those people who destroyed you will be far away.

20 Children were born to you while you were sad,
but they will say to you,

‘This place is too small for us.
Give us a bigger place to live.’

21 Then you will say to yourself,
‘Who gave me all these children?

I was sad and lonely,
defeated and separated from my people.
So who reared these children?

I was left all alone.
Where did all these children come from?’”

22 This is what the Lord God says:

“See, I will lift my hand to signal the nations;
I will raise my banner for all the people to see.

Then they will bring your sons back to you in their arms,
and they will carry your daughters on their shoulders.

23 Kings will teach your children,
and daughters of kings will take care of them.

They will bow down before you
and kiss the dirt at your feet.

Then you will know I am the LORD.
Anyone who trusts in me will not be disappointed.”

24 Can the wealth a soldier wins in war be taken away from him?
Can a prisoner be freed from a powerful soldier?

25 This is what the LORD says:

“The prisoners will be taken from the strong soldiers.
What the soldiers have taken will be saved.

I will fight your enemies,
and I will save your children.

26 I will force those who trouble you to eat their own flesh.
Their own blood will be the wine that makes them drunk.

Then everyone will know
I, the LORD, am the One who saves you;
I am the Powerful One of Jacob who saves you.”

## *Israel Was Punished for Its Sin*

50 This is what the LORD says: “People of Israel, you say I divorced your
mother.
Then where is the paper that proves it?

Or do you think I sold you
to pay a debt?

Because of the evil things you did, I sold you.

Because of the times she turned against me, your mother
was sent away.

[2]I came home and found no one there;
I called, but no one answered.

Do you think I am not able to save you?
Do I not have the power to save you?

Look, I need only to shout and the sea becomes dry.
I change rivers into a desert,

and their fish rot because there is no water;
they die of thirst.

[3]I can make the skies dark;
I can make them black like clothes of sadness.”

## *God’s Servant Obeys*

[4]The Lord God gave me the ability to teach
so that I know what to say to make the weak strong.

Every morning he wakes me.
He teaches me to listen like a student.

[5]The Lord God helps me learn,
and I have not turned against him
nor stopped following him.

[6]I offered my back to those who beat me.
I offered my cheeks to those who pulled my beard.

I won’t hide my face from them
when they make fun of me and spit at me.

[7]The Lord God helps me,
so I will not be ashamed.

I will be determined,
and I know I will not be disgraced.

[8]He shows that I am innocent, and he is close to me.
So who can accuse me?
If there is someone, let us go to court together.

If someone wants to prove I have done wrong,
he should come and tell me.

[9]Look! It is the Lord God who helps me.
So who can prove me guilty?

Look! All those who try will become useless like old clothes;
moths will eat them.

[10]Who among you fears the LORD
and obeys his servant?

That person may walk in the dark
and have no light.

Then let him trust in the LORD
and yet depend on his God.

[11]But instead, some of you want to light your own fires
and make your own light.

So, go, walk in the light of your fires,
and trust your own light to guide you.

But this is what you will receive from me:
You will lie down in a place of pain.

## Psalm 112:1–4

### *Honest People Are Blessed*

112 Praise the LORD! Happy are those who respect the LORD,
who want what he commands.

2 Their descendants will be powerful in the land;
the children of honest people will be blessed.

3 Their houses will be full of wealth and riches,
and their goodness will continue forever.

4 A light shines in the dark for honest people,
for those who are merciful and kind and good.

## Proverbs 26:13–15

13 The lazy person says, “There’s a lion in the road!
There’s a lion in the streets!”

14 Like a door turning back and forth on its hinges,
the lazy person turns over and over in bed.

15 Lazy people may put their hands in the dish,
but they are too tired to lift the food to their mouths.

## Ephesians 1:1–23

1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am an apostle because that is what God wanted.

To God’s holy people living in Ephesus,[n] believers in Christ Jesus:

2Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## *Spiritual Blessings in Christ*

3Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. 4That is, in Christ, he chose us before the world was made so that we would be his holy people—people without blame before him. 5Because of his love, God had already decided to make us his own children through Jesus Christ. That was what he wanted and what pleased him, 6and it brings praise to God because of his wonderful grace. God gave that grace to us freely, in Christ, the One he loves. 7In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God’s grace, 8which he has given to us so fully and freely. God, with full wisdom and understanding, 9let us know his secret purpose. This was what God wanted, and he planned to do it through Christ. 10His goal was to carry out his plan, when the right time came, that all things in heaven and on earth would be joined together in Christ as the head.

11In Christ we were chosen to be God’s people, because from the very beginning God had decided this in keeping with his plan. And he is the One who makes everything agree with what he decides and wants. 12We are the first people who hoped in Christ, and we were chosen so that we would bring praise to God’s glory. 13So it is with you. When you heard the true teaching—the Good News about your salvation—you believed in Christ. And in Christ, God put his special mark of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit that he had promised. 14That Holy Spirit is the guarantee that we will receive what God promised for his people until God gives full freedom to those who are his—to bring praise to God’s glory.

## *Paul’s Prayer*

15That is why since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, 16I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. I always remember you in my prayers, 17asking the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you will know him better. 18I pray also that you will have greater understanding in your heart so you will know the hope to which he has called us and that you will know how rich and glorious are the blessings God has promised his holy people. 19And you

will know that God's power is very great for us who believe. That power is the same as the great strength [20]God used to raise Christ from the dead and put him at his right side in the heavenly world. [21]God has put Christ over all rulers, authorities, powers, and kings, not only in this world but also in the next. [22]God put everything under his power and made him the head over everything for the church, [23]which is Christ's body. The church is filled with Christ, and Christ fills everything in every way.

# September 30

## A Passion for Excellence

*In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.*

Ephesians 2:10

The push for power has come to shove. And most of us are either pushing or being pushed. I might point out the difference between a passion for excellence and a passion for power. The desire for excellence is a gift of God, much needed in society. It is characterized by respect for quality and a yearning to use God's gifts in a way that pleases him …

But there is a canyon of difference between doing your best to glorify God and doing whatever it takes to glorify yourself. The quest for excellence is a mark of maturity. The quest for power is childish.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Isaiah 51:1—52:15

### *Jerusalem Will Be Saved*

51 The LORD says, "Listen to me,
those of you who try to live right and follow the LORD.

Look at the rock from which you were cut;
look at the stone quarry from which you were dug.

2 Look at Abraham, your ancestor,
and Sarah, who gave birth to your ancestors.

Abraham had no children when I called him,
but I blessed him and gave him many descendants.

3So the LORD will comfort Jerusalem;
he will show mercy to those who live in her ruins.

He will change her deserts into a garden like Eden;
he will make her empty lands like the garden of the LORD.

People there will be very happy;
they will give thanks and sing songs.

4"My people, listen to me;
my nation, pay attention to me.

I will give the people my teachings,
and my decisions will be like a light to all people.

5I will soon show that I do what is right.
I will soon save you.
I will use my power and judge all nations.

All the faraway places are waiting for me;
they wait for my power to help them.

6Look up to the heavens.
Look around you at the earth below.

The skies will disappear like clouds of smoke.
The earth will become useless like old clothes,
and its people will die like flies.

But my salvation will continue forever,
and my goodness will never end.

7"You people who know what is right should listen to me;
you people who follow my teachings should hear what I

say.

Don’t be afraid of the evil things people say,
and don’t be upset by their insults.

8 Moths will eat those people as if they were clothes,
and worms will eat them as if they were wool.

But my goodness will continue forever,
and my salvation will continue from now on.”

9 Wake up, wake up, and use your strength,
powerful LORD.

Wake up as you did in the old times,
as you did a long time ago.

With your own power, you cut Rahab into pieces
and killed that sea monster.

10 You dried up the sea
and the waters of the deep ocean.

You made the deepest parts of the sea into a road
for your people to cross over and be saved.

11 The people the LORD has freed will return
and enter Jerusalem with joy.
Their happiness will last forever.

They will have joy and gladness,
and all sadness and sorrow will be gone far away.

12 The LORD says, “I am the one who comforts you.
So why should you be afraid of people, who die?
Why should you fear people who die like the grass?

13 Have you forgotten the LORD who made you,
who stretched out the skies
and made the earth?

Why are you always afraid
of those angry people who trouble you
and who want to destroy?

But where are those angry people now?
14 People in prison will soon be set free;

they will not die in prison,
and they will have enough food.

15 I am the LORD your God,
who stirs the sea and makes the waves roar.
My name is the LORD All-Powerful.

16 I will give you the words I want you to say.
I will cover you with my hands and protect you.

I made the heavens and the earth,
and I say to Jerusalem, 'You are my people.'"

## *God Punished Israel*

17 Awake! Awake!
Get up, Jerusalem.

The LORD was very angry with you;
your punishment was like wine in a cup.

The LORD made you drink that wine;
you drank the whole cup until you stumbled.

18 Jerusalem had many people,

but there was not one to lead her.

Of all the people who grew up there,
no one was there to guide her.

19 Troubles came to you two by two,
but no one will feel sorry for you.

There was ruin and disaster, great hunger and fighting.
No one can comfort you.

20 Your people have become weak.
They fall down and lie on every street corner,
like animals caught in a net.

They have felt the full anger of the LORD
and have heard God's angry shout.

21 So listen to me, poor Jerusalem,
you who are drunk but not from wine.

22 Your God will defend his people.
This is what the LORD your God says:

"The punishment I gave you is like a cup of wine.
You drank it and could not walk straight.

But I am taking that cup of my anger away from you,
and you will never be punished by my anger again.

23 I will now give that cup of punishment to those who gave you pain,

who told you,
'Bow down so we can walk over you.'

They made your back like dirt for them to walk on;
you were like a street for them to travel on.”

## *Jerusalem Will Be Saved*

52 Wake up, wake up, Jerusalem! Become
strong!

Be beautiful again,
holy city of Jerusalem.

The people who do not worship God and who are not pure
will not enter you again.

2Jerusalem, you once were a prisoner.
Now shake off the dust and stand up.

Jerusalem, you once were a prisoner.
Now free yourself from the chains around your neck.

3This is what the LORD says:

“You were not sold for a price,
so you will be saved without cost.”

4This is what the Lord God says:

“First my people went down to Egypt to live.
Later Assyria made them slaves.

5“Now see what has happened,” says the LORD.
“Another nation has taken away my people for nothing.

This nation who rules them makes fun of me,” says the LORD.
“All day long they speak against me.

[6]This has happened so my people will know who I am,
and so, on that future day, they will know

that I am the one speaking to them.
It will really be me.”

[7]How beautiful is the person
who comes over the mountains to bring good news,

who announces peace
and brings good news,
who announces salvation

and says to Jerusalem,
“Your God is King.”

[8]Listen! Your guards are shouting.
They are all shouting for joy!

They all will see with their own eyes
when the LORD returns to Jerusalem.

[9]Jerusalem, your buildings are destroyed now,
but shout and rejoice together,

because the LORD has comforted his people.
He has saved Jerusalem.

[10]The LORD will show his holy power
to all the nations.

Then everyone on earth
will see the salvation of our God.

[11]You people, leave, leave; get out of Babylon!
Touch nothing that is unclean.

You men who carry the LORD's things used in worship,
leave there and make yourselves pure.

12 You will not be forced to leave Babylon quickly;
you will not be forced to run away,

because the LORD will go before you,
and the God of Israel will guard you from behind.

### *The Lord's Suffering Servant*

13 The LORD says, "See, my servant will act wisely.
People will greatly honor and respect him.

14 Many people were shocked when they saw him.
His appearance was so damaged he did not look like a man;
his form was so changed they could barely tell he was human.

15 But now he will surprise many nations.
Kings will be amazed and shut their mouths.

They will see things they had not been told about him,
and they will understand things they had not heard."

## Psalm 112:5–10

5 It is good to be merciful and generous.
Those who are fair in their business

6 will never be defeated.
Good people will always be remembered.

7 They won’t be afraid of bad news;
their hearts are steady because they trust the LORD.

8 They are confident and will not be afraid;
they will look down on their enemies.

9 They give freely to the poor.
The things they do are right and will continue forever.
They will be given great honor.

10 The wicked will see this and become angry;
they will grind their teeth in anger and then disappear.
The wishes of the wicked will come to nothing.

## Proverbs 26:16

16 The lazy person thinks he is wiser
than seven people who give sensible answers.

## Ephesians 2:1–22

### *We Now Have Life*

2 In the past you were spiritually dead because of your sins and the things you did against God. 2 Yes, in the past you lived the way the world lives, following the ruler of the evil powers that are above the earth. That same spirit is now working in those who refuse to obey God. 3 In the past all of us lived like them, trying to please our sinful selves and doing all the things our bodies and minds wanted. We should have suffered God’s anger because we were sinful by nature. We were the same as all other people.

4 But God’s mercy is great, and he loved us very much. 5 Though we were spiritually dead because of the things we did against God, he gave us new life with Christ. You have been saved by God’s grace. 6 And he raised us up with Christ and gave us a seat with him in the heavens. He did this for those in

Christ Jesus [7]so that for all future time he could show the very great riches of his grace by being kind to us in Christ Jesus. [8]I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. [9]It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it. [10]God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.

## *One in Christ*

[11]You were not born Jewish. You are the people the Jews call "uncircumcised."[n] Those who call you "uncircumcised" call themselves "circumcised." (Their circumcision is only something they themselves do on their bodies.) [12]Remember that in the past you were without Christ. You were not citizens of Israel, and you had no part in the agreements[n] with the promise that God made to his people. You had no hope, and you did not know God. [13]But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away from God are brought near through the blood of Christ's death. [14]Christ himself is our peace. He made both Jewish people and those who are not Jews one people. They were separated as if there were a wall between them, but Christ broke down that wall of hate by giving his own body. [15]The Jewish law had many commands and rules, but Christ ended that law. His purpose was to make the two groups of people become one new people in him and in this way make peace. [16]It was also Christ's purpose to end the hatred between the two groups, to make them into one body, and to bring them back to God. Christ did all this with his death on the cross. [17]Christ came and preached peace to you who were far away from God, and to those who were near to God. [18]Yes, it is through Christ we all have the right to come to the Father in one Spirit.

[19]Now you who are not Jewish are not foreigners or strangers any longer, but are citizens together with God's holy people. You belong to God's family. [20]You are like a building that was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone[n] in that building, [21]and that whole building is joined together in Christ. He makes it grow and become a holy temple in the Lord. [22]And in Christ you, too, are being built together with the Jews into a place where God lives through the Spirit.

# October 1

## Following Our Own Paths

*We all have wandered away like sheep; each of us has gone his own way.*

Isaiah 53:6

Adam and Eve turned their heads toward the hiss of the snake and for the first time ignored God. Eve did not ask, “God, what do you want?” Adam didn’t suggest, “Let’s consult the Creator.” They acted as if they had no heavenly Father. His will was ignored, and sin, with death on its coattails, entered the world.

Sin sees the world with no God in it.

Where we might think of sin as slip-ups or missteps, God views sin as a godless attitude that leads to godless actions. “We all have wandered away like sheep; each of us has gone his own way.” The sinful mind dismisses God. His counsel goes unconsulted. His opinion, unsolicited …

The lack of God-centeredness leads to self-centeredness. Sin celebrates its middle letter—sIn.

from *Come Thirsty*

### Isaiah 53:1—54:17

53 Who would have believed what we heard? Who saw the LORD’s power in this?

2 He grew up like a small plant before the LORD,
like a root growing in a dry land.

He had no special beauty or form to make us notice him;
there was nothing in his appearance to make us desire him.

[3]He was hated and rejected by people.
He had much pain and suffering.

People would not even look at him.
He was hated, and we didn’t even notice him.

[4]But he took our suffering on him
and felt our pain for us.

We saw his suffering
and thought God was punishing him.

[5]But he was wounded for the wrong we did;
he was crushed for the evil we did.

The punishment, which made us well, was given to him,
and we are healed because of his wounds.

[6]We all have wandered away like sheep;
each of us has gone his own way.

But the LORD has put on him the punishment
for all the evil we have done.

[7]He was beaten down and punished,
but he didn’t say a word.

He was like a lamb being led to be killed.
He was quiet, as a sheep is quiet while its wool is being cut;
he never opened his mouth.

[8]Men took him away roughly and unfairly.
He died without children to continue his family.

He was put to death;

he was punished for the sins of my people.

9 He was buried with wicked men,
and he died with the rich.

He had done nothing wrong,
and he had never lied.

10 But it was the LORD who decided
to crush him and make him suffer.
The LORD made his life a penalty offering,

but he will still see his descendants and live a long life.
He will complete the things the LORD wants him to do.

11 "After his soul suffers many things,
he will see life and be satisfied.

My good servant will make many people right with God;
he will carry away their sins.

12 For this reason I will make him a great man among people,
and he will share in all things with those who are strong.

He willingly gave his life
and was treated like a criminal.

But he carried away the sins of many people
and asked forgiveness for those who sinned."

## *People Will Return to Jerusalem*

54 The LORD says, "Sing, Jerusalem.
You are like a woman who never gave birth to children.

Start singing and shout for joy.
You never felt the pain of giving birth,

but you will have more children
than the woman who has a husband.

2 Make your tent bigger;
stretch it out and make it wider.
Do not hold back.

Make the ropes longer
and its stakes stronger,

3 because you will spread out to the right and to the left.
Your children will take over other nations,
and they will again live in cities that once were destroyed.

4 “Don’t be afraid, because you will not be ashamed.
Don’t be embarrassed, because you will not be disgraced.

You will forget the shame you felt earlier;
you will not remember the shame you felt when you lost your husband.

5 The God who made you is like your husband.
His name is the LORD All-Powerful.

The Holy One of Israel is the one who saves you.
He is called the God of all the earth.

6 You were like a woman whose husband left her,
and you were very sad.

You were like a wife who married young
and then her husband left her.

But the LORD called you to be his,”
    says your God.

7God says, “I left you for a short time,
    but with great kindness I will bring you back again.

8I became very angry
    and hid from you for a time,

but I will show you mercy with kindness forever,”
    says the LORD who saves you.

9The LORD says, “This day is like the time of Noah to me.
    I promised then that I would never flood the world again.

In the same way, I promise I will not be angry with you
    or punish you again.

10The mountains may disappear,
    and the hills may come to an end,

but my love will never disappear;
    my promise of peace will not come to an end,”
    says the LORD who shows mercy to you.

11“You poor city. Storms have hurt you,
    and you have not been comforted.

But I will rebuild you with turquoise stones,
    and I will build your foundations with sapphires.

12I will use rubies to build your walls
    and shining jewels for the gates
    and precious jewels for all your outer walls.

13All your children will be taught by the LORD,

and they will have much peace.

14 I will build you using fairness.

You will be safe from those who would hurt you,
so you will have nothing to fear.
Nothing will come to make you afraid.

15 I will not send anyone to attack you,
and you will defeat those who do attack you.

16 "See, I made the blacksmith.
He fans the fire to make it hotter,
and he makes the kind of tool he wants.

In the same way I have made the destroyer to destroy.
17 So no weapon that is used against you will defeat you.
You will show that those who speak against you are wrong.

These are the good things my servants receive.
Their victory comes from me," says the LORD.

## Psalm 113:1–4

### *Praise for the Lord's Kindness,*

113 Praise the LORD! Praise him, you servants of the LORD;
praise the name of the LORD.

2 The LORD's name should be praised
now and forever.

3 The LORD's name should be praised

from where the sun rises to where it sets.

4The LORD is supreme over all the nations;
his glory reaches to the skies.

## Proverbs 26:17–19

17Interfering in someone else's quarrel as you pass by
is like grabbing a dog by the ears.

18Like a madman shooting
deadly, burning arrows

19is the one who tricks a neighbor
and then says, "I was just joking."

## Ephesians 3:1–21

### *Paul's Work in Telling the Good News*

3 So I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus for you who are not
Jews. 2Surely you have heard that God gave me this work to tell
you about his grace. 3He let me know his secret by showing it to
me. I have already written a little about this. 4If you read what I
wrote then, you can see that I truly understand the secret about
the Christ. 5People who lived in other times were not told that
secret. But now, through the Spirit, God has shown that secret
to his holy apostles and prophets. 6This is that secret: that
through the Good News those who are not Jews will share with
the Jews in God's blessing. They belong to the same body, and
they share together in the promise that God made in Christ
Jesus.
7By God's special gift of grace given to me through his
power, I became a servant to tell that Good News. 8I am the
least important of all God's people, but God gave me this gift—
to tell those who are not Jews the Good News about the riches
of Christ, which are too great to understand fully. 9And God

gave me the work of telling all people about the plan for his secret, which has been hidden in him since the beginning of time. He is the One who created everything. [10]His purpose was that through the church all the rulers and powers in the heavenly world will now know God's wisdom, which has so many forms. [11]This agrees with the purpose God had since the beginning of time, and he carried out his plan through Christ Jesus our Lord. [12]In Christ we can come before God with freedom and without fear. We can do this through faith in Christ. [13]So I ask you not to become discouraged because of the sufferings I am having for you. My sufferings are for your glory.

## *The Love of Christ*

[14]So I bow in prayer before the Father [15]from whom every family in heaven and on earth gets its true name. [16]I ask the Father in his great glory to give you the power to be strong inwardly through his Spirit. [17]I pray that Christ will live in your hearts by faith and that your life will be strong in love and be built on love. [18]And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ's love —how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is. [19]Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God.

[20]With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine. [21]To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever. Amen.

# October 2

## A Load Too Heavy

*Do not be bitter or angry or mad. Never shout angrily or say things to hurt others.*

Ephesians 4:31

Oh, the gradual grasp of hatred. Its damage begins like the crack in my windshield. Thanks to a speeding truck on a gravel road, my window was chipped. With time the nick became a crack, and the crack became a winding tributary … I couldn't drive my car without thinking of the jerk who drove too fast. Though I've never seen him, I could describe him. He is some deadbeat bum who cheats on his wife, drives with a six-pack on the seat, and keeps the television so loud the neighbors can't sleep …

Ever heard the expression "blind rage"?

Let me be very clear. Hatred will sour your outlook and break your back. The load of bitterness is simply too heavy. Your knees will buckle under the strain, and your heart will break beneath the weight. The mountain before you is steep enough without the heaviness of hatred on your back. The wisest choice—the *only* choice—is for you to drop the anger. You will never be called upon to give anyone more grace than God has already given you.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### Isaiah 55:1—56:12

#### *God Gives What Is Good*

55 The LORD says, "All you who are thirsty, come and drink.

Those of you who do not have money,
come, buy and eat!

Come buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

2 Why spend your money on something that is not real food?
Why work for something that doesn't really satisfy you?

Listen closely to me, and you will eat what is good;
your soul will enjoy the rich food that satisfies.

3 Come to me and listen;
listen to me so you may live.

I will make an agreement with you that will last forever.
I will give you the blessings I promised to David.

4 I made David a witness of my power for all nations,
a ruler and commander of many nations.

5 You will call for nations that you don't yet know.
And these nations that do not know you will run to you

because of the LORD your God,
because of the Holy One of Israel who honors you."

6 So you should look for the LORD before it is too late;
you should call to him while he is near.

7 The wicked should stop doing wrong,
and they should stop their evil thoughts.

They should return to the LORD so he may have mercy on them.
They should come to our God, because he will freely forgive them.

8 The LORD says, "My thoughts are not like your thoughts.

Your ways are not like my ways.

9 Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

10 Rain and snow fall from the sky
and don't return without watering the ground.

They cause the plants to sprout and grow,
making seeds for the farmer
and bread for the people.

11 The same thing is true of the words I speak.
They will not return to me empty.

They make the things happen that I want to happen,
and they succeed in doing what I send them to do.

12 "So you will go out with joy
and be led out in peace.

The mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
and all the trees in the fields will clap their hands.

13 Large cypress trees will grow where thornbushes were.
Myrtle trees will grow where weeds were.

These things will be a reminder of the LORD's promise,
and this reminder will never be destroyed."

## *All Nations Will Obey the LORD*

56 This is what the LORD says: "Give justice to all people,
and do what is right,

because my salvation will come to you soon.
Soon everyone will know that I do what is right.

2 The person who obeys the law about the Sabbath
will be blessed,

and the person who does no evil
will be blessed."

3 Foreigners who have joined the LORD should not say,
"The LORD will not accept me with his people."

The eunuch should not say,
"Because I cannot have children, the LORD will not accept me."

4 This is what the LORD says:

"The eunuchs should obey the law about the Sabbath
and do what I want
and keep my agreement.

5 If they do, I will make their names remembered
within my Temple and its walls.
It will be better for them than children.

I will give them a name that will last forever,
that will never be forgotten.

6 Foreigners will join the LORD
to worship him and love him,
to serve him,

to obey the law about the Sabbath,
and to keep my agreement.

[7]I will bring these people to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.

The offerings and sacrifices
they place on my altar will please me,

because my Temple will be called
a house for prayer for people from all nations.”

[8]The Lord God says—
he who gathers the Israelites that were forced to leave their country:

“I will bring together other people
to join those who are already gathered.”

## *Israel’s Leaders Are Evil*

[9]All you animals of the field,
all you animals of the forest, come to eat.

[10]The leaders who are to guard the people are blind;
they don’t know what they are doing.

All of them are like quiet dogs
that don’t know how to bark.

They lie down and dream
and love to sleep.

[11]They are like hungry dogs
that are never satisfied.

They are like shepherds
who don’t know what they are doing.

They all have gone their own way;
all they want to do is satisfy themselves.

12 They say, “Come, let’s drink some wine;
let’s drink all the beer we want.

And tomorrow we will do this again,
or, maybe we will have an even better time.”

## Psalm 113:5–9

5 No one is like the LORD our God,
who rules from heaven,

6 who bends down to look
at the skies and the earth.

7 The LORD lifts the poor from the dirt
and takes the helpless from the ashes.

8 He seats them with princes,
the princes of his people.

9 He gives children to the woman who has none
and makes her a happy mother.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 26:20–21

20 Without wood, a fire will go out,
and without gossip, quarreling will stop.

21 Just as charcoal and wood keep a fire going,
a quarrelsome person keeps an argument going.

## Ephesians 4:1–32

### *The Unity of the Body*

4 I am in prison because I belong to the Lord. Therefore I urge
you who have been chosen by God to live up to the life to which
God called you. 2 Always be humble, gentle, and patient,
accepting each other in love. 3 You are joined together with
peace through the Spirit, so make every effort to continue
together in this way. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, and God
called you to have one hope. 5 There is one Lord, one faith, and
one baptism. 6 There is one God and Father of everything. He
rules everything and is everywhere and is in everything.
7 Christ gave each one of us the special gift of grace, showing
how generous he is. 8 That is why it says in the Scriptures,

"When he went up to the heights,
he led a parade of captives,
and he gave gifts to people."

Psalm 68:18

9 When it says, "He went up," what does it mean? It means
that he first came down to the earth. 10 So Jesus came down,
and he is the same One who went up above all the heaven.
Christ did that to fill everything with his presence. 11 And Christ
gave gifts to people—he made some to be apostles, some to be
prophets, some to go and tell the Good News, and some to have
the work of caring for and teaching God's people. 12 Christ gave
those gifts to prepare God's holy people for the work of serving,
to make the body of Christ stronger. 13 This work must continue
until we are all joined together in the same faith and in the
same knowledge of the Son of God. We must become like a
mature person, growing until we become like Christ and have
his perfection.
14 Then we will no longer be babies. We will not be tossed
about like a ship that the waves carry one way and then
another. We will not be influenced by every new teaching we
hear from people who are trying to fool us. They make plans
and try any kind of trick to fool people into following the wrong
path. 15 No! Speaking the truth with love, we will grow up in
every way into Christ, who is the head. 16 The whole body

depends on Christ, and all the parts of the body are joined and held together. Each part does its own work to make the whole body grow and be strong with love.

## *The Way You Should Live*

17 In the Lord's name, I tell you this. Do not continue living like those who do not believe. Their thoughts are worth nothing. 18 They do not understand, and they know nothing, because they refuse to listen. So they cannot have the life that God gives. 19 They have lost all feeling of shame, and they use their lives for doing evil. They continually want to do all kinds of evil. 20 But what you learned in Christ was not like this. 21 I know that you heard about him, and you are in him, so you were taught the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to leave your old self—to stop living the evil way you lived before. That old self becomes worse, because people are fooled by the evil things they want to do. 23 But you were taught to be made new in your hearts, 24 to become a new person. That new person is made to be like God—made to be truly good and holy.

25 So you must stop telling lies. Tell each other the truth, because we all belong to each other in the same body.[n] 26 When you are angry, do not sin, and be sure to stop being angry before the end of the day. 27 Do not give the devil a way to defeat you. 28 Those who are stealing must stop stealing and start working. They should earn an honest living for themselves. Then they will have something to share with those who are poor.

29 When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you. 30 And do not make the Holy Spirit sad. The Spirit is God's proof that you belong to him. God gave you the Spirit to show that God will make you free when the final day comes. 31 Do not be bitter or angry or mad. Never shout angrily or say things to hurt others. Never do anything evil. 32 Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ.

# October 3

## Imitate Christ

*Live a life of love just as Christ loved us.*

Ephesians 5:2

Long to be more loving? Begin by accepting your place as a dearly loved child. “You are God’s children whom he loves, so try to be like him. Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us” (Ephesians 5:1–2).

Want to learn to forgive? Then consider how you’ve been forgiven. “Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ” (Ephesians 4:32).

Finding it hard to put others first? Think of the way Christ put you first. “Christ himself was like God in everything. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit” (Philippians 2:6).

Need more patience? Drink from the patience of God (2 Peter 3:9). Is generosity an elusive virtue? Then consider how generous God has been with you (Romans 5:8). Having trouble putting up with ungrateful relatives or cranky neighbors? God puts up with you when you act the same. “He is kind even to people who are ungrateful and full of sin” (Luke 6:35).

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### Isaiah 57:1—58:14

#### *Israel Does Not Follow God*

57 Those who are right with God may die, but no one pays
attention.

Good people are taken away,
but no one understands.

Those who do right are being taken away from evil
2 and are given peace.

Those who live as God wants
find rest in death.

3“Come here, you magicians!
Come here, you children of prostitutes and those who take part in adultery!

4Of whom are you making fun?
Whom are you insulting?
At whom do you stick out your tongue?

You turn against God,
and you are liars.

5You have sexual relations under every green tree
to worship your gods.

You kill children in the ravines
and sacrifice them in the rocky places.

6You take the smooth rocks from the ravines
as your portion.

You pour drink offerings on them to worship them,
and you give grain offerings to them.
Do you think this makes me want to show you mercy?

7You make your bed on every hill and mountain,
and there you offer sacrifices.

8You have hidden your idols
behind your doors and doorposts.

You have left me, and you have uncovered yourself.
You have pulled back the covers and climbed into bed.

You have made an agreement with those whose beds you love,
and you have looked at their nakedness.

9 You use your oils and perfumes
to look nice for Molech.

You have sent your messengers to faraway lands;
you even tried to send them to the place of the dead.

10 You were tired from doing these things,
but you never gave up.

You found new strength,
so you did not quit.

11 "Whom were you so afraid of
that you lied to me?

You have not remembered me
or even thought about me.

I have been quiet for a long time.
Is that why you are not afraid of me?

12 I will tell about your 'goodness' and what you do,
and those things will do you no good.

13 When you cry out for help,
let the gods you have gathered help you.

The wind will blow them all away;
just a puff of wind will take them away.

But the person who depends on me will receive the land
and own my holy mountain.”

## *The Lord Will Save His People*

14 Someone will say, “Build a road! Build a road! Prepare the way!
Make the way clear for my people.”

15 And this is the reason: God lives forever and is holy.
He is high and lifted up.

He says, “I live in a high and holy place,
but I also live with people who are sad and humble.

I give new life to those who are humble
and to those whose hearts are broken.

16 I will not accuse forever,
nor will I always be angry,

because then human life would grow weak.
Human beings, whom I created, would die.

17 I was angry because they were dishonest in order to make money.
I punished them and turned away from them in anger,
but they continued to do evil.

18 I have seen what they have done, but I will heal them.
I will guide them and comfort them and those who felt sad for them.
They will all praise me.

19 I will give peace, real peace, to those far and near,
and I will heal them,” says the LORD.

20 But evil people are like the angry sea,
which cannot rest,
whose waves toss up waste and mud.

21 “There is no peace for evil people,” says my God.

## *How to Honor God*

58 The LORD says, “Shout out loud. Don’t hold
back.
Shout out loud like a trumpet.

Tell my people what they have done against their God;
tell the family of Jacob about their sins.

2 They still come every day looking for me
and want to learn my ways.

They act just like a nation that does what is right,
that obeys the commands of its God.

They ask me to judge them fairly.
They want God to be near them.

3 They say, ‘To honor you we had special days when we fasted,
but you didn’t see.

We humbled ourselves to honor you,
but you didn’t notice.’”

But the LORD says, “You do what pleases yourselves on these special days,
and you are unfair to your workers.

4 On these special days when you fast, you argue and fight

and hit each other with your fists.

You cannot do these things as you do now
and believe your prayers are heard in heaven.

5 This kind of special day is not what I want.
This is not the way I want people to be sorry for what they have done.

I don't want people just to bow their heads like a plant
and wear rough cloth and lie in ashes to show their sadness.

This is what you do on your special days when you fast,
but do you think this is what the LORD wants?

6 "I will tell you the kind of fast I want:

Free the people you have put in prison unfairly
and undo their chains.

Free those to whom you are unfair
and stop their hard labor.

7 Share your food with the hungry
and bring poor, homeless people into your own homes.

When you see someone who has no clothes, give him yours,
and don't refuse to help your own relatives.

8 Then your light will shine like the dawn,
and your wounds will quickly heal.

Your God will walk before you,
and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind.

9 Then you will call out, and the LORD will answer.
You will cry out, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’

“If you stop making trouble for others,
if you stop using cruel words and pointing your finger at others,

10 if you feed those who are hungry
and take care of the needs of those who are troubled,

then your light will shine in the darkness,
and you will be bright like sunshine at noon.

11 The LORD will always lead you.
He will satisfy your needs in dry lands
and give strength to your bones.

You will be like a garden that has much water,
like a spring that never runs dry.

12 Your people will rebuild the old cities that are now in ruins;
you will rebuild their foundations.

You will be known for repairing the broken places
and for rebuilding the roads and houses.

13 “You must obey God’s law about the Sabbath
and not do what pleases yourselves on that holy day.

You should call the Sabbath a joyful day
and honor it as the LORD’s holy day.

You should honor it by not doing whatever you please
nor saying whatever you please on that day.

14 Then you will find joy in the LORD,
and I will carry you to the high places above the earth.
I will let you eat the crops of the land your ancestor Jacob had.”

The LORD has said these things.

## Psalm 114:1–8

### *God Brought Israel from Egypt*

114 When the Israelites went out of Egypt, the people of Jacob left that foreign country.

2 Then Judah became God’s holy place;
Israel became the land he ruled.

3 The Red Sea looked and ran away;
the Jordan River turned back.

4 The mountains danced like sheep
and the hills like little lambs.

5 Sea, why did you run away?
Jordan, why did you turn back?

6 Mountains, why did you dance like sheep?
Hills, why did you dance like little lambs?

7 Earth, shake with fear before the Lord,
before the God of Jacob.

8 He turned a rock into a pool of water,
a hard rock into a spring of water.

## Proverbs 26:22

22 The words of a gossip are like tasty bits of food;
people like to gobble them up.

## Ephesians 5:1–20

### *Living in the Light*

5 You are God's children whom he loves, so try to be like him.
2 Live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself for
us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice to God.
3 But there must be no sexual sin among you, or any kind of
evil or greed. Those things are not right for God's holy people.
4 Also, there must be no evil talk among you, and you must not
speak foolishly or tell evil jokes. These things are not right for
you. Instead, you should be giving thanks to God. 5 You can be
sure of this: No one will have a place in the kingdom of Christ
and of God who sins sexually, or does evil things, or is greedy.
Anyone who is greedy is serving a false god.
6 Do not let anyone fool you by telling you things that are not
true, because these things will bring God's anger on those who
do not obey him. 7 So have nothing to do with them. 8 In the past
you were full of darkness, but now you are full of light in the
Lord. So live like children who belong to the light. 9 Light brings
every kind of goodness, right living, and truth. 10 Try to learn
what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the things
done in darkness, which are not worth anything. But show that
they are wrong. 12 It is shameful even to talk about what those
people do in secret. 13 But the light makes all things easy to see,
14 and everything that is made easy to see can become light.
This is why it is said:

"Wake up, sleeper!
Rise from death,

and Christ will shine on you."

[15]So be very careful how you live. Do not live like those who
are not wise, but live wisely. [16]Use every chance you have for
doing good, because these are evil times. [17]So do not be foolish
but learn what the Lord wants you to do. [18]Do not be drunk with
wine, which will ruin you, but be filled with the Spirit. [19]Speak
to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing
and making music in your hearts to the Lord. [20]Always give
thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our
Lord Jesus Christ.

# October 4

## Magnify Your Maker

*It does not belong to us, LORD. The glory belongs to you because of your love and loyalty.*

Psalm 115:1

God endows us with gifts so we can make him known. Period. God endues the Olympian with speed, the salesman with savvy, the surgeon with skill. Why? For gold medals, closed sales, or healed bodies? Only partially.

The big answer is to make a big to-do out of God. Brandish him. Herald him. "Each of you has received a gift to use to serve others. Be good servants of God's various gifts of grace … so that in everything God will be praised through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:10–11).

Live so that "power and glory belong to him forever and ever" (1 Peter 4:11). Exhibit God with your uniqueness. When you magnify your Maker with your strengths, when your contribution enriches God's reputation, your days grow suddenly sweet.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Isaiah 59:1—60:22

#### *The Evil That People Do*

59 Surely the LORD's power is enough to save you.
He can hear you when you ask him for help.

2 It is your evil that has separated
you from your God.

Your sins cause him to turn away from you,
so he does not hear you.

3 With your hands you have killed others,
and with your fingers you have done wrong.

With your lips you have lied,
and with your tongue you say evil things.

4 People take each other to court unfairly,
and no one tells the truth in arguing his case.

They accuse each other falsely and tell lies.
They cause trouble and create more evil.

5 They hatch evil like eggs from poisonous snakes.
If you eat one of those eggs, you will die,
and if you break one open, a poisonous snake comes out.

People tell lies as they would spin a spider's web.
6 The webs they make cannot be used for clothes;
you can't cover yourself with those webs.

The things they do are evil,
and they use their hands to hurt others.

7 They eagerly run to do evil,
and they are always ready to kill innocent people.

They think evil thoughts.
Everywhere they go they cause ruin and destruction.

8 They don't know how to live in peace,
and there is no fairness in their lives.

They are dishonest.

Anyone who lives as they live will never have peace.

## *Israel's Sin Brings Trouble*

9 Fairness has gone far away;
goodness is nowhere to be found.

We wait for the light, but there is only darkness now.
We hope for a bright light, but all we have is darkness.

10 We are like the blind feeling our way along a wall.
We feel our way as if we had no eyes.

In the brightness of day we trip as if it were night.
We are like dead men among the strong.

11 All of us growl like the bears.
We call out sadly like the doves.

We look for justice, but there isn't any.
We want to be saved, but salvation is far away.

12 We have done many wrong things against our God;
our sins show we are wrong.

We know we have turned against God;
we know the evil things we have done:

13 sinning and rejecting the LORD,
turning away from our God,

planning to hurt others and to disobey God,
planning and speaking lies.

14 So we have driven away justice,

and we have kept away from what is right.

Truth is not spoken in the streets;
what is honest is not allowed to enter the city.

15 Truth cannot be found anywhere,
and people who refuse to do evil are attacked.

The LORD looked and could not find any justice,
and he was displeased.

16 He could not find anyone to help the people,
and he was surprised that there was no one to help.

So he used his own power to save the people;
his own goodness gave him strength.

17 He covered himself with goodness like armor.
He put the helmet of salvation on his head.

He put on his clothes for punishing
and wrapped himself in the coat of his strong love.

18 The LORD will pay back his enemies for what they have done.
He will show his anger to those who were against him;
he will punish the people in faraway places as they deserve.

19 Then people from the west will fear the LORD,
and people from the east will fear his glory.

The LORD will come quickly like a fast-flowing river,
driven by the breath of the LORD.

20 "Then a Savior will come to Jerusalem

and to the people of Jacob who have turned from sin,”
says the LORD.

21The LORD says, “This is my agreement with these people:
My Spirit and my words that I give you will never leave you or
your children or your grandchildren, now and forever.”

## *Jerusalem Will Be Great*

60 “Jerusalem, get up and shine, because your
light has come,
and the glory of the LORD shines on you.

2Darkness now covers the earth;
deep darkness covers her people.

But the LORD shines on you,
and people see his glory around you.

3Nations will come to your light;
kings will come to the brightness of your sunrise.

4“Look around you.
People are gathering and coming to you.

Your sons are coming from far away,
and your daughters are coming with them.

5When you see them, you will shine with happiness;
you will be excited and full of joy,

because the wealth of the nations across the seas will be
given to you;
the riches of the nations will come to you.

6Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels from Midian and Ephah.

People will come from Sheba
bringing gold and incense,
and they will sing praises to the LORD.

7All the sheep from Kedar will be given to you;
the sheep from Nebaioth will be brought to you.

They will be pleasing sacrifices on my altar,
and I will make my beautiful Temple more beautiful.

8"The people are returning to you like clouds,
like doves flying to their nests.

9People in faraway lands are waiting for me.
The great trading ships will come first,

bringing your children from faraway lands,
and with them silver and gold.

This will honor the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
who does wonderful things for you.

10"Jerusalem, foreigners will rebuild your walls,
and their kings will serve you.

When I was angry, I hurt you,
but now I want to be kind to you and comfort you.

11Your gates will always be open;
they will not be closed day or night

so the nations can bring their wealth to you,
and their kings will be led to you.

12The nation or kingdom that doesn't serve you will be

destroyed;
it will be completely ruined.

13 “The great trees of Lebanon will be given to you:
its pine, fir, and cypress trees together.

You will use them to make my Temple beautiful,
and I will give much honor to this place where I rest my feet.

14 The people who have hurt you will bow down to you;
those who hated you will bow down at your feet.

They will call you The City of the LORD,
Jerusalem, city of the Holy One of Israel.

15 “You have been hated and left empty
with no one passing through.

But I will make you great from now on;
you will be a place of happiness forever and ever.

16 You will be given what you need from the nations,
like a child drinking milk from its mother.

Then you will know that it is I, the LORD, who saves you.
You will know that the Powerful One of Jacob protects you.

17 I will bring you gold in place of bronze,
silver in place of iron,

bronze in place of wood,
iron in place of rocks.

I will change your punishment into peace,
and you will be ruled by what is right.

18 There will be no more violence in your country;
it will not be ruined or destroyed.

You will name your walls Salvation
and your gates Praise.

19 The sun will no longer be your light during the day
nor will the brightness from the moon be your light,

because the LORD will be your light forever,
and your God will be your glory.

20 Your sun will never set again,
and your moon will never be dark,

because the LORD will be your light forever,
and your time of sadness will end.

21 All of your people will do what is right.
They will receive the earth forever.

They are the plant I have planted,
the work of my own hands
to show my greatness.

22 The smallest family will grow to a thousand.
The least important of you will become a powerful nation.

I am the LORD,
and when it is time, I will make these things happen quickly.”

## Psalm 115:1–8

### *The One True God*

[115] It does not belong to us, LORD. The glory belongs to you
because of your love and loyalty.

[2]Why do the nations ask,
"Where is their God?"

[3]Our God is in heaven.
He does what he pleases.

[4]Their idols are made of silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

[5]They have mouths, but they cannot speak.
They have eyes, but they cannot see.

[6]They have ears, but they cannot hear.
They have noses, but they cannot smell.

[7]They have hands, but they cannot feel.
They have feet, but they cannot walk.
No sounds come from their throats.

[8]People who make idols will be like them,
and so will those who trust them.

## Proverbs 26:23

[23]Kind words from a wicked mind
are like a shiny coating on a clay pot.

## Ephesians 5:21–33

## *Wives and Husbands*

21 Yield to obey each other as you would to Christ.

22 Wives, yield to your husbands, as you do to the Lord,
23 because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the
head of the church. And he is the Savior of the body, which is
the church. 24 As the church yields to Christ, so you wives
should yield to your husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and
gave himself for it 26 to make it belong to God. Christ used the
word to make the church clean by washing it with water. 27 He
died so that he could give the church to himself like a bride in
all her beauty. He died so that the church could be pure and
without fault, with no evil or sin or any other wrong thing in it.
28 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they
love their own bodies. The man who loves his wife loves himself.
29 No one ever hates his own body, but feeds and takes care of it.
And that is what Christ does for the church, 30 because we are
parts of his body. 31 The Scripture says, "So a man will leave his
father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will
become one body."[n] 32 That secret is very important—I am
talking about Christ and the church. 33 But each one of you must
love his wife as he loves himself, and a wife must respect her
husband.

# October 5

## Living in God's Presence

*Pray in the Spirit at all times with all kinds of prayers, asking for everything you need.*

Ephesians 6:18

HOW do I live in God's presence? How do I detect his unseen hand on my shoulder and his inaudible voice in my ear? ... How can you and I grow familiar with the voice of God? Here are a few ideas:

*Give God your waking thoughts.* Before you face the day, face the Father. Before you step out of bed, step into his presence.

*Give God your waiting thoughts.* Spend time with him in silence.

*Give God your whispering thoughts ...* Imagine considering every moment as a potential time of communion with God.

*Give God your waning thoughts.* At the end of the day, let your mind settle on him. Conclude the day as you began it: talking to God.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Isaiah 61:1—62:12

### *The LORD's Message of Freedom*

61 The LORD GOD has put his Spirit in me,
because the LORD has appointed me
to tell the good news to the poor.
He has sent me to comfort those whose hearts are broken,

to tell the captives they are free,

and to tell the prisoners they are released.

[2]He has sent me to announce the time when the LORD will show his kindness
and the time when our God will punish evil people.

He has sent me to comfort all those who are sad
[3] and to help the sorrowing people of Jerusalem.

I will give them a crown to replace their ashes,
and the oil of gladness to replace their sorrow,
and clothes of praise to replace their spirit of sadness.

Then they will be called Trees of Goodness,
trees planted by the LORD to show his greatness.

[4]They will rebuild the old ruins
and restore the places destroyed long ago.

They will repair the ruined cities
that were destroyed for so long.

[5]My people, foreigners will come to tend your sheep.
People from other countries will tend your fields and vineyards.

[6]You will be called priests of the LORD;
you will be named the servants of our God.

You will have riches from all the nations on earth,
and you will take pride in them.

[7]Instead of being ashamed, my people will receive twice as much wealth.
Instead of being disgraced, they will be happy because of what they receive.

They will receive a double share of the land,
so their happiness will continue forever.

8 “I, the LORD, love justice.
I hate stealing and everything that is wrong.

I will be fair and give my people what they should have,
and I will make an agreement with them that will continue forever.

9 Everyone in all nations will know the children of my people,
and their children will be known among the nations.

Anyone who sees them will know
that they are people the LORD has blessed.”

10 The LORD makes me very happy;
all that I am rejoices in my God.

He has covered me with clothes of salvation
and wrapped me with a coat of goodness,

like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding,
like a bride dressed in jewels.

11 The earth causes plants to grow,
and a garden causes the seeds planted in it to grow.

In the same way the Lord God will make goodness and praise
come from all the nations.

## *New Jerusalem*

62 Because I love Jerusalem, I will continue to
speak for her;
for Jerusalem’s sake I will not stop speaking

until her goodness shines like a bright light,
until her salvation burns bright like a flame.

2 Jerusalem, the nations will see your goodness,
and all kings will see your glory.

Then you will have a new name,
which the LORD himself will give you.

3 You will be like a beautiful crown in the LORD's hand,
like a king's crown in your God's hand.

4 You will never again be called the People that God Left,
nor your land the Land that God Destroyed.

You will be called the People God Loves,
and your land will be called the Bride of God,

because the LORD loves you.
And your land will belong to him as a bride belongs to her husband.

5 As a young man marries a woman,
so your children will marry your land.

As a man rejoices over his new wife,
so your God will rejoice over you.

6 Jerusalem, I have put guards on the walls to watch.
They must not be silent day or night.

You people who remind the LORD of your needs in prayer
should never be quiet.

7 You should not stop praying to him until he builds up Jerusalem

and makes it a city all people will praise.

[8]The LORD has made a promise,
and by his power he will keep his promise.

He said, “I will never again give your grain
as food to your enemies.

I will not let your enemies drink the new wine
that you have worked to make.

[9]Those who gather food will eat it,
and they will praise the LORD.

Those who gather the grapes will drink the wine
in the courts of my Temple.”

[10]Go through, go through the gates!
Make the way ready for the people.

Build up, build up the road!
Move all the stones off the road.

Raise the banner as a sign for the people.

[11]The LORD is speaking
to all the faraway lands:

“Tell the people of Jerusalem,
‘Look, your Savior is coming.

He is bringing your reward to you;
he is bringing his payment with him.’”

[12]His people will be called the Holy People,

the Saved People of the LORD,

and Jerusalem will be called the City God Wants,
the City God Has Not Rejected.

## Psalm 115:9–13

9 Family of Israel, trust the LORD;
he is your helper and your protection.

10 Family of Aaron, trust the LORD;
he is your helper and your protection.

11 You who respect the LORD should trust him;
he is your helper and your protection.

12 The LORD remembers us and will bless us.
He will bless the family of Israel;
he will bless the family of Aaron.

13 The LORD will bless those who respect him,
from the smallest to the greatest.

## Proverbs 26:24–26

24 Those who hate you may try to fool you with their words,
but in their minds they are planning evil.

25 People's words may be kind, but don't believe them,
because their minds are full of evil thoughts.

26 Lies can hide hate,

but the evil will be plain to everyone.

# Ephesians 6:1–24

## *Children and Parents*

6 Children, obey your parents as the Lord wants, because this is
the right thing to do. 2The command says, “Honor your father
and mother.”[n] This is the first command that has a promise with
it— 3“Then everything will be well with you, and you will have a
long life on the earth.”[n]
4Fathers, do not make your children angry, but raise them
with the training and teaching of the Lord.

## *Slaves and Masters*

5Slaves, obey your masters here on earth with fear and
respect and from a sincere heart, just as you obey Christ. 6You
must do this not only while they are watching you, to please
them. With all your heart you must do what God wants as
people who are obeying Christ. 7Do your work with enthusiasm.
Work as if you were serving the Lord, not as if you were serving
only men and women. 8Remember that the Lord will give a
reward to everyone, slave or free, for doing good.
9Masters, in the same way, be good to your slaves. Do not
threaten them. Remember that the One who is your Master and
their Master is in heaven, and he treats everyone alike.

## *Wear the Full Armor of God*

10Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his great power. 11Put
on the full armor of God so that you can fight against the devil’s
evil tricks. 12Our fight is not against people on earth but against
the rulers and authorities and the powers of this world’s
darkness, against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly
world. 13That is why you need to put on God’s full armor. Then
on the day of evil you will be able to stand strong. And when
you have finished the whole fight, you will still be standing. 14So
stand strong, with the belt of truth tied around your waist and
the protection of right living on your chest. 15On your feet wear
the Good News of peace to help you stand strong. 16And also
use the shield of faith with which you can stop all the burning
arrows of the Evil One. 17Accept God’s salvation as your helmet,
and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

[18]Pray in the Spirit at all times with all kinds of prayers, asking for everything you need. To do this you must always be ready and never give up. Always pray for all God's people.

[19]Also pray for me that when I speak, God will give me words so that I can tell the secret of the Good News without fear. [20]I have been sent to preach this Good News, and I am doing that now, here in prison. Pray that when I preach the Good News I will speak without fear, as I should.

## *Final Greetings*

[21]I am sending to you Tychicus, our brother whom we love and a faithful servant of the Lord's work. He will tell you everything that is happening with me. Then you will know how I am and what I am doing. [22]I am sending him to you for this reason—so that you will know how we are, and he can encourage you.

[23]Peace and love with faith to you brothers and sisters from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [24]Grace to all of you who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love that never ends.

# October 6

# A Heart Like His

*We are like clay, and you are the potter; your hands made us all.*

Isaiah 64:8

[God] wants us to be just like Jesus. Isn't that good news? You aren't stuck with today's personality. You aren't condemned to "grumpydom." You are tweakable. Even if you've worried each day of your life, you needn't worry the rest of your life. So what if you were born a bigot? You don't have to die one.

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

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Isaiah 63:1—64:12

### *The LORD Judges His People*

63 Who is this coming from Edom, from the city of Bozrah,
dressed in red?

Who is this dressed in fine clothes
and marching forward with his great power?

He says, "I, the LORD, speak what is right.

I have the power to save you.”

2 Someone asks, “Why are your clothes bright red
as if you had walked on the grapes to make wine?”

3 The LORD answers, “I have walked in the winepress alone,
and no one among the nations helped me.

I was angry and walked on the nations
and crushed them because of my anger.

Blood splashed on my clothes,
and I stained all my clothing.

4 I chose a time to punish people,
and the time has come for me to save.

5 I looked around, but I saw no one to help me.
I was surprised that no one supported me.

So I used my own power to save my people;
my own anger supported me.

6 While I was angry, I walked on the nations.
In my anger I punished them
and poured their blood on the ground.”

## *The LORD's Kindness to His People*

7 I will tell about the LORD's kindness
and praise him for everything he has done.

I will praise the LORD for the many good things he has given us
and for his goodness to the people of Israel.

He has shown great mercy to us
and has been very kind to us.

8 He said, “These are my people;
my children will not lie to me.”
So he saved them.

9 When they suffered, he suffered also.
He sent his own angel to save them.

Because of his love and kindness, he saved them.
Since long ago he has picked them up and carried them.

10 But they turned against him
and made his Holy Spirit very sad.

So he became their enemy,
and he fought against them.

11 But then his people remembered what happened long ago,
in the days of Moses and the Israelites with him.

Where is the LORD who brought the people through the sea,
with the leaders of his people?

Where is the one
who put his Holy Spirit among them,

12 who led Moses by the right hand
with his wonderful power,

who divided the water before them
to make his name famous forever,

13 who led the people through the deep waters?

Like a horse walking through a desert,
the people did not stumble.

14 Like cattle that go down to the valley,
the Spirit of the LORD gave the people a place to rest.

LORD, that is the way you led your people,
and by this you won for yourself wonderful fame.

## *A Prayer for Help*

15 LORD, look down from the heavens and see;
look at us from your wonderful and holy home in heaven.

Where is your strong love and power?
Why are you keeping your love and mercy from us?

16 You are our father.
Abraham doesn't know we are his children,
and Israel doesn't recognize us.

LORD, you are our father.
You are called "the one who has always saved us."

17 LORD, why are you making us wander from your ways?
Why do you make us stubborn so that we don't honor you?

For our sake come back to us,
your servants, who belong to you.

18 Your people had your Temple for a while,
but now our enemies have walked on your holy place and crushed it.

19 We have become like people you never ruled over,

like those who have never worn your name.

64 Tear open the skies and come down to earth
so that the mountains will tremble before you.

2 Like a fire that burns twigs,
like a fire that makes water boil,

let your enemies know who you are.
Then all nations will shake with fear when they see you.

3 You have done amazing things we did not expect.
You came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

4 From long ago no one has ever heard of a God like you.
No one has ever seen a God besides you,
who helps the people who trust you.

5 You help those who enjoy doing good,
who remember how you want them to live.

But you were angry because we sinned.
For a long time we disobeyed,
so how can we be saved?

6 All of us are dirty with sin.
All the right things we have done are like filthy pieces of cloth.

All of us are like dead leaves,
and our sins, like the wind, have carried us away.

7 No one worships you
or even asks you to help us.

That is because you have turned away from us

and have let our sins destroy us.

8 But LORD, you are our father.
We are like clay, and you are the potter;
your hands made us all.

9 LORD, don't continue to be angry with us;
don't remember our sins forever.

Please, look at us,
because we are your people.

10 Your holy cities are empty like the desert.
Jerusalem is like a desert;
it is destroyed.

11 Our ancestors worshiped you
in our holy and wonderful Temple,

but now it has been burned with fire,
and all our precious things have been destroyed.

12 When you see these things, will you hold yourself back from helping us, LORD?
Will you be silent and punish us beyond what we can stand?

## Psalm 115:14–18

14 May the LORD give you success,
and may he give you and your children success.

15 May you be blessed by the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

16 Heaven belongs to the LORD,
but he gave the earth to people.

17 Dead people do not praise the LORD;
those in the grave are silent.

18 But we will praise the LORD
now and forever.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 26:27

27 Whoever digs a pit for others will fall into it.
Whoever tries to roll a boulder down on others will be crushed by it.

## Philippians 1:1—2:4

1 From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.To all of God's holy people in Christ Jesus who live in Philippi, including your overseers and deacons:
2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### *Paul's Prayer*

3 I thank my God every time I remember you, 4 always praying with joy for all of you. 5 I thank God for the help you gave me while I preached the Good News—help you gave from the first day you believed until now. 6 God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again.
7 And I know that I am right to think like this about all of you, because I have you in my heart. All of you share in God's grace with me while I am in prison and while I am defending and proving the truth of the Good News. 8 God knows that I want to see you very much, because I love all of you with the love of

Christ Jesus.
9This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and
more; that you will have knowledge and understanding with
your love; 10that you will see the difference between good and
bad and will choose the good; that you will be pure and without
wrong for the coming of Christ; 11that you will be filled with the
good things produced in your life by Christ to bring glory and
praise to God.

## *Paul's Troubles Help the Work*

12I want you brothers and sisters to know that what has
happened to me has helped to spread the Good News. 13All the
palace guards and everyone else knows that I am in prison
because I am a believer in Christ. 14Because I am in prison,
most of the believers have become more bold in Christ and are
not afraid to speak the word of God.
15It is true that some preach about Christ because they are
jealous and ambitious, but others preach about Christ because
they want to help. 16They preach because they have love, and
they know that God gave me the work of defending the Good
News. 17But the others preach about Christ for selfish and
wrong reasons, wanting to make trouble for me in prison.
18But it doesn't matter. The important thing is that in every
way, whether for right or wrong reasons, they are preaching
about Christ. So I am happy, and I will continue to be happy.
19Because you are praying for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ
is helping me, I know this trouble will bring my freedom. 20I
expect and hope that I will not fail Christ in anything but that I
will have the courage now, as always, to show the greatness of
Christ in my life here on earth, whether I live or die. 21To me
the only important thing about living is Christ, and dying would
be profit for me. 22If I continue living in my body, I will be able
to work for the Lord. I do not know what to choose—living or
dying. 23It is hard to choose between the two. I want to leave
this life and be with Christ, which is much better, 24but you
need me here in my body. 25Since I am sure of this, I know I will
stay with you to help you grow and have joy in your faith. 26You
will be very happy in Christ Jesus when I am with you again.
27Only one thing concerns me: Be sure that you live in a way
that brings honor to the Good News of Christ. Then whether I
come and visit you or am away from you, I will hear that you are
standing strong with one purpose, that you work together as
one for the faith of the Good News, 28and that you are not afraid
of those who are against you. All of this is proof that your
enemies will be destroyed but that you will be saved by God.
29God gave you the honor not only of believing in Christ but also
of suffering for him, both of which bring glory to Christ. 30When

I was with you, you saw the struggles I had, and you hear about the struggles I am having now. You yourselves are having the same kind of struggles.
2 Does your life in Christ give you strength? Does his love comfort you? Do we share together in the spirit? Do you have mercy and kindness? 2If so, make me very happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and having one mind and purpose. 3When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead, be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. 4Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.

# October 7

## What Love Does

*Christ ... did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit. But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He was born as a man and became like a servant.*

Philippians 2:6–7

would you do what Jesus did? He swapped a spotless castle for a grimy stable. He exchanged the worship of angels for the company of killers. He could hold the universe in his palm but gave it up to float in the womb of a maiden.

If you were God, would you sleep on straw, nurse from a breast, and be clothed in a diaper? I wouldn't, but Christ did.

If you knew that only a few would care that you came, would you still come? If you knew that those you loved would laugh in your face, would you still care? ... Christ did.

He humbled himself. He went from commanding angels to sleeping in the straw. From holding stars to clutching Mary's finger. The palm that held the universe took the nail of a soldier.

Why? Because that's what love does. It puts the beloved before itself.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### Isaiah 65:1—66:24

#### *All People Will Learn About God*

65 The LORD says, "I made myself known to
people who were not looking for me.
I was found by those who were not asking me for help.

I said, ‘Here I am. Here I am,’
to a nation that was not praying to me.

2 All day long I stood ready to accept
people who turned against me,

but the way they continue to live is not good;
they do anything they want to do.

3 Right in front of me
they continue to do things that make me angry.
They offer sacrifices to their gods in their gardens,
and they burn incense on altars of brick.

4 They sit among the graves
and spend their nights waiting to get messages from the dead.

They eat the meat of pigs,
and their pots are full of soup made from meat that is wrong to eat.

5 But they tell others, ‘Stay away, and don’t come near me.
I am too holy for you.’

These people are like smoke in my nose.
Like a fire that burns all the time, they continue to make me angry.

6 “Look, it is written here before me.
I will not be quiet; instead, I will repay you in full.
I will punish you for what you have done.

7 I will punish you for your sins and your ancestors’ sins,”
says the LORD.

“They burned incense to gods on the mountains
and shamed me on those hills.

So I will punish them as they should be punished
for what they did.”

8This is what the LORD says:

“When there is juice left in the grapes,
people do not destroy them,
because they know there is good left in them.

So I will do the same thing to my servants—
I will not completely destroy them.

9I will leave some of the children of Jacob,
and some of the people of Judah will receive my mountain.

I will choose the people who will live there;
my servants will live there.

10Then the Plain of Sharon will be a field for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor will be a place for herds to rest.
They will be for the people who want to follow me.

11“But as for you who left the LORD,
who forgot about my holy mountain,

who worship the god Luck,
who hold religious feasts for the god Fate,

12I decide your fate, and I will punish you with my sword.
You will all be killed,

because I called you, but you refused to answer.
I spoke to you, but you wouldn’t listen.

You did the things I said were evil
and chose to do things that displease me.”

13 So this is what the Lord God says:

"My servants will eat,
but you evil people will be hungry.

My servants will drink,
but you evil people will be thirsty.

My servants will be happy,
but you evil people will be shamed.

14 My servants will shout for joy
because of the goodness of their hearts,

but you evil people will cry,
because you will be sad.
You will cry loudly, because your spirits will be broken.

15 Your names will be like curses to my servants,
and the Lord God will put you to death.
But he will call his servants by another name.

16 People in the land who ask for blessings
will ask for them from the faithful God.

And people in the land who make a promise
will promise in the name of the faithful God,

because the troubles of the past will be forgotten.
I will make those troubles go away.

## *A New Time Is Coming*

17 "Look, I will make new heavens and a new earth,
and people will not remember the past

or think about those things.

18 My people will be happy forever
because of the things I will make.

I will make a Jerusalem that is full of joy,
and I will make her people a delight.

19 Then I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and be delighted with my people.

There will never again be heard in that city
the sounds of crying and sadness.

20 There will never be a baby from that city
who lives only a few days.

And there will never be an older person
who doesn't have a long life.

A person who lives a hundred years will be called young,
and a person who dies before he is a hundred will be thought of as a sinner.

21 In that city those who build houses will live there.
Those who plant vineyards will get to eat their grapes.

22 No more will one person build a house and someone else live there.
One person will not plant a garden and someone else eat its fruit.

My people will live a long time,
as trees live long.

My chosen people will live there
and enjoy the things they make.

[23]They will never again work for nothing.
They will never again give birth to children who die young.

All my people will be blessed by the LORD;
they and their children will be blessed.

[24]I will provide for their needs before they ask,
and I will help them while they are still asking for help.

[25]Wolves and lambs will eat together in peace.
Lions will eat hay like oxen,
and a snake on the ground will not hurt anyone.

They will not hurt or destroy each other
on all my holy mountain,”

says the LORD.

## *The LORD Will Judge All Nations*

[66] This is what the LORD says: “Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.

So do you think you can build a house for me?
Do I need a place to rest?

[2]My hand made all things.
All things are here because I made them,”

says the LORD.

“These are the people I am pleased with:
those who are not proud or stubborn
and who fear my word.

[3]But those people who kill bulls as a sacrifice to me
are like those who kill people.

Those who kill sheep as a sacrifice
are like those who break the necks of dogs.

Those who give me grain offerings
are like those who offer me the blood of pigs.[n]

Those who burn incense
are like those who worship idols.

These people choose their own ways, not mine,
and they love the terrible things they do.

[4]So I will choose their punishments,
and I will punish them with what they fear most.

This is because I called to them, but they did not listen.
I spoke to them, but they did not hear me.

They did things I said were evil;
they chose to do things I did not like.”

[5]You people who obey the words of the LORD,
listen to what he says:

“Your brothers hated you
and turned against you because you followed me.

Your brothers said, ‘Let the LORD be honored
so we may see you rejoice,’
but they will be punished.

[6]Listen to the loud noise coming from the city;
hear the noise from the Temple.

It is the LORD punishing his enemies,
giving them the punishment they should have.

7“A woman does not give birth before she feels the pain;
she does not give birth to a son before the pain starts.

8No one has ever heard of that happening;
no one has ever seen that happen.

In the same way no one ever saw a country begin in one day;
no one has ever heard of a new nation beginning in one moment.

But Jerusalem will give birth to her children
just as soon as she feels the birth pains.

9In the same way I will not cause pain
without allowing something new to be born,” says the LORD.

“If I cause you the pain,
I will not stop you from giving birth to your new nation,” says your God.

10“Jerusalem, rejoice.
All you people who love Jerusalem, be happy.

Those of you who felt sad for Jerusalem
should now feel happy with her.

11You will take comfort from her and be satisfied,
as a child is nursed by its mother.

You will receive her good things
and enjoy her wealth.”

12This is what the LORD says:

“I will give her peace that will flow to her like a river.
The wealth of the nations will come to her like a river
overflowing its banks.

Like babies you will be nursed and held in my arms
and bounced on my knees.

13 I will comfort you
as a mother comforts her child.
You will be comforted in Jerusalem.”

14 When you see these things, you will be happy,
and you will grow like the grass.

The LORD’s servants will see his power,
but his enemies will see his anger.

15 Look, the LORD is coming with fire
and his armies with clouds of dust.

He will punish those people with his anger;
he will punish them with flames of fire.

16 The LORD will judge the people with fire,
and he will destroy many people with his sword;
he will kill many people.

17 “These people make themselves holy and pure to go to
worship their gods in their gardens. Following each other into
their special gardens, they eat the meat of pigs and rats and
other hateful things. But they will all be destroyed together,”
says the LORD.
18 “I know they have evil thoughts and do evil things, so I am
coming to punish them. I will gather all nations and all people,
and they will come together and see my glory.
19 “I will put a mark on some of the people, and I will send
some of these saved people to the nations: to Tarshish, Libya,
Lud (the land of archers), Tubal, Greece, and all the faraway
lands. These people have never heard about what I have done
nor seen my glory. So the saved people will tell the nations
about my glory. 20 And they will bring all your fellow Israelites

from all nations to my holy mountain in Jerusalem. Your fellow Israelites will come on horses, donkeys, and camels and in chariots and wagons. They will be like the grain offerings that the people bring in clean containers to the Temple," says the LORD. [21]"And I will choose even some of these people to be priests and Levites," says the LORD.

[22]"I will make new heavens and the new earth, which will last forever," says the LORD. "In the same way, your names and your children will always be with me. [23]All people will come to worship me every Sabbath and every New Moon," says the LORD. [24]"They will go out and see the dead bodies of the people who sinned against me. The worms that eat them will never die, and the fires that burn them will never stop, and everyone will hate to see those bodies."

## Psalm 116:1–4

### *Thanksgiving for Escaping Death*

116 I love the LORD, because he listens to my prayers for help.

2He paid attention to me,
so I will call to him for help as long as I live.

3The ropes of death bound me,
and the fear of the grave took hold of me.
I was troubled and sad.

4Then I called out the name of the LORD.
I said, "Please, LORD, save me!"

## Proverbs 26:28

28Liars hate the people they hurt,
and false praise can ruin others.

# Philippians 2:5–30

## *Be Unselfish Like Christ*

5 In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus.

6 Christ himself was like God in everything.
But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit.

7 But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing.
He was born as a man
and became like a servant.

8 And when he was living as a man,
he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God,
even when that caused his death—death on a cross.

9 So God raised him to the highest place.
God made his name greater than every other name

10 so that every knee will bow to the name of Jesus—
everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

11 And everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord
and bring glory to God the Father.

## *Be the People God Wants You to Be*

12 My dear friends, you have always obeyed God when I was with you. It is even more important that you obey now while I am away from you. Keep on working to complete your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 because God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him.
14 Do everything without complaining or arguing. 15 Then you will be innocent and without any wrong. You will be God's children without fault. But you are living with crooked and

mean people all around you, among whom you shine like stars in the dark world. [16]You offer the teaching that gives life. So when Christ comes again, I can be happy because my work was not wasted. I ran the race and won.

[17]Your faith makes you offer your lives as a sacrifice in serving God. If I have to offer my own blood with your sacrifice, I will be happy and full of joy with all of you. [18]You also should be happy and full of joy with me.

## *Timothy and Epaphroditus*

[19]I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon. I will be happy to learn how you are. [20]I have no one else like Timothy, who truly cares for you. [21]Other people are interested only in their own lives, not in the work of Jesus Christ. [22]You know the kind of person Timothy is. You know he has served with me in telling the Good News, as a son serves his father. [23]I plan to send him to you quickly when I know what will happen to me. [24]I am sure that the Lord will help me to come to you soon.

[25]Epaphroditus, my brother in Christ, works and serves with me in the army of Christ. When I needed help, you sent him to me. I think now that I must send him back to you, [26]because he wants very much to see all of you. He is worried because you heard that he was sick. [27]Yes, he was sick, and nearly died, but God had mercy on him and me too so that I would not have more sadness. [28]I want very much to send him to you so that when you see him you can be happy, and I can stop worrying about you. [29]Welcome him in the Lord with much joy. Give honor to people like him, [30]because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to give me the help you could not give in your service to me.

# October 8

## The Other Side of the River

*I want to know Christ and the power that raised him from the dead … Then I have hope that I myself will be raised from the dead.*

Philippians 3:10–11

Jesus saw people enslaved by their fear of death. He explained that the river of death was nothing to fear. The people wouldn't believe him. He touched a boy and called him back to life. The followers were still unconvinced. He whispered life into the dead body of a girl. The people were still cynical. He let a dead man spend four days in a grave and then called him out. Is that enough? Apparently not. For it was necessary for him to enter the river, to submerge himself in the water of death before people would believe that death had been conquered.

But after he did, after he came out on the other side of death's river, it was time to sing … it was time to celebrate.

from *Six Hours One Friday*

## Jeremiah 1:1—2:37

1 These are the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah. He belonged
to the family of priests who lived in the town of Anathoth in the
land of Benjamin. 2The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah during
the thirteenth year that Josiah son of Amon was king of Judah.
3The LORD also spoke to Jeremiah while Jehoiakim son of Josiah
was king of Judah and during the eleven years that Zedekiah
son of Josiah was king of Judah. In the fifth month of his last
year, the people of Jerusalem were taken away as captives.

### *The LORD Calls Jeremiah*

4The LORD spoke his word to me, saying:

5 “Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you.
Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work.
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

6 Then I said, “But Lord God, I don’t know how to speak. I am only a boy.”
7 But the LORD said to me, “Don’t say, ‘I am only a boy.’ You must go everywhere I send you, and you must say everything I tell you to say. 8 Don’t be afraid of anyone, because I am with you to protect you,” says the LORD.
9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth. He said to me, “See, I am putting my words in your mouth. 10 Today I have put you in charge of nations and kingdoms. You will pull up and tear down, destroy and overthrow, build up and plant.”

## *Jeremiah Sees Two Visions*

11 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: “Jeremiah, what do you see?”
I answered, “I see a stick of almond wood.”
12 The LORD said to me, “You have seen correctly, because I am watching to make sure my words come true.”
13 The LORD spoke his word to me again: “What do you see?”
I answered, “I see a pot of boiling water, tipping over from the north.”
14 The LORD said to me, “Disaster will come from the north and strike all the people who live in this country. 15 In a short time I will call all of the people in the northern kingdoms,” said the LORD.

“Those kings will come and set up their thrones
near the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem.

They will attack all the city walls around Jerusalem
and all the cities in Judah.

16 And I will announce my judgments against my people
because of their evil in turning away from me.

They offered sacrifices to other gods
and worshiped idols they had made with their own hands.

17 “Jeremiah, get ready. Stand up and tell them everything I

command you to say. Don’t be afraid of the people, or I will give you good reason to be afraid of them. 18Today I am going to make you a strong city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall. You will be able to stand against everyone in the land: Judah’s kings, officers, priests, and the people of the land. 19They will fight against you, but they will not defeat you, because I am with you to protect you!” says the LORD.

## *Israel Turns from God*

2 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2“Go and speak to the people of Jerusalem, saying: This is what the LORD says:

‘I remember how faithful you were to me when you were a young nation.
You loved me like a young bride.

You followed me through the desert,
a land that had never been planted.

3The people of Israel were holy to the LORD,
like the firstfruits from his harvest.

Those who tried to hurt Israel were judged guilty.
Disasters struck them,’” says the LORD.

4Hear the word of the LORD, family of Jacob,
all you family groups of Israel.

5This is what the LORD says:

“I was fair to your ancestors,
so why did they turn away from me?

Your ancestors worshiped useless idols
and became useless themselves.

6Your ancestors didn’t say,
‘Where is the LORD who brought us out of Egypt?

He led us through the desert,
through a dry and rocky land,

through a dark and dangerous land.
He led us where no one travels or lives.’

7 I brought you into a fertile land
so you could eat its fruit and produce.

But you came and made my land unclean;
you made it a hateful place.

8 The priests didn’t ask,
‘Where is the LORD?’

The people who know the teachings didn’t know me.
The leaders turned against me.

The prophets prophesied in the name of Baal
and worshiped useless idols.

9 “So now I will again tell what I have against you,” says the LORD.
“And I will tell what I have against your grandchildren.

10 Go across the sea to the island of Cyprus and see.
Send someone to the land of Kedar to look closely.
See if there has ever been anything like this.

11 Has a nation ever exchanged its gods?
(Of course, its gods are not really gods at all.)

But my people have exchanged their glorious God
for idols worth nothing.

12 Skies, be shocked at the things that have happened

and shake with great fear!” says the LORD.

13 “My people have done two evils:

They have turned away from me,
the spring of living water.

And they have dug their own wells,
which are broken wells that cannot hold water.

14 Have the people of Israel become slaves?
Have they become like someone who was born a slave?
Why were they taken captive?

15 Enemies have roared like lions at Israel;
they have growled at Israel.

They have destroyed the land of Israel.
The cities of Israel lie in ruins,
and all the people have left.

16 The men from the cities of Memphis and Tahpanhes
have disgraced you by shaving the top of your head.

17 Haven’t you brought this on yourselves
by turning away from the LORD your God
when he was leading you in the right way?

18 It did not help to go to Egypt
and drink from the Shihor River.

It did not help to go to Assyria
and drink from the Euphrates River.

19 Your evil will bring punishment to you,
and the wrong you have done will teach you a lesson.

Think about it and understand
that it is a terrible evil to turn away from the LORD your God.
It is wrong not to fear me,”
says the Lord God All-Powerful.

20“Long ago you refused to obey me as an ox breaks its yoke.
You broke the ropes I used to hold you
and said, ‘I will not serve you!’

In fact, on every high hill
and under every green tree
you lay down as a prostitute.

21But I planted you as a special vine,
as a very good seed.

How then did you turn
into a wild vine that grows bad fruit?

22Although you wash yourself with cleanser
and use much soap,
I can still see the stain of your guilt,” says the Lord God.

23“How can you say to me, ‘I am not guilty.
I have not worshiped the Baal idols’?

Look at the things you did in the valley.
Think about what you have done.

You are like a she-camel in mating season
that runs from place to place.

24You are like a wild donkey that lives in the desert
and sniffs the wind at mating time.
At that time who can hold her back?

Any male who chases her will easily catch her;

at mating time, it is easy to find her.

25 Don’t run until your feet are bare
or until your throat is dry.

But you say, ‘It’s no use!
I love those other gods,
and I must chase them!’

26 “A thief is ashamed when someone catches him stealing.
In the same way, the family of Israel is ashamed—

they, their kings, their officers,
their priests, and their prophets.

27 They say to things of wood, ‘You are my father,’
and to idols of stone, ‘You gave birth to me.’

Those people won’t look at me;
they have turned their backs to me.

But when they get into trouble, they say,
‘Come and save us!’

28 Where are the idols you made for yourselves?
Let them come and save you
when you are in trouble!

People of Judah, you have as many idols
as you have towns!

29 “Why do you complain to me?
All of you have turned against me,” says the LORD.

30 “I punished your people, but it did not help.
They didn’t come back when they were punished.

With your swords you killed your prophets
like a hungry lion.

31 “People of Judah, pay attention to the word of the LORD:

Have I been like a desert to the people of Israel
or like a dark and dangerous land?

Why do my people say, ‘We are free to wander.
We won’t come to you anymore’?

32 A young woman does not forget her jewelry,
and a bride does not forget the decorations for her dress.

But my people have forgotten me
for more days than can be counted.

33 You really know how to chase after love.
Even the worst women can learn evil ways from you.

34 Even on your clothes you have the blood
of poor and innocent people,
but they weren’t thieves you caught breaking in.

You do all these things,
35 but you say, ‘I am innocent.
God is not angry with me.’

But I will judge you guilty of lying,
because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’

36 It is so easy for you to change your mind.
Even Egypt will let you down,
as Assyria let you down.

37 You will eventually leave that place

with your hands on your head, like captives.

You trusted those countries,
but you will not be helped by them,

because the LORD has rejected them.

## Psalm 116:5–14

5 The LORD is kind and does what is right;
our God is merciful.

6 The LORD watches over the foolish;
when I was helpless, he saved me.

7 I said to myself, “Relax,
because the LORD takes care of you.”

8 LORD, you saved me from death.
You stopped my eyes from crying;
you kept me from being defeated.

9 So I will walk with the LORD
in the land of the living.

10 I believed, so I said,
“I am completely ruined.”

11 In my distress I said,
“All people are liars.”

12 What can I give the LORD
for all the good things he has given to me?

13 I will lift up the cup of salvation,
and I will pray to the LORD.

14 I will give the LORD what I promised
in front of all his people.

## Proverbs 27:1

27 Don't brag about tomorrow;
you don't know what may happen then.

## Philippians 3:1–21

### *The Importance of Christ*

3 My brothers and sisters, be full of joy in the Lord. It is no
trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it will
help you to be more ready. 2 Watch out for those who do evil,
who are like dogs, who demand to cut[n] the body. 3 We are the
ones who are truly circumcised. We worship God through his
Spirit, and our pride is in Christ Jesus. We do not put trust in
ourselves or anything we can do, 4 although I might be able to
put trust in myself. If anyone thinks he has a reason to trust in
himself, he should know that I have greater reason for trusting
in myself. 5 I was circumcised eight days after my birth. I am
from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. I am a
Hebrew, and my parents were Hebrews. I had a strict view of
the law, which is why I became a Pharisee. 6 I was so
enthusiastic I tried to hurt the church. No one could find fault
with the way I obeyed the law of Moses. 7 Those things were
important to me, but now I think they are worth nothing
because of Christ. 8 Not only those things, but I think that all
things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of
knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him, I have lost all
those things, and now I know they are worthless trash. This
allows me to have Christ 9 and to belong to him. Now I am right
with God, not because I followed the law, but because I believed
in Christ. God uses my faith to make me right with him. 10 I want
to know Christ and the power that raised him from the dead. I

want to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death. [11]Then I have hope that I myself will be raised from the dead.

## *Continuing Toward Our Goal*

[12]I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal, but I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that, which is the reason he made me his. [13]Brothers and sisters, I know that I have not yet reached that goal, but there is one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead, [14]I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize for which God called me through Christ to the life above.

[15]All of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, too. And if there are things you do not agree with, God will make them clear to you. [16]But we should continue following the truth we already have.

[17]Brothers and sisters, all of you should try to follow my example and to copy those who live the way we showed you. [18]Many people live like enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often told you about them, and it makes me cry to tell you about them now. [19]In the end, they will be destroyed. They do whatever their bodies want, they are proud of their shameful acts, and they think only about earthly things. [20]But our homeland is in heaven, and we are waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. [21]By his power to rule all things, he will change our humble bodies and make them like his own glorious body.

# October 9

## Store Up the Sweet

*Think about the things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected.*

Philippians 4:8

change the thoughts, and you change the person. If today's thoughts are tomorrow's actions, what happens when we fill our minds with thoughts of God's love? Will standing beneath the downpour of his grace change the way we feel about others?

Paul says absolutely! It's not enough to keep the bad stuff out. We've got to let the good stuff in. It's not enough to keep no list of wrongs. We have to cultivate a list of blessings: "Think about the things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected." *Thinking* conveys the idea of pondering—studying and focusing, allowing what is viewed to have an impact on us.

Rather than store up the sour, store up the sweet.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Jeremiah 3:1—4:31

### *Judah Is Unfaithful*

3 "If a man divorces his wife
and she leaves him and marries another man,

should her first husband come back to her again?
If he went back to her, wouldn't the land become completely unclean?

But you have acted like a prostitute with many lovers,
and now you want to come back to me?” says the LORD.

2 “Look up to the bare hilltops, Judah.
Is there any place where you have not been a prostitute?

You have sat by the road waiting for lovers,
like an Arab in the desert.

You made the land unclean,
because you did evil and were like a prostitute.

3 So the rain has not come,
and there have not been any spring rains.

But your face still looks like the face of a prostitute.
You refuse even to be ashamed of what you did.

4 Now you are calling to me,
‘My father, you have been my friend since I was young.

5 Will you always be angry at me?
Will your anger last forever?’

Judah, you said this,
but you did as much evil as you could!”

## *Judah and Israel Are like Sisters*

6 When King Josiah was ruling Judah, the LORD said to me, “Did you see what unfaithful Israel did? She was like a prostitute with her idols on every hill and under every green tree. 7 I said to myself, ‘Israel will come back to me after she does this evil,’ but she didn’t come back. And Israel’s wicked sister Judah saw what she did. 8 Judah saw that I divorced unfaithful Israel because of her adultery, but that didn’t make Israel’s wicked sister Judah afraid. She also went out and acted like a prostitute! 9 And she didn’t care that she was acting like a prostitute. So she made her country unclean and was guilty of

adultery, because she worshiped idols made of stone and wood.
10 Israel's wicked sister didn't even come back to me with her
whole heart, but only pretended," says the Lord.
11 The LORD said to me, "Unfaithful Israel had a better excuse
than wicked Judah. 12 Go and speak this message toward the
north:

'Come back, unfaithful people of Israel,' says the LORD.
'I will stop being angry at you,

because I am full of mercy,' says the LORD.
'I will not be angry with you forever.

13 All you have to do is admit your sin—
that you turned against the LORD your God

and worshiped gods under every green tree
and didn't obey me,'" says the LORD.

14 "Come back to me, you unfaithful children," says the LORD,
"because I am your master. I will take one person from every
city and two from every family group, and I will bring you to
Jerusalem. 15 Then I will give you new rulers who will be faithful
to me, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.
16 In those days there will be many of you in the land," says the
LORD. "At that time people will no longer say, 'I remember the
Ark of the Agreement.' They won't think about it anymore or
remember it or miss it or make another one. 17 At that time
people will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all
nations will come together in Jerusalem to show respect to the
LORD. They will not follow their stubborn, evil hearts anymore.
18 In those days the family of Judah will join the family of Israel.
They will come together from a land in the north to the land I
gave their ancestors.
19 "I, the LORD, said,

'How happy I would be to treat you as my own children
and give you a pleasant land,
a land more beautiful than that of any other nation.'

I thought you would call me 'My Father'
and not turn away from me.

[20]But like a woman who is unfaithful to her husband,
family of Israel, you have been unfaithful to me," says the LORD.

[21]You can hear crying on the bare hilltops.
It is the people of Israel crying and praying for mercy.

They have become very evil
and have forgotten the LORD their God.

[22]"Come back to me, you unfaithful children,
and I will forgive you for being unfaithful."

"Yes, we will come to you,
because you are the LORD our God.

[23]It was foolish to worship idols on the hills
and on the mountains.

Surely the salvation of Israel
comes from the LORD our God.

[24]Since our youth, shameful gods have eaten up in sacrifice
everything our ancestors worked for—
their flocks and herds,
their sons and daughters.

[25]Let us lie down in our shame,
and let our disgrace cover us like a blanket.

We have sinned against the LORD our God,
both we and our ancestors.

From our youth until now,
we have not obeyed the LORD our God."

4 “If you will return, Israel, then return to me,” says the LORD.

“If you will throw away your idols that I hate,
then don’t wander away from me.

2If you say when you make a promise,
‘As surely as the LORD lives,’
and you can say it in a truthful, honest, and right way,

then the nations will be blessed by him,
and they will praise him for what he has done.”

3This is what the LORD says to the people of Judah and to Jerusalem:

“Plow your unplowed fields,
and don’t plant seeds among thorns.

4Give yourselves to the service of the LORD,
and decide to obey him,
people of Judah and people of Jerusalem.

If you don’t, my anger will spread among you like a fire,
and no one will be able to put it out,
because of the evil you have done.

## *Trouble from the North*

5“Announce this message in Judah and say it in Jerusalem:
‘Blow the trumpet throughout the country!’

Shout out loud and say,
‘Come together!
Let’s all escape to the strong, walled cities!’

6Raise the signal flag toward Jerusalem!

Run for your lives, and don't wait,

because I am bringing disaster from the north
There will be terrible destruction."

7 A lion has come out of his den;
a destroyer of nations has begun to march.

He has left his home
to destroy your land.

Your towns will be destroyed
with no one left to live in them.

8 So put on rough cloth,
show how sad you are, and cry loudly.

The terrible anger of the LORD
has not turned away from us.

9 "When this happens," says the LORD,
"the king and officers will lose their courage.

The priests will be terribly afraid,
and the prophets will be shocked!"

10 Then I said, "Lord God, you have tricked the people of Judah and Jerusalem. You said, 'You will have peace,' but now the sword is pointing at our throats!"

11 At that time this message will be given to Judah and Jerusalem: "A hot wind blows from the bare hilltops of the desert toward the LORD's people. It is not a gentle wind to separate grain from chaff. 12 I feel a stronger wind than that. Now even I will announce judgments against the people of Judah."

13 Look! The enemy rises up like a cloud,
and his chariots come like a tornado.

His horses are faster than eagles.
How terrible it will be for us! We are ruined!

14 People of Jerusalem, clean the evil from your hearts so that you can be saved.
Don't continue making evil plans.

15 A voice from Dan makes an announcement
and brings bad news from the mountains of Ephraim.

16 "Report this to the nations.
Spread this news in Jerusalem:

'Invaders are coming from a faraway country,
shouting words of war against the cities of Judah.

17 The enemy has surrounded Jerusalem as men guard a field,
because Judah turned against me,'" says the LORD.

18 "The way you have lived and acted
has brought this trouble to you.

This is your punishment.
How terrible it is!
The pain stabs your heart!"

## *Jeremiah's Cry*

19 Oh, how I hurt! How I hurt!
I am bent over in pain.

Oh, the torture in my heart!
My heart is pounding inside me.
I cannot keep quiet,

because I have heard the sound of the trumpet.
I have heard the shouts of war.

20 Disaster follows disaster;
the whole country has been destroyed.

My tents are destroyed in only a moment.
My curtains are torn down quickly.

21 How long must I look at the war flag?
How long must I listen to the war trumpet?

22 The LORD says, “My people are foolish.
They do not know me.

They are stupid children;
they don’t understand.

They are skillful at doing evil,
but they don’t know how to do good.”

## *Disaster Is Coming*

23 I looked at the earth,
and it was empty and had no shape.

I looked at the sky,
and its light was gone.

24 I looked at the mountains,
and they were shaking.
All the hills were trembling.

25 I looked, and there were no people.
Every bird in the sky had flown away.

26 I looked, and the good, rich land had become a desert.
All its towns had been destroyed
by the LORD and his great anger.

27 This is what the LORD says:

"All the land will be ruined,
but I will not completely destroy it.

28 So the people in the land will cry loudly,
and the sky will grow dark,

because I have spoken and will not change my mind.
I have made a decision, and I will not change it."

29 At the sound of the horsemen and the archers,
all the people in the towns run away.

They hide in the thick bushes
and climb up into the rocks.

All of the cities of Judah are empty;
no one lives in them.

30 Judah, you destroyed nation, what are you doing?
Why do you put on your finest dress
and decorate yourself with gold jewelry?

Why do you put color around your eyes?
You make yourself beautiful, but it is all useless.

Your lovers hate you;
they want to kill you.

31 I hear a cry like a woman having a baby,
distress like a woman having her first child.

It is the sound of Jerusalem gasping for breath.
She lifts her hands in prayer and says,

“Oh! I am about to faint
before my murderers!”

## Psalm 116:15–19

15 The death of one that belongs to the LORD
is precious in his sight.

16 LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant and the son of your female servant.
You have freed me from my chains.

17 I will give you an offering to show thanks to you,
and I will pray to the LORD.

18 I will give the LORD what I promised
in front of all his people,

19 in the Temple courtyards
in Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 27:2

2 Don’t praise yourself. Let someone else do it.
Let the praise come from a stranger and not from your own mouth.

# Philippians 4:1–23

## *What the Christians Are to Do*

4 My dear brothers and sisters, I love you and want to see you.
You bring me joy and make me proud of you, so stand strong in
the Lord as I have told you.
2I ask Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3And I ask
you, my faithful friend, to help these women. They served with
me in telling the Good News, together with Clement and others
who worked with me, whose names are written in the book of
life.[n]
4Be full of joy in the Lord always. I will say again, be full of
joy.
5Let everyone see that you are gentle and kind. The Lord is
coming soon. 6Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask
God for everything you need, always giving thanks. 7And God's
peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your
hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
8Brothers and sisters, think about the things that are good
and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and
honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected. 9Do
what you learned and received from me, what I told you, and
what you saw me do. And the God who gives peace will be with
you.

## *Paul Thanks the Christians*

10I am very happy in the Lord that you have shown your care
for me again. You continued to care about me, but there was no
way for you to show it. 11I am not telling you this because I
need anything. I have learned to be satisfied with the things I
have and with everything that happens. 12I know how to live
when I am poor, and I know how to live when I have plenty. I
have learned the secret of being happy at any time in
everything that happens, when I have enough to eat and when I
go hungry, when I have more than I need and when I do not
have enough. 13I can do all things through Christ, because he
gives me strength.
14But it was good that you helped me when I needed it. 15You
Philippians remember when I first preached the Good News
there. When I left Macedonia, you were the only church that
gave me help. 16Several times you sent me things I needed
when I was in Thessalonica. 17Really, it is not that I want to
receive gifts from you, but I want you to have the good that

comes from giving. [18]And now I have everything, and more. I have all I need, because Epaphroditus brought your gift to me. It is like a sweet-smelling sacrifice offered to God, who accepts that sacrifice and is pleased with it. [19]My God will use his wonderful riches in Christ Jesus to give you everything you need. [20]Glory to our God and Father forever and ever! Amen.

[21]Greet each of God's people in Christ Jesus. Those who are with me send greetings to you. [22]All of God's people greet you, particularly those from the palace of Caesar.

[23]The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

# October 10

## God Created All Things

*Through his power all things were made—things in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, all powers, authorities, lords, and rulers. All things were made through Christ and for Christ.*

Colossians 1:16

what a phenomenal list! Things in heaven and earth. Seen and unseen. Powers, lords, rulers, and authorities. No thing, place, or person omitted. The scale on the sea urchin. The hair on the elephant hide. The hurricane that wrecks the coast, the rain that nourishes the desert, the infant's first heartbeat, the elderly person's final breath—all can be traced back to the hand of Christ, the firstborn of creation.

Firstborn in Paul's vernacular has nothing to do with birth order. Firstborn refers to order of rank. "He ranks higher than everything that has been made" (Colossians 1:15). Everything? Find an exception. Peter's mother-in-law has a fever; Jesus rebukes it. A tax needs to be paid; Jesus pays it by sending first a coin and then a fisherman's hook into the mouth of a fish. Jesus … bats an eyelash, and nature jumps.

from *Next Door Savior*

### Jeremiah 5:1—6:30

### *No One Is Right*

5 The LORD says, "Walk up and down the streets
of Jerusalem.
Look around and discover these things.
Search the public squares of the city.

If you can find one person who does honest things,
who searches for the truth,
I will forgive this city.

2 Although the people say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives!’
they don’t really mean it.”

3 LORD, don’t you look for truth in people?

You struck the people of Judah,
but they didn’t feel any pain.

You crushed them,
but they refused to learn what is right.

They became more stubborn than a rock;
they refused to turn back to God.

4 But I thought,
“These are only the poor, foolish people.

They have not learned the way of the LORD
and what their God wants them to do.

5 So I will go to the leaders of Judah
and talk to them.

Surely they understand the way of the LORD
and know what God wants them to do.”

But even the leaders had all joined together to break away from the LORD;
they had broken their ties with him.

6 So a lion from the forest will attack them.
A wolf from the desert will kill them.

A leopard is waiting for them near their towns.
    It will tear to pieces anyone who comes out of the city,

because the people of Judah have sinned greatly.
    They have wandered away from the LORD many times.

7 The LORD said, “Tell me why I should forgive you.
    Your children have left me
    and have made promises to idols that are not gods at all.

I gave your children everything they needed,
    but they still were like an unfaithful wife to me.
    They spent much time in houses of prostitutes.

8 They are like well-fed horses filled with sexual desire;
    each one wants another man’s wife.

9 Shouldn’t I punish the people of Judah for doing these things?” says the LORD.
    “Shouldn’t I give a nation such as this the punishment it deserves?

10 “Go along and cut down Judah’s vineyards,
    but do not completely destroy them.

Cut off all her people as if they were branches,
    because they do not belong to the LORD.

11 The families of Israel and Judah
    have been completely unfaithful to me,” says the LORD.

12 Those people have lied about the LORD
    and said, “He will not do anything to us!

Nothing bad will happen to us!
    We will never see war or hunger!

13 The prophets are like an empty wind;
the word of God is not in them.
Let the bad things they say happen to them.”

14 So this is what the LORD God All-Powerful says:

“The people said I would not punish them.
So, the words I give you will be like fire,
and these people will be like wood that it burns up.

15 Listen, family of Israel,” says the LORD,
“I will soon bring a nation from far away to attack you.

It is an old nation that has lasted a long time.
The people there speak a language you do not know;
you cannot understand what they say.

16 Their arrows bring death.
All their people are strong warriors.

17 They will eat your crops and your food.
They will eat your sons and daughters.

They will eat your flocks and herds.
They will eat your grapes and figs.

They will destroy with their swords
the strong, walled cities you trust.

18 “Yet even then,” says the LORD, “I will not destroy you completely. 19 When the people of Judah ask, ‘Why has the LORD our God done all these terrible things to us?’ then give them this answer: ‘You have left the LORD and served foreign idols in your own land. So now you will serve foreigners in a land that does not belong to you.’

20 “Announce this message to the family of Jacob,
and tell it to the nation of Judah:

[21]Hear this message, you foolish people who have no sense.
They have eyes, but they don't really see.
They have ears, but they don't really listen.

[22]Surely you are afraid of me," says the LORD.
"You should shake with fear in my presence.

I am the one who made the beaches to be a border for the sea,
a border the water can never go past.

The waves may pound the beach, but they can't win over it.
They may roar, but they cannot go beyond it.

[23]But the people of Judah are stubborn and have turned against me.
They have turned aside and gone away from me.

[24]They do not say to themselves,
'We should fear the LORD our God,

who gives us autumn and spring rains in their seasons,
who makes sure we have the harvest at the right time.'

[25]But your evil has kept away both rain and harvest.
Your sins have kept you from enjoying good things.

[26]There are wicked men among my people.
Like those who make nets for catching birds,
they set their traps to catch people.

[27]Like cages full of birds,
their houses are full of lies.

They have become rich and powerful.
[28] They have grown big and fat.

There is no end to the evil things they do.
They won't plead the case of the orphan
or help the poor be judged fairly.

29 Shouldn't I punish the people of Judah for doing these
things?" says the LORD.
"Shouldn't I give a nation such as this the punishment it
deserves?

30 "A terrible and shocking thing
has happened in the land of Judah:

31 The prophets speak lies,
and the priests take power into their own hands,

and my people love it this way.
But what will you do when the end comes?

## *Jerusalem Is Surrounded*

6 "Run for your lives, people of Benjamin!
Run away from Jerusalem!

Blow the war trumpet in the town of Tekoa!
Raise the warning flag over the town of Beth Hakkerem!

Disaster is coming from the north;
terrible destruction is coming to you.

2 Jerusalem, I will destroy you,
you who are fragile and gentle.

3 Shepherds with their flocks will come against Jerusalem.
They will set up their tents all around her,
each shepherd taking care of his own section."

[4]They say, “Get ready to fight against Jerusalem!
Get up! We will attack at noon!

But it is already getting late;
the evening shadows are growing long.

[5]So get up! We will attack at night.
We will destroy the strong towers of Jerusalem!”

[6]This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

“Cut down the trees around Jerusalem,
and build an attack ramp to the top of its walls.

This city must be punished.
Inside it is nothing but slavery.

[7]Jerusalem pours out her evil
as a well pours out its water.

The sounds of violence and destruction are heard within her.
I can see the sickness and hurts of Jerusalem.

[8]Listen to this warning, Jerusalem,
or I will turn my back on you

and make your land an empty desert
where no one can live.”

[9]This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

“Gather the few people of Israel who are left alive,
as you would gather the last grapes on a grapevine.

Check each vine again,
like someone who gathers grapes.”

10 To whom can I speak? Whom can I warn?
Who will listen to me?

The people of Israel have closed ears,
so they cannot hear my warnings.

They don't like the word of the LORD;
they don't want to listen to it!

11 But I am full of the anger of the LORD,
and I am tired of holding it in.

"Pour out my anger on the children who play in the street
and on the young men gathered together.

A husband and his wife will both be caught in his anger,
as will the very old.

12 Their houses will be turned over to others,
along with their fields and wives,

because I will raise my hand
and punish the people of Judah," says the LORD.

13 "Everyone, from the least important to the greatest,
is greedy for money.

Even the prophets and priests
all tell lies.

14 They tried to heal my people's serious injuries
as if they were small wounds.

They said, 'It's all right, it's all right.'
But really, it is not all right.

15 They should be ashamed of the terrible way they act,
but they are not ashamed at all.
They don't even know how to blush about their sins.

So they will fall, along with everyone else.
They will be thrown to the ground when I punish them,"
says the LORD.

16 This is what the LORD says:

"Stand where the roads cross and look.
Ask where the old way is,

where the good way is, and walk on it.
If you do, you will find rest for yourselves.
But they have said, 'We will not walk on the good way.'

17 I set watchmen over you
and told you, 'Listen for the sound of the war trumpet!'
But they said, 'We will not listen.'

18 So listen, all you nations,
and pay attention, you witnesses.
Watch what I will do to the people of Judah.

19 Hear this, people of the earth:
I am going to bring disaster to the people of Judah
because of the evil they plan.

They have not listened to my messages
and have rejected my teachings.

20 Why do you bring me offerings of incense from the land of
Sheba?
Why do you bring me sweet-smelling cane from a faraway
land?

Your burnt offerings will not be accepted;
your sacrifices do not please me."

21 So this is what the LORD says:

“I will put problems in front of Judah.
Fathers and sons will stumble over them together.
Neighbors and friends will die.”

22 This is what the LORD says:

“Look, an army is coming
from the land of the north;

a great nation is coming
from the far sides of the earth.

23 The soldiers carry bows and spears.
They are cruel and show no mercy.

They sound like the roaring ocean
when they ride their horses.

That army is coming lined up for battle,
ready to attack you, Jerusalem.”

24 We have heard the news about that army
and are helpless from fear.

We are gripped by our pain,
like a woman having a baby.

25 Don’t go out into the fields
or walk down the roads,

because the enemy has swords.
There is terror on every side.

[26]My people, put on rough cloth
and roll in the ashes to show how sad you are.

Cry loudly for those who are dead,
as if your only son were dead,

because the destroyer
will soon come against us.

[27]“Jeremiah, I have made you like a worker who tests metal,
and my people are like the ore.

You must observe their ways
and test them.

[28]All my people have turned against me and are stubborn.
They go around telling lies about others.

They are like bronze and iron
that became covered with rust.
They all act dishonestly.

[29]The fire is fanned to make it hotter,
but the lead does not melt.

The pure metal does not come out;
the evil is not removed from my people.

[30]My people will be called rejected silver,
because the LORD has rejected them.”

## Psalm 117:1–2

### *A Hymn of Praise*

117 All you nations, praise the LORD. All you people, praise
him

2because the LORD loves us very much,
and his truth is everlasting.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 27:3–4

3Stone is heavy, and sand is weighty,
but a complaining fool is worse than either.

4Anger is cruel and destroys like a flood,
but no one can put up with jealousy!

## Colossians 1:1—2:5

1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am an apostle because
that is what God wanted. Also from Timothy, our brother.
2To the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ that
live in Colossae:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father.[n]
3In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of
our Lord Jesus Christ, 4because we have heard about the faith
you have in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all of God's
people. 5You have this faith and love because of your hope, and
what you hope for is kept safe for you in heaven. You learned
about this hope when you heard the message about the truth,
the Good News 6that was told to you. Everywhere in the world
that Good News is bringing blessings and is growing. This has
happened with you, too, since you heard the Good News and
understood the truth about the grace of God. 7You learned
about God's grace from Epaphras, whom we love. He works
together with us and is a faithful servant of Christ for us.[n] 8He
also told us about the love you have from the Holy Spirit.
9Because of this, since the day we heard about you, we have
continued praying for you, asking God that you will know fully

what he wants. We pray that you will also have great wisdom and understanding in spiritual things [10]so that you will live the kind of life that honors and pleases the Lord in every way. You will produce fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God. [11]God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come, but you will be patient. [12]And you will joyfully give thanks to the Father who has made you[n] able to have a share in all that he has prepared for his people in the kingdom of light. [13]God has freed us from the power of darkness, and he brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son. [14]The Son paid for our sins,[n] and in him we have forgiveness.

## *The Importance of Christ*

[15]No one can see God, but Jesus Christ is exactly like him. He ranks higher than everything that has been made. [16]Through his power all things were made—things in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, all powers, authorities, lords, and rulers. All things were made through Christ and for Christ. [17]He was there before anything was made, and all things continue because of him. [18]He is the head of the body, which is the church. Everything comes from him. He is the first one who was raised from the dead. So in all things Jesus has first place. [19]God was pleased for all of himself to live in Christ. [20]And through Christ, God has brought all things back to himself again—things on earth and things in heaven. God made peace through the blood of Christ's death on the cross.

[21]At one time you were separated from God. You were his enemies in your minds, and the evil things you did were against God. [22]But now God has made you his friends again. He did this through Christ's death in the body so that he might bring you into God's presence as people who are holy, with no wrong, and with nothing of which God can judge you guilty. [23]This will happen if you continue strong and sure in your faith. You must not be moved away from the hope brought to you by the Good News that you heard. That same Good News has been told to everyone in the world, and I, Paul, help in preaching that Good News.

## *Paul's Work for the Church*

[24]I am happy in my sufferings for you. There are things that Christ must still suffer through his body, the church. I am accepting, in my body, my part of these things that must be suffered. [25]I became a servant of the church because God gave me a special work to do that helps you, and that work is to tell fully the message of God. [26]This message is the secret that was

hidden from everyone since the beginning of time, but now it is made known to God's holy people. 27God decided to let his people know this rich and glorious secret which he has for all people. This secret is Christ himself, who is in you. He is our only hope for glory. 28So we continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature person in Christ. 29To do this, I work and struggle, using Christ's great strength that works so powerfully in me.

2 I want you to know how hard I work for you, those in Laodicea, and others who have never seen me. 2I want them to be strengthened and joined together with love so that they may be rich in their understanding. This leads to their knowing fully God's secret, that is, Christ himself. 3In him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are safely kept.

4I say this so that no one can fool you by arguments that seem good, but are false. 5Though I am absent from you in my body, my heart is with you, and I am happy to see your good lives and your strong faith in Christ.

# October 11

# Miraculous Moments

*All of God lives fully in Christ (even when Christ was on earth).*

Colossians 2:9

Jesus was not a godlike man, nor a manlike God. He was God-man. Midwifed by a carpenter. Bathed by a peasant girl.

The maker of the world with a bellybutton.

The author of the Torah being taught the Torah.

Heaven's human. And because he was, we are left with scratch-your-head, double-blink, what's-wrong-with-this-picture? moments like these:

A cripple sponsoring the town dance.

A sack lunch satisfying five thousand tummies.

What do we do with such moments?

What do we do with such a person? We applaud men for doing good things. We enshrine God for doing great things. But when a man does God things?

One thing is certain, we can't ignore him.

from *Next Door Savior*

## Jeremiah 7:1—8:22

### *Jeremiah's Temple Message*

7 This is the word that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah: 2"Stand at
the gate of the Temple and preach this message there:
"'Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of the nation of
Judah! All you who come through these gates to worship the
LORD, listen to this message! 3This is what the LORD All-Powerful,
the God of Israel, says: Change your lives and do what is right!
Then I will let you live in this place. 4Don't trust the lies of
people who say, "This is the Temple of the LORD. This is the
Temple of the LORD. This is the Temple of the LORD!" 5You must
change your lives and do what is right. Be fair to each other.

6You must not be hard on strangers, orphans, and widows.
Don’t kill innocent people in this place! Don’t follow other gods,
or they will ruin your lives. 7If you do these things, I will let you
live in this land that I gave to your ancestors to keep forever.
8“‘But look, you are trusting lies, which is useless. 9Will you
steal and murder and be guilty of adultery? Will you falsely
accuse other people? Will you burn incense to the god Baal and
follow other gods you have not known? 10If you do that, do you
think you can come before me and stand in this place where I
have chosen to be worshiped? Do you think you can say, “We
are safe!” when you do all these hateful things? 11This place
where I have chosen to be worshiped is nothing more to you
than a hideout for robbers. I have been watching you, says the
LORD.
12“‘You people of Judah, go now to the town of Shiloh, where
I first made a place to be worshiped. See what I did to it
because of the evil things the people of Israel had done. 13You
people of Judah have done all these evil things too, says the
LORD. I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen to
me. I called you, but you did not answer. 14So I will destroy the
place where I have chosen to be worshiped in Jerusalem. You
trust in that place, which I gave to you and your ancestors, but I
will destroy it just as I destroyed Shiloh. 15I will push you away
from me just as I pushed away your relatives, the people of
Israel!’
16“As for you, Jeremiah, don’t pray for these people. Don’t
cry out for them or ask anything for them or beg me to help
them, because I will not listen to you. 17Don’t you see what they
are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?
18The children gather wood, and the fathers use the wood to
make a fire. The women make the dough for cakes of bread, and
they offer them to the Queen Goddess. They pour out drink
offerings to other gods to make me angry. 19But I am not the
one the people of Judah are really hurting, says the LORD. They
are only hurting themselves and bringing shame upon
themselves.
20“‘So this is what the Lord God says: I will pour out my anger
on this place, on people and animals, on the trees in the field
and the crops in the ground. My anger will be like a hot fire that
no one can put out.

## *Obedience Is More than Sacrifice*

21“‘This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says:
Offer burnt offerings along with your other sacrifices, and eat
the meat yourselves! 22When I brought your ancestors out of
Egypt, I did not speak to them and give them commands only
about burnt offerings and sacrifices. 23I also gave them this

command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Do all that I command so that good things will happen to you. 24But your ancestors did not listen or pay attention to me. They were stubborn and did whatever their evil hearts wanted. They went backward, not forward. 25Since the day your ancestors left Egypt, I have sent my servants, the prophets, again and again to you. 26But your ancestors did not listen or pay attention to me. They were very stubborn and did more evil than their ancestors.'

27"Jeremiah, you will tell all these things to the people of Judah, but they will not listen to you. You will call to them, but they will not answer you. 28So say to them, 'This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God. These people do nothing when I correct them. They do not tell the truth; it has disappeared from their lips.

## *The Valley of Killing*

29"'Cut off your hair and throw it away. Go up to the bare hilltop and cry out, because the LORD has rejected these people. He has turned his back on them, and in his anger will punish them. 30The people of Judah have done what I said was evil, says the LORD. They have set up their hateful idols in the place where I have chosen to be worshiped and have made it unclean. 31The people of Judah have built places of worship at Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. There they burned their own sons and daughters as sacrifices, something I never commanded. It never even entered my mind. 32So, I warn you. The days are coming, says the LORD, when people will not call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom anymore. They will call it the Valley of Killing. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no room to bury anyone else. 33Then the bodies of the dead will become food for the birds of the sky and for the wild animals. There will be no one left alive to chase them away. 34I will end the happy sounds of the bride and bridegroom. There will be no happy sounds in the cities of Judah or in the streets of Jerusalem, because the land will become an empty desert!

8 "'The LORD says: At that time they will remove from their tombs the bones of Judah's kings and officers, priests and prophets, and the people of Jerusalem. 2The bones will be spread on the ground under the sun, moon, and stars that the people loved and served and went after and searched for and worshiped. No one will gather up the bones and bury them. So they will be like dung thrown on the ground. 3I will force the people of Judah to leave their homes and their land. Those of this evil family who are not dead will wish they were, says the LORD All-Powerful.'

## *Sin and Punishment*

4 “Say to the people of Judah: ‘This is what the LORD says:

When people fall down, don’t they get up again?
And when someone goes the wrong way, doesn’t he turn back?

5 Why, then, have the people of Jerusalem gone the wrong way
and not turned back?

They believe their own lies
and refuse to turn around and come back.

6 I have listened to them very carefully,
but they do not say what is right.

They do not feel sorry about their wicked ways,
saying, “What have I done?”

Each person goes his own way,
like a horse charging into a battle.

7 Even the birds in the sky
know the right times to do things.

The storks, doves, swifts, and thrushes
know when it is time to migrate.

But my people don’t know
what the LORD wants them to do.

8 “‘You keep saying, “We are wise,
because we have the teachings of the LORD.”

But actually, those who explain the Scriptures
have written lies with their pens.

9 These wise teachers refused to listen to the word of the LORD,
so they are not really wise at all.

They will be ashamed.
They will be shocked and trapped.

10 So I will give their wives to other men
and their fields to new owners.

Everyone, from the least important to the greatest,
is greedy for money.

Even the prophets and priests
all tell lies.

11 They tried to heal my people's serious injuries
as if they were small wounds.

They said, "It's all right, it's all right."
But really, it is not all right.

12 They should be ashamed of the terrible way they act,
but they are not ashamed at all.
They don't even know how to blush about their sins.

So they will fall, along with everyone else.
They will be thrown to the ground when I punish them,
says the LORD.

13 "'I will take away their crops, says the LORD.
There will be no grapes on the vine

and no figs on the fig tree.

Even the leaves will dry up and die.

I will take away what I gave them.’”

14 “Why are we just sitting here?
Let’s get together!

We have sinned against the LORD,
so he has given us poisoned water to drink.

Come, let’s run to the strong, walled cities.
The LORD our God has decided that we must die,
so let’s die there.

15 We hoped to have peace,
but nothing good has come.

We hoped for a time when he would heal us,
but only terror has come.

16 From the land of Dan,
the snorting of the enemy’s horses is heard.
The ground shakes from the neighing of their large horses.

They have come and destroyed
the land and everything in it,
the city and all who live there.”

17 “Look! I am sending poisonous snakes to attack you.
These snakes cannot be charmed,
and they will bite you,” says the LORD.

## *Jeremiah’s Sadness*

18 God, you are my comfort when I am very sad

and when I am afraid.

19 Listen to the sound of my people.
They cry from a faraway land:

“Isn’t the LORD still in Jerusalem?
Isn’t Jerusalem’s king still there?”

But God says, “Why did the people make me angry by worshiping idols,
useless foreign idols?”

20 And the people say, “Harvest time is over;
summer has ended,
and we have not been saved.”

21 Because my people are crushed, I am crushed.
I cry loudly and am afraid for them.

22 Isn’t there balm in the land of Gilead?
Isn’t there a doctor there?

So why aren’t the hurts of my people healed?

## Psalm 118:1–4

### *Thanksgiving for Victory*

118 Thank the LORD because he is good. His love continues forever.

2 Let the people of Israel say,
“His love continues forever.”

3 Let the family of Aaron say,
"His love continues forever."

4 Let those who respect the LORD say,
"His love continues forever."

## Proverbs 27:5–6

5 It is better to correct someone openly
than to have love and not show it.

6 The slap of a friend can be trusted to help you,
but the kisses of an enemy are nothing but lies.

## Colossians 2:6–23

### *Continue to Live in Christ*

6 As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to live in
him. 7 Keep your roots deep in him and have your lives built on
him. Be strong in the faith, just as you were taught, and always
be thankful.
8 Be sure that no one leads you away with false and empty
teaching that is only human, which comes from the ruling
spirits of this world, and not from Christ. 9 All of God lives fully
in Christ (even when Christ was on earth), 10 and you have a full
and true life in Christ, who is ruler over all rulers and powers.
11 Also in Christ you had a different kind of circumcision, a
circumcision not done by hands. It was through Christ's
circumcision, that is, his death, that you were made free from
the power of your sinful self. 12 When you were baptized, you
were buried with Christ, and you were raised up with him
through your faith in God's power that was shown when he
raised Christ from the dead. 13 When you were spiritually dead
because of your sins and because you were not free from the
power of your sinful self, God made you alive with Christ, and
he forgave all our sins. 14 He canceled the debt, which listed all
the rules we failed to follow. He took away that record with its

rules and nailed it to the cross. [15]God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless.

## *Don't Follow People's Rules*

[16]So do not let anyone make rules for you about eating and drinking or about a religious feast, a New Moon Festival, or a Sabbath day. [17]These things were like a shadow of what was to come. But what is true and real has come and is found in Christ. [18]Do not let anyone disqualify you by making you humiliate yourself and worship angels. Such people enter into visions, which fill them with foolish pride because of their human way of thinking. [19]They do not hold tightly to Christ, the head. It is from him that all the parts of the body are cared for and held together. So it grows in the way God wants it to grow.

[20]Since you died with Christ and were made free from the ruling spirits of the world, why do you act as if you still belong to this world by following rules like these: [21]"Don't handle this," "Don't taste that," "Don't even touch that thing"? [22]These rules refer to earthly things that are gone as soon as they are used. They are only human commands and teachings. [23]They seem to be wise, but they are only part of a human religion. They make people pretend not to be proud and make them punish their bodies, but they do not really control the evil desires of the sinful self.

# October 12

## Work Can Be Worship

*Everything you do or say should be done to obey Jesus your Lord.*

Colossians 3:17

Have you seen the painting *The Angelus* by Jean-Francois Millet? It portrays two peasants praying in their field. A church steeple sits on the horizon, and a light falls from heaven. The rays do not fall on the church, however. They don't fall on the bowed heads of the man and woman. The rays of the sun fall on the wheelbarrow and the pitchfork at the couple's feet.

God's eyes fall on the work of our hands. Our Wednesdays matter to him as much as our Sundays. He blurs the secular and sacred. One stay-at-home mom keeps this sign over her kitchen sink: "Divine tasks performed here, daily." An executive hung this plaque in her office: "My desk is my altar." Both are correct. With God, our work matters as much as our worship. Indeed, work can be worship.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Jeremiah 9:1—10:25

9 I wish my head were like a spring of water
and my eyes like a fountain of tears!

Then I could cry day and night
for my people who have been killed.

2 I wish I had a place in the desert—
a house where travelers spend the night—

so I could leave my people.
I could go away from them,

because they are all unfaithful to God;
they are all turning against him.

## *Judah's Failures*

3 "They use their tongues like a bow,
shooting lies from their mouths like arrows.

Lies, not truth,
have grown strong in the land.

They go from one evil thing to another.
They do not know who I am," says the LORD.

4 "Watch out for your friends,
and don't trust your own relatives,

because every relative is a cheater,
and every friend tells lies about you.

5 Everyone lies to his friend,
and no one speaks the truth.

The people of Judah have taught their tongues to lie.
They have become tired from sinning.

6 Jeremiah, you live in the middle of lies.
With their lies the people refuse to know me," says the LORD.

7 So this is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

"I will test the people of Judah as a person tests metal in a

fire.
I have no other choice,
because my people have sinned.

8 Their tongues are like sharp arrows.
Their mouths speak lies.

Everyone speaks nicely to his neighbor,
but he is secretly planning to attack him.

9 Shouldn't I punish the people for doing this?" says the LORD.
"Shouldn't I give a nation like this the punishment it deserves?"

10 I, Jeremiah, will cry loudly for the mountains
and sing a funeral song for the empty fields.

They are empty, and no one passes through.
The mooing of cattle cannot be heard.

The birds have flown away,
and the animals are gone.

11 "I, the LORD, will make the city of Jerusalem a heap of ruins,
a home for wild dogs.

I will destroy the cities of Judah
so no one can live there."

12 What person is wise enough to understand these things? Is there someone who has been taught by the LORD who can explain them? Why was the land ruined? Why has it been made like an empty desert where no one goes?
13 The LORD answered, "It is because Judah quit following my teachings that I gave them. They have not obeyed me or done what I told them to do. 14 Instead, they were stubborn and followed the Baals, as their ancestors taught them to do." 15 So this is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: "I will soon make the people of Judah eat bitter food and drink

poisoned water. [16]I will scatter them through other nations that
they and their ancestors never knew about. I will chase the
people of Judah with the sword until they are all killed."
[17]This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

"Now, think about these things!
Call for the women who cry at funerals to come.
Send for those women who are good at that job.

[18]Let them come quickly
and cry loudly for us.

Then our eyes will fill with tears,
and streams of water will flow from our eyelids.

[19]The sound of loud crying is heard from Jerusalem:
'We are truly ruined!
We are truly ashamed!

We must leave our land,
because our houses are in ruins.'"

[20]Now, women of Judah, listen to the word of the LORD;
open your ears to hear the words of his mouth.

Teach your daughters how to cry loudly.
Teach one another a funeral song.

[21]Death has climbed in through our windows
and has entered our strong cities.

Death has taken away our children who play in the streets
and the young men who meet in the city squares.

[22]Say, "This is what the LORD says:

'The dead bodies of people will lie
in the open field like dung.

They will lie like grain a farmer has cut,
but there will be no one to gather them.’”

23 This is what the LORD says:

“The wise must not brag about their wisdom.
The strong must not brag about their strength.
The rich must not brag about their money.

24 But if people want to brag, let them brag
that they understand and know me.

Let them brag that I am the LORD,
and that I am kind and fair,
and that I do things that are right on earth.

This kind of bragging pleases me,” says the LORD.

25 The LORD says, “The time is coming when I will punish all those who are circumcised only in the flesh: 26 the people of Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and the desert people who cut their hair short. The men in all those countries are not circumcised. And the whole family of Israel does not give itself to serving me.”

## *The LORD and the Idols*

10 Family of Israel, listen to what the LORD says to you. 2 This is what he says:

“Don’t live like the people from other nations,
and don’t be afraid of special signs in the sky,
even though the other nations are afraid of them.

3 The customs of other people are worth nothing.
Their idols are just wood cut from the forest,
shaped by a worker with his chisel.

4 They decorate their idols with silver and gold.
With hammers and nails they fasten them down
so they won’t fall over.

5 Their idols are like scarecrows in melon fields;
they cannot talk.

Since they cannot walk,
they must be carried.

Do not be afraid of those idols,
because they can't hurt you,
and they can't help you either."

6 LORD, there is no one like you.
You are great,
and your name is great and powerful.

7 Everyone should respect you, King of the nations;
you deserve respect.

Of all the wise people among the nations
and in all the kingdoms,
none of them is as wise as you.

8 Those wise people are stupid and foolish.
Their teachings come from worthless wooden idols.

9 Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish
and gold from Uphaz,

so the idols are made by craftsmen and goldsmiths.
They put blue and purple clothes on the idols.
All these things are made by skilled workers.

10 But the LORD is the only true God.
He is the only living God, the King forever.

The earth shakes when he is angry,
and the nations cannot stand up to his anger.

11 "Tell them this message: 'These gods did not make heaven

and earth; they will be destroyed and disappear from heaven and earth.’”

[12]God made the earth by his power.
He used his wisdom to build the world
and his understanding to stretch out the skies.

[13]When he thunders, the waters in the skies roar.
He makes clouds rise in the sky all over the earth.

He sends lightning with the rain
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

[14]People are so stupid and know so little.
Goldsmiths are made ashamed by their idols,

because those statues are only false gods.
They have no breath in them.

[15]They are worth nothing; people make fun of them.
When they are judged, they will be destroyed.

[16]But God, who is Jacob’s Portion, is not like the idols.
He made everything,

and he chose Israel to be his special people.
The LORD All-Powerful is his name.

## *Destruction Is Coming*

[17]Get everything you own and prepare to leave,
you people who are trapped by your enemies.

[18]This is what the LORD says:
“At this time I will throw out the people who live in this land.

I will bring trouble to them
so that they may be captured.”

19 How terrible it will be for me because of my injury.
My wound cannot be healed.

Yet I told myself,
“This is my sickness; I must suffer through it.”

20 My tent is ruined,
and all its ropes are broken.

My children have gone away and left me.
No one is left to put up my tent again
or to set up a shelter for me.

21 The shepherds are stupid
and don’t ask the LORD for advice.

So they do not have success,
and all their flocks are scattered and lost.

22 Listen! The news is coming.
A loud noise comes from the north

to make the towns of Judah an empty desert
and a home for wild dogs!

## *Jeremiah’s Prayer*

23 LORD, I know that our lives don’t really belong to us.
We can’t control our own lives.

24 LORD, correct me, but be fair.
Don’t punish me in your anger,
or you will destroy me.

25 Pour out your anger on other nations
that do not know you
and do not pray to you.

Those nations have destroyed the people of Jacob.
They have eaten them up completely
and destroyed their homeland.

## Psalm 118:5–9

5 I was in trouble, so I called to the LORD.
The LORD answered me and set me free.

6 I will not be afraid, because the LORD is with me.
People can't do anything to me.

7 The LORD is with me to help me,
so I will see my enemies defeated.

8 It is better to trust the LORD
than to trust people.

9 It is better to trust the LORD
than to trust princes.

## Proverbs 27:7

7 When you are full, not even honey tastes good,
but when you are hungry, even something bitter tastes sweet.

## Colossians 3:1—4:1

## *Your New Life in Christ*

3 Since you were raised from the dead with Christ, aim at what
is in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.
2Think only about the things in heaven, not the things on earth.
3Your old sinful self has died, and your new life is kept with
Christ in God. 4Christ is your[n] life, and when he comes again,
you will share in his glory.

5So put all evil things out of your life: sexual sinning, doing
evil, letting evil thoughts control you, wanting things that are
evil, and greed. This is really serving a false god. 6These things
make God angry.[n] 7In your past, evil life you also did these
things.

8But now also put these things out of your life: anger, bad
temper, doing or saying things to hurt others, and using evil
words when you talk. 9Do not lie to each other. You have left
your old sinful life and the things you did before. 10You have
begun to live the new life, in which you are being made new and
are becoming like the One who made you. This new life brings
you the true knowledge of God. 11In the new life there is no
difference between Greeks and Jews, those who are circumcised
and those who are not circumcised, or people who are
foreigners, or Scythians.[n] There is no difference between slaves
and free people. But Christ is in all believers, and Christ is all
that is important.

12God has chosen you and made you his holy people. He
loves you. So you should always clothe yourselves with mercy,
kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13Bear with each
other, and forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you,
forgive that person because the Lord forgave you. 14Even more
than all this, clothe yourself in love. Love is what holds you all
together in perfect unity. 15Let the peace that Christ gives
control your thinking, because you were all called together in
one body[n] to have peace. Always be thankful. 16Let the teaching
of Christ live in you richly. Use all wisdom to teach and instruct
each other by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with
thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17Everything you do or say
should be done to obey Jesus your Lord. And in all you do, give
thanks to God the Father through Jesus.

## *Your New Life with Other People*

18Wives, yield to the authority of your husbands, because this
is the right thing to do in the Lord.

19Husbands, love your wives and be gentle with them.

[20]Children, obey your parents in all things, because this pleases the Lord.

[21]Fathers, do not nag your children. If you are too hard to please, they may want to stop trying.

[22]Slaves, obey your masters in all things. Do not obey just when they are watching you, to gain their favor, but serve them honestly, because you respect the Lord. [23]In all the work you are doing, work the best you can. Work as if you were doing it for the Lord, not for people. [24]Remember that you will receive your reward from the Lord, which he promised to his people. You are serving the Lord Christ. [25]But remember that anyone who does wrong will be punished for that wrong, and the Lord treats everyone the same.

[4] Masters, give what is good and fair to your slaves. Remember that you have a Master in heaven.

# October 13

## Courteous Conduct

*Be wise in the way you act with people who are not believers.*

Colossians 4:5

Those who don't believe in Jesus note what we do. They make decisions about Christ by watching us. When we are kind, they assume Christ is kind. When we are gracious, they assume Christ is gracious. But if we are brash, what will people think about our King? When we are dishonest, what assumption will an observer make about our Master? No wonder Paul says, "Be wise in the way you act with people who are not believers, making the most of every opportunity. When you talk, you should always be kind and pleasant so you will be able to answer everyone in the way you should" (Colossians 4:5–6). Courteous conduct honors Christ.

It also honors his children. When you surrender a parking place to someone, you honor him. When you return a borrowed book, you honor the lender. When you make an effort to greet everyone in the room, especially the ones others may have overlooked, you honor God's children.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Jeremiah 11:1—12:17

### *The Agreement Is Broken*

11 These are the words that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah: 2"Listen
to the words of this agreement and tell them to the people of
Judah and those living in Jerusalem. 3Tell them this is what the
LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Cursed is the person who does not
obey the words of this agreement 4that I made with your
ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt. Egypt was like a
furnace for melting iron!' I told them, 'Obey me and do
everything I command you. Then you will be my people, and I

will be your God. [5]Then I will keep the promise I made to your ancestors to give them a fertile land.' And you are living in that country today."

I answered, "Amen, LORD."

[6]The LORD said to me, "Announce this message in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: 'Listen to the words of this agreement and obey them. [7]I warned your ancestors to obey me when I brought them out of Egypt. I have warned them again and again to this very day: "Obey me!" [8]But your ancestors did not listen to me. They were stubborn and did what their own evil hearts wanted. So I made all the curses of this agreement come upon them. I commanded them to obey the agreement, but they did not.'"

[9]Then the LORD said to me, "I know the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem have made secret plans. [10]They have gone back to the same sins their ancestors did. Their ancestors refused to listen to my message and followed and worshiped other gods instead. The families of Israel and Judah have broken the agreement I made with their ancestors. [11]So this is what the LORD says: 'I will soon bring a disaster on the people of Judah which they will not be able to escape. They will cry to me for help, but I will not listen to them. [12]The people living in the towns of Judah and the city of Jerusalem will pray to their idols to whom they burn incense. But those idols will not be able to help when disaster comes. [13]Look, people of Judah, you have as many idols as there are towns in Judah. You have built as many altars to burn incense to that shameful god Baal as there are streets in Jerusalem.'

[14]"As for you, Jeremiah, don't pray for these people or cry out for them or ask anything for them. I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.

[15]"What is my beloved Judah doing in my Temple
when she makes many evil plans?
Do you think animal sacrifices will stop your punishment?

When you do your evil, then you are happy."

[16]The LORD called you "a leafy olive tree,
with beautiful fruit and shape."

But with the roar of a strong storm
he will set that tree on fire,
and its branches will be burned up.

17The LORD All-Powerful, who planted you, has announced
that disaster will come to you. This is because the families of
Israel and Judah have done evil and have made him angry by
burning incense to Baal.

## *Evil Plans Against Jeremiah*

18The LORD showed me that people were making plans
against me. Because he showed me what they were doing, I
knew they were against me. 19Before this, I was like a gentle
lamb waiting to be butchered. I did not know they had made
plans against me, saying:

"Let us destroy the tree and its fruit.
Let's kill him so people will forget him."

20But, LORD All-Powerful, you are a fair judge.
You know how to test peoples' hearts and minds.

I have told you what I have against them.
So let me see you give them the punishment they
deserve.

21So the LORD speaks about the people from Anathoth who
plan to kill Jeremiah and say, "Don't prophesy in the name of
the LORD, or we will kill you!" 22So this is what the LORD All-
Powerful says: "I will soon punish the men from Anathoth. Their
young men will die in war. Their sons and daughters will die
from hunger. 23No one from the city of Anathoth will be left
alive, because I will cause a disaster to happen to them that
year."

## *Jeremiah's First Complaint*

12 LORD, when I bring my case to you,
you are always right.

But I want to ask you about the justice you give.
Why are evil people successful?
Why do dishonest people have such easy lives?

2 You have put the evil people here
like plants with strong roots.
They grow and produce fruit.

With their mouths they speak well of you,
but their hearts are really far away from you.

3 But you know my heart, LORD.
You see me and test my thoughts about you.

Drag the evil people away like sheep to be butchered.
Set them aside for the day of killing.

4 How much longer will the land stay dried up
and the grass in every field be dead?

The animals and birds in the land have died,
because the people are evil.

Yes, they are even saying,
"God does not see what happens to us."

## *The LORD's Answer to Jeremiah*

5 "If you get tired while racing against people,
how can you race against horses?

If you stumble in a country that is safe,
what will you do in the thick thornbushes along the Jordan River?

6 Even your own brothers and members of your own family
are making plans against you.
They are crying out against you.

Don't trust them,

even when they say nice things to you!

7 “I have left Israel;
I have left my people.

I have given the people I love
over to their enemies.

8 My people have become to me
like a lion in the forest.

They roar at me,
so I hate them.

9 My people have become to me
like a speckled bird attacked on all sides by hawks.

Go, gather the wild animals.
Bring them to get something to eat.

10 Many shepherds have ruined my vineyards
and trampled the plants in my field.

They have turned my beautiful field
into an empty desert.

11 They have turned my field into a desert
that is wilted and dead.

The whole country is an empty desert,
because no one who lives there cares.

12 Many soldiers have marched over those barren hills.
The LORD is using the armies to punish that land

from one end to the other.
No one is safe.

13 The people have planted wheat,
but they have harvested only thorns.

They have worked hard until they were very tired,
but they have nothing for all their work.

They are ashamed of their poor harvest,
because the LORD's terrible anger has caused this."

14 This is what the LORD said to me: "Here is what I will do to all my wicked neighbors who take the land I gave my people Israel. I will pull them up and throw them out of their land. And I will pull up the people of Judah from among them. 15 But after I pull them up, I will feel sorry for them again. I will bring each person back to his own property and to his own land. 16 I want them to learn their lessons well. In the past they taught my people to swear by Baal's name. But if they will now learn to swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the LORD lives … ' I will allow them to rebuild among my people. 17 But if a nation will not listen to my message, I will pull it up completely and destroy it," says the LORD.

## Psalm 118:10–14

10 All the nations surrounded me,
but I defeated them in the name of the LORD.

11 They surrounded me on every side,
but with the LORD's power I defeated them.

12 They surrounded me like a swarm of bees,
but they died as quickly as thorns burn.
By the LORD's power, I defeated them.

13 They chased me until I was almost defeated,
but the LORD helped me.

14 The LORD gives me strength and a song.
He has saved me.

## Proverbs 27:8

8 A person who leaves his home
is like a bird that leaves its nest.

## Colossians 4:2–18

### *What the Christians Are to Do*

2 Continue praying, keeping alert, and always thanking God.
3 Also pray for us that God will give us an opportunity to tell
people his message. Pray that we can preach the secret that
God has made known about Christ. This is why I am in prison.
4 Pray that I can speak in a way that will make it clear, as I
should.
5 Be wise in the way you act with people who are not
believers, making the most of every opportunity. 6 When you
talk, you should always be kind and pleasant so you will be able
to answer everyone in the way you should.

### *News About the People with Paul*

7 Tychicus is my dear brother in Christ and a faithful minister
and servant with me in the Lord. He will tell you all the things
that are happening to me. 8 This is why I am sending him: so you
may know how we are[n] and he may encourage you. 9 I send him
with Onesimus, a faithful and dear brother in Christ, and one of
your group. They will tell you all that has happened here.
10 Aristarchus, a prisoner with me, and Mark, the cousin of
Barnabas, greet you. (I have already told you what to do about
Mark. If he comes, welcome him.) 11 Jesus, who is called Justus,
also greets you. These are the only Jewish believers who work
with me for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort

to me.

12 Epaphras, a servant of Jesus Christ, from your group, also
greets you. He always prays for you that you will grow to be
spiritually mature and have everything God wants for you. 13 I
know he has worked hard for you and the people in Laodicea
and in Hierapolis. 14 Demas and our dear friend Luke, the
doctor, greet you.

15 Greet the brothers and sisters in Laodicea. And greet
Nympha and the church that meets in her house. 16 After this
letter is read to you, be sure it is also read to the church in
Laodicea. And you read the letter that I wrote to Laodicea.
17 Tell Archippus, “Be sure to finish the work the Lord gave
you.”

18 I, Paul, greet you and write this with my own hand.
Remember me in prison. Grace be with you.

# October 14

## The Key of Our Faith

*And you wait for God's Son, whom God raised from the dead, to come from heaven.*

1 Thessalonians 1:10

FOR ... any follower of Christ, the promise is simply this: The Resurrection of Jesus is proof and preview of our own. But can we trust the promise? Is the Resurrection a reality? Are the claims of the empty tomb true? This is not only a good question. It is *the* question. For as Paul wrote, "If Christ has not been raised, then your faith has nothing to it; you are still guilty of your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). In other words, if Christ has been raised, then his followers will join him; but if not, then his followers are fools. The Resurrection, then, is the keystone in the arch of the Christian faith.

from *When Christ Comes*

## Jeremiah 13:1—14:22

### *Jeremiah's Linen Belt*

13 This is what the LORD said to me: "Go and buy a linen belt and
put it around your waist. Don't let the belt get wet."
2So I bought a linen belt, just as the LORD told me, and put it
around my waist. 3Then the LORD spoke his word to me a second
time: 4"Take the belt you bought and are wearing, and go to
Perath. Hide the belt there in a crack in the rocks." 5So I went
to Perath and hid the belt there, just as the LORD told me.
6Many days later the LORD said to me, "Now go to Perath and
get the belt I told you to hide there." 7So I went to Perath and
dug up the belt and took it from where I had hidden it. But now
it was ruined; it was good for nothing.
8Then the LORD spoke his word to me. 9This is what the LORD
said: "In the same way I will ruin the pride of the people of

Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. [10]These evil people refuse to listen to my warnings. They stubbornly do only what they want to do, and they follow other gods to serve and worship them. So they will become like this linen belt—good for nothing. [11]As a belt is wrapped tightly around a person's waist, I wrapped the families of Israel and Judah around me," says the LORD. "I did that so they would be my people and bring fame, praise, and honor to me. But my people would not listen.

## *Warnings About Leather Wine Bags*

[12]"Say to them: 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: All leather bags for holding wine should be filled with wine.' People will say to you: 'Of course, we know all wine bags should be filled with wine.' [13]Then you will say to them, 'This is what the LORD says: I will make everyone in this land like a drunken person—the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests and the prophets, and all the people who live in Jerusalem. [14]I will make them smash against one another, fathers and sons alike, says the LORD. I will not feel sorry or have pity on them or show mercy that would stop me from destroying them.'"

## *Threat of Slavery*

[15]Listen and pay attention.
    Don't be too proud,
    because the LORD has spoken to you.

[16]Give glory to the LORD your God
    before he brings darkness

and before you slip and fall
    on the dark hills.

You hope for light,
    but he will turn it into thick darkness;
    he will change it into deep gloom.

[17]If you don't listen to him,
    I will cry secretly
    because of your pride.

I will cry painfully,
and my eyes will overflow with tears,
because the LORD's people will be captured.

18 Tell this to the king and the queen mother:
"Come down from your thrones,

because your beautiful crowns
have fallen from your heads."

19 The cities of southern Judah are locked up,
and no one can open them.

All Judah will be taken as captives to a foreign land;
they will be carried away completely.

20 Jerusalem, look up and see
the people coming from the north.

Where is the flock God gave you to care for,
the flock you bragged about?

21 What will you say when they appoint as your heads
those you had thought were your friends?

Won't you have much pain and trouble,
like a woman giving birth to a baby?

22 You might ask yourself,
"Why has this happened to me?"

It happened because of your many sins.
Because of your sins, your skirt was torn off
and your body has been treated badly.

23 Can a person from Cush change the color of his skin?

Can a leopard change his spots?

In the same way, Jerusalem, you cannot change and do good,
because you are accustomed to doing evil.

24 “I will scatter you like chaff that is blown away by the
desert wind.

25 This is what will happen to you;
this is your part in my plans,” says the LORD.

“Because you forgot me
and trusted in false gods,

26 I will pull your skirts up over your face
so everyone will see your shame.

27 I have seen the terrible things you have done:
your acts of adultery and your snorting,
your prostitution,

your hateful acts
on the hills and in the fields.

How terrible it will be for you, Jerusalem.
How long will you continue being unclean?”

## *A Time Without Rain*

14 These are the words that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah about
the time when there was no rain:

2 “The nation of Judah cries as if someone has died,
and her cities are very sad.

They are distressed over the land.
A cry goes up to God from Jerusalem.

[3]The important men send their servants to get water.
They go to the wells,
but they find no water.

So they return with empty jars.
They are ashamed and embarrassed
and cover their heads in shame.

[4]The ground is dry and cracked open,
because no rain falls on the land.

The farmers are upset and sad,
so they cover their heads in shame.

[5]Even the mother deer in the field
leaves her newborn fawn to die,
because there is no grass.

[6]Wild donkeys stand on the bare hills
and sniff the wind like wild dogs.

But their eyes go blind,
because there is no food.”

[7]We know that we suffer because of our sins.
LORD, do something to help us for the good of your name.

We have left you many times;
we have sinned against you.

[8]God, the Hope of Israel,
you have saved Israel in times of trouble.

Why are you like a stranger in the land,
or like a traveler who only stays one night?

9 Why are you like someone who has been attacked by surprise,
like a warrior who is not able to save anyone?

But you are among us, LORD,
and we are called by your name
so don't leave us without help!

10 This is what the LORD says about the people of Judah:

"They really love to wander from me;
they don't stop themselves from leaving me.

So now the LORD will not accept them.
He will now remember the evil they do
and will punish them for their sins."

11 Then the LORD said, "Don't pray for good things to happen to the people of Judah. 12 Even if they fast, I will not listen to their prayers. Even if they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings to me, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy the people of Judah with war, hunger, and terrible diseases."

13 But I said, "Oh, Lord God, the prophets keep telling the people, 'You will not suffer from an enemy's sword or from hunger. I, the LORD, will give you peace in this land.'"

14 Then the LORD said to me, "Those prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them or appoint them or speak to them. They have been prophesying false visions, idolatries, worthless magic, and their own wishful thinking. 15 So this is what I say about the prophets who are prophesying in my name. I did not send them. They say, 'No enemy will attack this country with swords. There will never be hunger in this land.' So those prophets will die from hunger and from an enemy's sword. 16 And the people to whom the prophets speak will be thrown into the streets of Jerusalem. There they will die from hunger and from an enemy's sword. And no one will be there to bury them, or their wives, or their sons, or their daughters. I will punish them.

17 "Jeremiah, speak this message to the people of Judah:

'Let my eyes be filled with tears
night and day, without stopping.

My people have received a terrible blow;
they have been hurt badly.

18 If I go into the country,
I see people killed by swords.

If I go into the city,
I see much sickness, because the people have no food.

Both the priests and the prophets
have been taken to a foreign land.’”

19 LORD, have you completely rejected the nation of Judah?
Do you hate Jerusalem?

Why have you hurt us so badly
that we cannot be made well again?

We hoped for peace,
but nothing good has come.

We looked for a time of healing,
but only terror came.

20 LORD, we admit that we are wicked
and that our ancestors did evil things.
We have sinned against you.

21 For your sake, do not hate us.
Do not take away the honor from your glorious throne.

Remember your agreement with us,
and do not break it.

22 Do foreign idols have the power to bring rain?
Does the sky itself have the power to send down showers?

No, it is you, LORD our God.
You are our only hope,
because you are the one who made all these things.

## Psalm 118:15–21

15 Shouts of joy and victory
come from the tents of those who do right:

"The LORD has done powerful things."

16 The power of the LORD has won the victory;
with his power the LORD has done mighty things.

17 I will not die, but live,
and I will tell what the LORD has done.

18 The LORD has taught me a hard lesson,
but he did not let me die.

19 Open for me the Temple gates.
Then I will come in and thank the LORD.

20 This is the LORD's gate;
only those who are good may enter through it.

21 LORD, I thank you for answering me.
You have saved me.

## Proverbs 27:9

9 The sweet smell of perfume and oils is pleasant,
and so is good advice from a friend.

# 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

1 From Paul, Silas, and Timothy. To the church in Thessalonica,
the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you.

## *The Faith of the Thessalonians*

2We always thank God for all of you and mention you when
we pray. 3We continually recall before God our Father the things
you have done because of your faith and the work you have
done because of your love. And we thank him that you continue
to be strong because of your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
4Brothers and sisters, God loves you, and we know he has
chosen you, 5because the Good News we brought to you came
not only with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit, and
with sure knowledge that it is true. Also you know how we lived
when we were with you in order to help you. 6And you became
like us and like the Lord. You suffered much, but still you
accepted the teaching with the joy that comes from the Holy
Spirit. 7So you became an example to all the believers in
Macedonia and Southern Greece. 8And the Lord's teaching
spread from you not only into Macedonia and Southern Greece,
but now your faith in God has become known everywhere. So
we do not need to say anything about it. 9People everywhere
are telling about the way you accepted us when we were there
with you. They tell how you stopped worshiping idols and began
serving the living and true God. 10And you wait for God's Son,
whom God raised from the dead, to come from heaven. He is
Jesus, who saves us from God's angry judgment that is sure to
come.

# October 15

## A Place of Permanence

*"They will fight against you, but they will not defeat you, because I am with you."*

Jeremiah 15:20

You've been there. You've escaped the sandy foundations of the valley and ascended his grand outcropping of granite. You've turned your back on the noise and sought his voice. You've stepped away from the masses and followed the Master as he led you up the winding path to the summit …

Gently your guide invites you to sit on the rock above the tree line and look out with him at the ancient peaks that will never erode. "What is necessary is still what is sure," he confides. "Just remember:

"You'll go nowhere tomorrow that I haven't already been.

"Truth will still triumph …

"The victory is yours …"

The sacred summit. A place of permanence in a world of transition.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Jeremiah 15:1—16:21

15 Then the LORD said to me: "I would not feel sorry for the
people of Judah even if Moses and Samuel prayed for them.
Send them away from me! Tell them to go! 2When they ask you,
'Where will we go?' tell them: 'This is what the LORD says:

Those who are meant to die
will die.

Those who are meant to die in war
will die in war.

Those who are meant to die from hunger
will die from hunger.

Those who are meant to be taken captive
will be taken captive.’

3 “I will send four kinds of destroyers against them,” says the LORD. “I will send war to kill, dogs to drag the bodies away, and the birds of the air and wild animals to eat and destroy the bodies. 4 I will make the people of Judah hated by everyone on earth because of what Manasseh did in Jerusalem. (Manasseh son of Hezekiah was king of the nation of Judah.)

5 “Who will feel sorry for you, Jerusalem?
Who will be sad and cry for you?
Who will go out of his way to ask how you are?

6 Jerusalem, you have left me,” says the LORD.
“You keep going farther and farther away,

so I have taken hold of you and destroyed you.
I was tired of holding back my anger.

7 I have separated the people of Judah with my pitchfork
and scattered them at the city gates of the land.

My people haven’t changed their ways.
So I have destroyed them
and taken away their children.

8 There are more widows than grains of sand in the sea.

I brought a destroyer at noontime
against the mothers of the young men of Judah.

I suddenly brought pain and fear
on the people of Judah.

[9]When the enemy attacked, a woman with seven sons felt faint because they would all die.
She became weak and unable to breathe.

Her bright day became dark from sadness.
She felt shame and disgrace.

And everyone else left alive in Judah
I will hand over to the enemies, too!” says the LORD.

## *Jeremiah’s Second Complaint*

[10]Mother, I am sorry that you gave birth to me
since I must accuse and criticize the whole land.

I have not loaned or borrowed anything,
but everyone curses me.

[11]The LORD said,
“I have saved you for a good reason.

I have made your enemies beg you
in times of disaster and trouble.

[12]No one can smash a piece of iron or bronze
that comes from the north.

[13]Your wealth and treasures
I will give to others free of charge,

because the people of Judah have sinned
throughout the country.

[14]I will make you slaves to your enemies
in a land you have never known.

My anger is like a hot fire,
and it will burn against you.”

15 LORD, you understand.
Remember me and take care of me.
Punish for me those who are hurting me.

Don’t destroy me while you remain patient with them.
Think about the shame I suffer for you.

16 Your words came to me, and I listened carefully to them.
Your words made me very happy,

because I am called by your name,
LORD God All-Powerful.

17 I never sat with the crowd
as they laughed and had fun.

I sat by myself, because you were there,
and you filled me with anger at the evil around me.

18 I don’t understand why my pain has no end.
I don’t understand why my injury is not cured or healed.

Will you be like a brook that goes dry?
Will you be like a spring that stops flowing?

19 So this is what the LORD says:

“If you change your heart and return to me, I will take you back.
Then you may serve me.

And if you speak things that have worth,
not useless words,
then you may speak for me.

Let the people of Judah turn to you,
but you must not change and be like them.

20 I will make you as strong as a wall to this people,
as strong as a wall of bronze.

They will fight against you,
but they will not defeat you,

because I am with you.
I will rescue you and save you," says the LORD.

21 "I will save you from these wicked people
and rescue you from these cruel people."

## *The Day of Disaster*

16 Then the LORD spoke his word to me: 2 "You must not get married or have sons or daughters in this place."

3 The LORD says this about the sons and daughters born in this land and their mothers and fathers: 4 "They will die of terrible diseases, and no one will cry for them or bury them. Their bodies will lie on the ground like dung. They will die in war, or they will starve to death. Their bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and for the wild animals."

5 So this is what the LORD says: "Jeremiah, do not go into a house where there is a funeral meal. Do not go there to cry for the dead or to show your sorrow for them, because I have taken back my blessing, my love, and my pity from these people," says the LORD. 6 "Important people and common people will die in the land of Judah. No one will bury them or cry for them or cut himself or shave his head to show sorrow for them. 7 No one will bring food to comfort those who are crying for the dead. No one will offer a drink to comfort someone whose mother or father has died.

8 "Do not go into a house where the people are having a feast to sit down to eat and drink, 9 because this is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: I will soon stop the sounds of joy and gladness and the happy sounds of brides and bridegrooms in this place. This will happen during your lifetime.

10 "When you tell the people of Judah these things, they will ask you, 'Why has the LORD said these terrible things to us? What have we done wrong? What sin have we done against the LORD our God?'

11 “Then say to them: ‘This is because your ancestors quit
following me,’ says the LORD. ‘And they followed other gods and
served and worshiped them. Your ancestors left me and quit
obeying my teaching. 12 But you have done even more evil than
your ancestors. You are very stubborn and do only what you
want to do; you have not obeyed me. 13 So I will throw you out of
this country and send you into a land that you and your
ancestors never knew. There you can serve other gods day and
night, because I will not help you or show you any favors.’
14 “People say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the
people of Israel out of Egypt …’ But the time is coming,” says
the LORD, “when people will not say this anymore. 15 They will
say instead, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the
Israelites from the northern land and from all the countries
where he had sent them …’ And I will bring them back to the
land I gave to their ancestors.
16 “I will soon send for many fishermen to come to this land,”
says the LORD. “And they will catch the people of Judah. After
that, I will send for many hunters to come to this land. And they
will hunt the people of Judah on every mountain and hill and in
the cracks of the rocks. 17 I see everything they do. They cannot
hide from me the things they do; their sin is not hidden from my
eyes. 18 I will pay back the people of Judah twice for every one of
their sins, because they have made my land unclean. They have
filled my country with their hateful idols.”

19 LORD, you are my strength and my protection,
my safe place in times of trouble.

The nations will come to you from all over the world
and say, “Our ancestors had only false gods,
useless idols that didn’t help them.

20 Can people make gods for themselves?
They will not really be gods!”

21 The LORD says, “So I will teach those who make idols.
This time I will teach them
about my power and my strength.

Then they will know
that my name is the LORD.

## Psalm 118:22–24

22 The stone that the builders rejected
became the cornerstone.

23 The LORD did this,
and it is wonderful to us.

24 This is the day that the LORD has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad today!

## Proverbs 27:10

10 Don’t forget your friend or your parent’s friend.
Don’t always go to your family for help when trouble comes.
A neighbor close by is better than a family far away.

## 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16

### *Paul’s Work in Thessalonica*

2 Brothers and sisters, you know our visit to you was not a failure. 2 Before we came to you, we suffered in Philippi. People there insulted us, as you know, and many people were against us. But our God helped us to be brave and to tell you his Good News. 3 Our appeal does not come from lies or wrong reasons, nor were we trying to trick you. 4 But we speak the Good News because God tested us and trusted us to do it. When we speak, we are not trying to please people, but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know that we never tried to influence you by saying nice things about you. We were not trying to get your money; we had no selfishness to hide from you. God knows that this is true. 6 We were not looking for human praise, from you or

anyone else, [7]even though as apostles of Christ we could have used our authority over you.

But we were very gentle with you,[n] like a mother caring for her little children. [8]Because we loved you, we were happy to share not only God's Good News with you, but even our own lives. You had become so dear to us! [9]Brothers and sisters, I know you remember our hard work and difficulties. We worked night and day so we would not burden any of you while we preached God's Good News to you.

[10]When we were with you, we lived in a holy and honest way, without fault. You know this is true, and so does God. [11]You know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. [12]We encouraged you, we urged you, and we insisted that you live good lives for God, who calls you to his glorious kingdom.

[13]Also, we always thank God because when you heard his message from us, you accepted it as the word of God, not the words of humans. And it really is God's message which works in you who believe. [14]Brothers and sisters, your experiences have been like those of God's churches in Christ that are in Judea.[n] You suffered from the people of your own country, as they suffered from the Jews [15]who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and forced us to leave that country. They do not please God and are against all people. [16]They try to stop us from teaching those who are not Jews so they may be saved. By doing this, they are increasing their sins to the limit. The anger of God has come to them at last.

# October 16

## Don’t Be Troubled

*“The person who trusts in the* LORD *will be blessed.”*

Jeremiah 17:7

Just prior to his crucifixion, [Jesus] told his disciples that he would be leaving them. “Where I am going you cannot follow now, but you will follow later” (John 13:36). Such a statement was bound to stir some questions. Peter spoke for the others and asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now?” (John 13:37).

See if Jesus’ reply doesn’t reflect the tenderness of a parent to a child: “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you … I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am” (John 14:1–3).

Reduce the paragraph to a sentence and it might read: “You do the trusting and I’ll do the taking.”

from *When Christ Comes*

### Jeremiah 17:1—18:23

### *Judah’s Guilty Heart*

17 “The sin of the people of Judah is written
with an iron tool.
Their sins were cut with a hard point into the stone that is their hearts.
Their sins were cut into the corners of their altars.

2 Even their children remember
their altars to idols and their Asherah idols

beside the green trees
and on the high hills.

3My mountain in the open country
and your wealth and treasures

I will give away to other people.
I will give away the places of worship in your country,
because you sinned by worshiping there.

4You will lose the land I gave you,
and it is your own fault.

I will let your enemies take you as their slaves
to a land you have never known.

This is because you have made my anger burn like a hot fire,
and it will burn forever.”

## *Trusting in Humans or God*

5This is what the LORD says:

“A curse is placed on those who trust other people,
who depend on humans for strength,
who have stopped trusting the LORD.

6They are like a bush in a desert
that grows in a land where no one lives,
a hot and dry land with bad soil.

They don’t know about the good things God can give.

7“But the person who trusts in the LORD will be blessed.
The LORD will show him that he can be trusted.

[8]He will be strong, like a tree planted near water
that sends its roots by a stream.

It is not afraid when the days are hot;
its leaves are always green.

It does not worry in a year when no rain comes;
it always produces fruit.

[9]"More than anything else, a person's mind is evil
and cannot be healed.
Who can understand it?

[10]But I, the LORD, look into a person's heart
and test the mind.

So I can decide what each one deserves;
I can give each one the right payment for what he does."

[11]Like a bird hatching an egg it did not lay,
so are the people who get rich by cheating.

When their lives are half finished, they will lose their riches.
At the end of their lives, it will be clear they were fools.

[12]From the beginning, our Temple has been honored
as a glorious throne for God.

[13]LORD, hope of Israel,
those who leave you will be shamed.

People who quit following the LORD will be like a name written in the dust,
because they have left the LORD, the spring of living water.

## *Jeremiah's Third Complaint*

14 LORD, heal me, and I will truly be healed.
Save me, and I will truly be saved.
You are the one I praise.

15 The people of Judah keep asking me,
"Where is the word from the LORD?
Let's see that message come true!"

16 LORD, I didn't run away from being the shepherd you wanted.
I didn't want the terrible day to come.

You know everything I have said;
you see all that is happening.

17 Don't be a terror to me.
I run to you for safety in times of trouble.

18 Make those who are hurting me be ashamed,
but don't bring shame to me.

Let them be terrified,
but keep me from terror.

Bring the day of disaster on my enemies.
Destroy them, and destroy them again.

## *Keeping the Sabbath Holy*

19 This is what the LORD said to me: "Go and stand at the People's Gate of Jerusalem, where the kings of Judah go in and out. And then go to all the other gates of Jerusalem. 20 Say to them there: 'Hear the word of the LORD, kings of Judah, all you people of Judah, and all who live in Jerusalem, who come through these gates into the city. 21 This is what the LORD says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. 22 Don't take a load out of your

houses on the Sabbath or do any work on that day. But keep the Sabbath as a holy day, as I commanded your ancestors. 23But your ancestors did not listen or pay attention to me. They were very stubborn and did not listen. I punished them, but it didn't do any good. 24But you must be careful to obey me, says the LORD. You must not bring a load through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath, but you must keep the Sabbath as a holy day and not do any work on that day.

25"'If you obey this command, kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of Jerusalem with their officers. They will come riding in chariots and on horses, along with the people of Judah and Jerusalem. And the city of Jerusalem will have people living in it forever. 26People will come to Jerusalem from the villages around it, from the towns of Judah, from the land of Benjamin, from the western hills, from the mountains, and from southern Judah. They will all bring to the Temple of the LORD burnt offerings, sacrifices, grain offerings, incense, and offerings to show thanks to God. 27But you must obey me and keep the Sabbath day as a holy day. You must not carry any loads into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. If you don't obey me, I will start a fire at the gates of Jerusalem, and it will burn until it burns even the strong towers. And it will not be put out.'"

## *The Potter and the Clay*

18 This is the word the LORD spoke to Jeremiah: 2"Go down to the potter's house, and I will give you my message there." 3So I went down to the potter's house and saw him working at the potter's wheel. 4He was using his hands to make a pot from clay, but something went wrong with it. So he used that clay to make another pot the way he wanted it to be.

5Then the LORD spoke his word to me: 6"Family of Israel, can't I do the same thing with you?" says the LORD. "You are in my hands like the clay in the potter's hands. 7There may come a time when I will speak about a nation or a kingdom that I will pull up by its roots or that I will pull down to destroy it. 8But if the people of that nation stop doing the evil they have done, I will change my mind and not carry out my plans to bring disaster to them. 9There may come another time when I will speak about a nation that I will build up and plant. 10But if I see it doing evil by not obeying me, I will change my mind and not carry out my plans to do good for them.

11"So, say this to the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem: 'This is what the LORD says: I am preparing disaster for you and making plans against you. So stop doing evil. Change your ways and do what is right.' 12But the people of Judah will answer, 'It won't do any good to try! We will continue

to do what we want. Each of us will do what his stubborn, evil heart wants!’”

13 So this is what the LORD says:

“Ask the people in other nations this question:
‘Have you ever heard anything like this?’
The people of Israel have done a horrible thing.

14 The snow on the mountains of Lebanon
never melts from the rocks.

Its cool, flowing streams
do not dry up.

15 But my people have forgotten me.
They burn incense to worthless idols

and have stumbled in what they do
and in the old ways of their ancestors.

They walk along back roads
and on poor highways.

16 So Judah’s country will become an empty desert.
People will not stop making fun of it.

They will shake their heads as they pass by;
they will be shocked at how the country was destroyed.

17 Like a strong east wind,
I will scatter them before their enemies.

At that awful time they will not see me coming to help them;
they will see me leaving.”

## *Jeremiah’s Fourth Complaint*

18 Then the people said, “Come, let’s make plans against
Jeremiah. Surely the teaching of the law by the priest will not
be lost. We will still have the advice from the wise teachers and
the words of the prophets. So let’s ruin him by telling lies about
him. We won’t pay attention to anything he says.”

19 LORD, listen to me.
Listen to what my accusers are saying!

20 Good should not be paid back with evil,
but they have dug a pit in order to kill me.

Remember that I stood before you
and asked you to do good things for these people
and to turn your anger away from them.

21 So now, let their children starve,
and let their enemies kill them with swords.

Let their wives lose their children and husbands.
Let the men from Judah be put to death
and the young men be killed with swords in battle.

22 Let them cry out in their houses
when you bring an enemy against them suddenly.

Let all this happen, because my enemies have dug
a pit to capture me and have hidden traps for my feet.

23 LORD, you know
about all their plans to kill me.

Don’t forgive their crimes
or erase their sins from your mind.

Make them fall from their places;
punish them while you are angry.

## Psalm 118:25–29

25 Please, LORD, save us;
please, LORD, give us success.

26 God bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless all of you from the Temple of the LORD.

27 The LORD is God,
and he has shown kindness to us.

With branches in your hands, join the feast.
Come to the corners of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will thank you;
you are my God, and I will praise your greatness.

29 Thank the LORD because he is good.
His love continues forever.

## Proverbs 27:11–12

11 Be wise, my child, and make me happy.
Then I can respond to any insult.

12 The wise see danger ahead and avoid it,
but fools keep going and get into trouble.

## 1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:13

## *Paul Wants to Visit Them Again*

17 Brothers and sisters, though we were separated from you
for a short time, our thoughts were still with you. We wanted
very much to see you and tried hard to do so. 18 We wanted to
come to you. I, Paul, tried to come more than once, but Satan
stopped us. 19 You are our hope, our joy, and the crown we will
take pride in when our Lord Jesus Christ comes. 20 Truly you are
our glory and our joy.
3 When we could not wait any longer, we decided it was best to
stay in Athens alone 2 and send Timothy to you. Timothy, our
brother, works with us for God and helps us tell people the
Good News about Christ. We sent him to strengthen and
encourage you in your faith 3 so none of you would be upset by
these troubles. You yourselves know that we must face these
troubles. 4 Even when we were with you, we told you we all
would have to suffer, and you know it has happened. 5 Because
of this, when I could wait no longer, I sent Timothy to you so I
could learn about your faith. I was afraid the devil had tempted
you, and perhaps our hard work would have been wasted.

6 But Timothy now has come back to us from you and has
brought us good news about your faith and love. He told us that
you always remember us in a good way and that you want to see
us just as much as we want to see you. 7 So, brothers and
sisters, while we have much trouble and suffering, we are
encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 Our life is really
full if you stand strong in the Lord. 9 We have so much joy before
our God because of you. We cannot thank him enough for all the
joy we feel. 10 Night and day we continue praying with all our
heart that we can see you again and give you all the things you
need to make your faith strong.

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus
prepare the way for us to come to you. 12 May the Lord make
your love grow more and multiply for each other and for all
people so that you will love others as we love you. 13 May your
hearts be made strong so that you will be holy and without fault
before our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all
his holy ones.

# October 17

# “No More”

*The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command.*

1 Thessalonians 4:16

Have you ever wondered what that command will be? It will be the inaugural word of heaven. It will be the first audible message most have heard from God. It will be the word that closes one age and opens a new one.

I think I know what the command will be. I could very well be wrong, but I think the command that puts an end to the pains of the earth and initiates the joys of heaven will be two words: “No more.”

The King of kings will raise his pierced hand and proclaim, “No more.”

The angels will stand, and the Father will speak, “No more.”

Every person who lives and who ever lived will turn toward the sky and hear God announce, “No more.”

No more loneliness.

No more tears.

No more death. No more sadness. No more crying. No more pain.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## Jeremiah 19:1—20:18

### *Judah Is like a Broken Jar*

19 This is what the LORD said to me: “Go and buy a clay jar from
a potter. 2Take some of the elders of the people and the priests,
and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the front of the
Potsherd Gate. There speak the words I tell you. 3Say, ‘Kings of
Judah and people of Jerusalem, listen to this message from the
LORD. This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says:

I will soon bring a disaster on this place that will amaze and
frighten everyone who hears about it. 4The people of Judah have
quit following me. They have made this a place for foreign gods.
They have burned sacrifices to other gods that neither they, nor
their ancestors, nor the kings of Judah had ever known before.
They filled this place with the blood of innocent people. 5They
have built places on hilltops to worship Baal, where they burn
their children in the fire to Baal. That is something I did not
command or speak about; it never even entered my mind. 6Now
people call this place the Valley of Ben Hinnom or Topheth, but
the days are coming, says the LORD, when people will call it the
Valley of Killing.

7"'At this place I will ruin the plans of the people of Judah
and Jerusalem. The enemy will chase them, and I will have them
killed with swords. I will make their dead bodies food for the
birds and wild animals. 8I will completely destroy this city.
People will make fun of it and shake their heads when they pass
by. They will be shocked when they see how the city was
destroyed. 9An enemy army will surround the city and will not
let anyone go out to get food. I will make the people so hungry
that they will eat the bodies of their own sons and daughters,
and then they will begin to eat each other.'

10"While the people with you are watching, break that jar.
11Then say this: 'The LORD All-Powerful says: I will break this
nation and this city just as someone breaks a clay jar that
cannot be put back together again. The dead people will be
buried here in Topheth, because there is no other place for
them. 12This is what I will do to these people and to this place,
says the LORD. I will make this city like Topheth. 13The houses in
Jerusalem and the king's palaces will become as unclean as this
place, Topheth, because the people worshiped gods on the
roofs[n] of their houses. They worshiped the stars and burned
incense to honor them and gave drink offerings to gods.'"

14When Jeremiah left Topheth where the LORD had sent him
to prophesy, he went to the LORD's Temple, stood in the
courtyard, and said to all the people: 15"This is what the LORD
All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: 'I will soon bring disaster
to Jerusalem and the villages around it, as I said I would. This
will happen because the people are very stubborn and do not
listen at all to what I say.'"

## *Pashhur Will Be Captured*

20 Pashhur son of Immer was a priest and the highest officer in
the Temple of the LORD. When he heard Jeremiah prophesying in
the Temple courtyard, 2he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten.
And he locked Jeremiah's hands and feet between large blocks
of wood at the Upper Gate of Benjamin of the LORD's Temple.

[3]The next day when Pashhur took Jeremiah out of the blocks of wood, Jeremiah said to him, “The LORD’s name for you is not Pashhur. Now his name for you is Terror on Every Side. [4]This is what the LORD says: ‘I will soon make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. You will watch enemies killing your friends with swords. And I will give all the people of Judah to the king of Babylon, who will take them away as captives to Babylon and then will kill them with swords. [5]I will give all the wealth of this city to its enemies—its goods, its valuables, and the treasures of the kings of Judah. The enemies will carry all those valuables off to Babylon. [6]And Pashhur, you and everyone in your house will be taken captive. You will be forced to go to Babylon, where you will die and be buried, you and your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.’”

## *Jeremiah’s Fifth Complaint*

[7]LORD, you tricked me, and I was fooled.
You are stronger than I am, so you won.

I have become a joke;
everyone makes fun of me all day long.

[8]Every time I speak, I shout.
I am always shouting about violence and destruction.

I tell the people about the message I received from the LORD,
but this only brings me insults.
The people make fun of me all day long.

[9]Sometimes I say to myself,
“I will forget about the LORD.
I will not speak anymore in his name.”

But then his message becomes like a burning fire inside me,
deep within my bones.

I get tired of trying to hold it inside of me,
and finally, I cannot hold it in.

[10]I hear many people whispering about me:
“Terror on every side!
Tell on him! Let’s tell the rulers about him.”

My friends are all just waiting for me to make some mistake.
They are saying,

“Maybe we can trick him
so we can defeat him
and pay him back.”

[11]But the LORD is with me like a strong warrior,
so those who are chasing me will trip and fall;
they will not defeat me.

They will be ashamed because they have failed,
and their shame will never be forgotten.

[12]LORD All-Powerful, you test good people;
you look deeply into the heart and mind of a person.

I have told you my arguments against these people,
so let me see you give them the punishment they deserve.

[13]Sing to the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

He saves the life of the poor
from the power of the wicked.

## *Jeremiah’s Sixth Complaint*

[14]Let there be a curse on the day I was born;
let there be no blessing on the day when my mother gave birth to me.

15 Let there be a curse on the man
who brought my father the news:

"You have a son!"
This made my father very glad.

16 Let that man be like the towns
the LORD destroyed without pity.

Let him hear loud crying in the morning
and battle cries at noon,

17 because he did not kill me before I was born.
Then my mother would have been my grave;
she would have stayed pregnant forever.

18 Why did I have to come out of my mother's body?
All I have known is trouble and sorrow,
and my life will end in shame.

## Psalm 119:1–8

### *The Word of God*

119 Happy are those who live pure lives,who follow the LORD's teachings.

2 Happy are those who keep his rules,
who try to obey him with their whole heart.

3 They don't do what is wrong;
they follow his ways.

4 LORD, you gave your orders

to be obeyed completely.

5I wish I were more loyal
in obeying your demands.

6Then I would not be ashamed
when I study your commands.

7When I learned that your laws are fair,
I praised you with an honest heart.

8I will obey your demands,
so please don't ever leave me.

## Proverbs 27:13

13Take the coat of someone who promises to pay a stranger's loan,
and keep it until he pays what the stranger owes.

## 1 Thessalonians 4:1–18

### *A Life that Pleases God*

4 Brothers and sisters, we taught you how to live in a way that will please God, and you are living that way. Now we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus to live that way even more. 2You know what we told you to do by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3God wants you to be holy and to stay away from sexual sins. 4He wants each of you to learn to control your own body[n] in a way that is holy and honorable. 5Don't use your body for sexual sin like the people who do not know God. 6Also, do not wrong or cheat another Christian in this way. The Lord will punish people who do those things as we have already told you and warned you. 7God called us to be holy and does not want us

to live in sin. [8]So the person who refuses to obey this teaching is disobeying God, not simply a human teaching. And God is the One who gives us his Holy Spirit.

[9]We do not need to write you about having love for your Christian family, because God has already taught you to love each other. [10]And truly you do love the Christians in all of Macedonia. Brothers and sisters, now we encourage you to love them even more.

[11]Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work as we have already told you. [12]If you do, then people who are not believers will respect you, and you will not have to depend on others for what you need.

## *The Lord's Coming*

[13]Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about those Christians who have died so you will not be sad, as others who have no hope. [14]We believe that Jesus died and that he rose again. So, because of him, God will raise with Jesus those who have died. [15]What we tell you now is the Lord's own message. We who are living when the Lord comes again will not go before those who have already died. [16]The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel,[n] and with the trumpet call of God. And those who have died believing in Christ will rise first. [17]After that, we who are still alive will be gathered up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And we will be with the Lord forever. [18]So encourage each other with these words.

# October 18

# A Free Choice

*God did not choose us to suffer his anger but to have salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 5:9

we don't like to talk about hell, do we? In intellectual circles the topic of hell is regarded as primitive and foolish. It's not logical. "A loving God wouldn't send people to hell." So we dismiss it.

But to dismiss it is to dismiss a core teaching of Jesus. The doctrine of hell is not one developed by Paul, Peter, or John. It is taught by Jesus himself.

And to dismiss it is to dismiss much more. It is to dismiss the presence of a loving God and the privilege of a free choice. Let me explain.

We are free either to love God or not. He invites us to love him. He urges us to love him.

He came that we might love him. But, in the end, the choice is yours and mine. To take that choice from each of us, for him to force us to love him, would be less than love.

God explains the benefits, outlines the promises, and articulates very clearly the consequences. And then, in the end, he leaves the choice to us.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## Jeremiah 21:1—22:30

### *God Rejects King Zedekiah's Request*

21 This is the word that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah. It came
when Zedekiah king of Judah sent Pashhur son of Malkijah and
the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to Jeremiah. 2They said,
"Ask the LORD for us what will happen, because Nebuchadnezzar
king of Babylon is attacking us. Maybe the LORD will do miracles
for us as he did in the past so Nebuchadnezzar will stop

attacking us and leave."

3But Jeremiah answered them, "Tell King Zedekiah this:
4'Here is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: You have
weapons of war in your hands to defend yourselves against the
king of Babylon and the Babylonians, who are all around the
city wall. But I will make those weapons useless. Soon I will
bring them into the center of this city. 5In my anger, my very
great anger, I myself will fight against you with my great power
and strength. 6I will kill everything living in Jerusalem—both
people and animals. They will die from terrible diseases. 7Then,
says the LORD, I'll hand over Zedekiah king of Judah, his officers,
and the people in Jerusalem who do not die from the terrible
diseases or battle or hunger, to Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon. I will let those win who want to kill the people of
Judah, so the people of Judah and Jerusalem will be killed in
war. Nebuchadnezzar will not show any mercy or pity or feel
sorry for them!'

8"Also tell this to the people of Jerusalem: 'This is what the
LORD says: I will let you choose to live or die. 9Anyone who stays
in Jerusalem will die in war or from hunger or from a terrible
disease. But anyone who goes out of Jerusalem and surrenders
to the Babylonians who are attacking you will live. Anyone who
leaves the city will save his life as if it were a prize won in war.
10I have decided to make trouble for this city and not to help it,
says the LORD. I will give it to the king of Babylon, and he will
burn it with fire.'

11"Say to Judah's royal family: 'Hear the word of the LORD.
12Family of David, this is what the LORD says:

You must judge people fairly every morning.
Save the person who has been robbed
from the power of his attacker.

If you don't, I will become very angry.
My anger will be like a fire that no one can put out,
because you have done evil things.

13"'Jerusalem, I am against you,
you who live on top of the mountain
over this valley, says the LORD.

You say, "No one can attack us
or come into our strong city."

14 But I will give you the punishment you deserve, says the LORD.
I will start a fire in your forests
that will burn up everything around you!'"

## *Judgment Against Evil Kings*

22 This is what the LORD says: "Go down to the palace of the king
of Judah and prophesy this message there: 2 'Hear the word of
the LORD, king of Judah, who rules from David's throne. You and
your officers, and your people who come through these gates,
listen! 3 This is what the LORD says: Do what is fair and right.
Save the one who has been robbed from the power of his
attacker. Don't mistreat or hurt the foreigners, orphans, or
widows. Don't kill innocent people here. 4 If you carefully obey
these commands, kings who sit on David's throne will come
through the gates of this palace with their officers and people,
riding in chariots and on horses. 5 But if you don't obey these
commands, says the LORD, I swear by my own name that this
king's palace will become a ruin.'"
6 This is what the LORD says about the palace where the king
of Judah lives:

"You are tall like the forests of Gilead,
like the mountaintops of Lebanon.

But I will truly make you into a desert,
into towns where no one lives.

7 I will send men to destroy the palace,
each with his weapons.

They will cut up your strong, beautiful cedar beams
and throw them into the fire.

8 "People from many nations will pass by this city and ask
each other, 'Why has the LORD done such a terrible thing to
Jerusalem, this great city?' 9 And the answer will be: 'Because
the people of Judah quit following the agreement with the LORD
their God. They worshiped and served other gods.'"

## *Judgment Against Jehoahaz*

10 Don’t cry for the dead king or be sad about him.
But cry painfully for the king who is being taken away,

because he will never return
or see his homeland again.

11 This is what the LORD says about Jehoahaz son of Josiah who became king of Judah after his father died and who has left this place: “He will never return. 12 He will die where he has been taken captive, and he will not see this land again.”

## *Judgment Against Jehoiakim*

13 “How terrible it will be for one who builds his palace by doing evil,
who cheats people so he can build its upper rooms.

He makes his own people work for nothing
and does not pay them.

14 He says, ‘I will build a great palace for myself
with large upper rooms.’

So he builds it with large windows
and uses cedar wood for the walls,
which he paints red.

15 “Does having a lot of cedar in your house
make you a great king?

Your father was satisfied to have food and drink.
He did what was right and fair,
so everything went well for him.

16 He helped those who were poor and needy,
so everything went well for him.

That is what it means to know God,”
says the LORD.

17 “But you only look for and think about
what you can get dishonestly.

You are even willing to kill innocent people to get it.
You feel free to hurt people and to steal from them.”

18 So this is what the LORD says to Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah:

“The people of Judah will not cry when Jehoiakim dies,
saying: ‘Oh, my brother,’ or ‘Oh, my sister.’

They will not cry for him, saying:
‘Oh, master,’ or ‘Oh, my king.’

19 They will bury him like a donkey,
dragging his body away
and throwing it outside the gates of Jerusalem.

20 “Judah, go up to Lebanon and cry out.
Let your voice be heard in Bashan.

Cry out from Abarim,
because all your friends are destroyed!

21 Judah, when you were successful, I warned you,
but you said, ‘I won’t listen.’

You have acted like this since you were young;
you have not obeyed me.

22 Like a storm, my punishment will blow all your shepherds away

and send your friends into captivity.

Then you will really be ashamed and disgraced
because of all the wicked things you did.

23 King, you live in your palace,
cozy in your rooms of cedar.

But when your punishment comes, how you will groan
like a woman giving birth to a baby!

## *Judgment upon Jehoiachin*

24 "As surely as I live," says the LORD, "Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, even if you were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. 25 I will hand you over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians—those people you fear because they want to kill you. 26 I will throw you and your mother into another country. Neither of you was born there, but both of you will die there. 27 They will want to come back, but they will never be able to return."

28 Jehoiachin is like a broken pot someone threw away;
he is like something no one wants.

Why will Jehoiachin and his children be thrown out
and sent into a foreign land?

29 Land, land, land of Judah,
hear the word of the LORD!

30 This is what the LORD says:

"Write this down in the record about Jehoiachin:
He is a man without children,
a man who will not be successful in his lifetime.

And none of his descendants will be successful;

none will sit on the throne of David
or rule in Judah.”

## Psalm 119:9–16

9 How can a young person live a pure life?
By obeying your word.

10 With all my heart I try to obey you.
Don’t let me break your commands.

11 I have taken your words to heart
so I would not sin against you.

12 LORD, you should be praised.
Teach me your demands.

13 My lips will tell about
all the laws you have spoken.

14 I enjoy living by your rules
as people enjoy great riches.

15 I think about your orders
and study your ways.

16 I enjoy obeying your demands,
and I will not forget your word.

## Proverbs 27:14

14 If you loudly greet your neighbor early in the morning,
he will think of it as a curse.

# 1 Thessalonians 5:1–28

## *Be Ready for the Lord's Coming*

5 Now, brothers and sisters, we do not need to write you about
times and dates. 2 You know very well that the day the Lord
comes again will be a surprise, like a thief that comes in the
night. 3 While people are saying, "We have peace and we are
safe," they will be destroyed quickly. It is like pains that come
quickly to a woman having a baby. Those people will not escape.
4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not living in darkness, and so
that day will not surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all people
who belong to the light and to the day. We do not belong to the
night or to darkness. 6 So we should not be like other people
who are sleeping, but we should be alert and have self-control.
7 Those who sleep, sleep at night. Those who get drunk, get
drunk at night. 8 But we belong to the day, so we should control
ourselves. We should wear faith and love to protect us, and the
hope of salvation should be our helmet. 9 God did not choose us
to suffer his anger but to have salvation through our Lord Jesus
Christ. 10 Jesus died for us so that we can live together with him,
whether we are alive or dead when he comes. 11 So encourage
each other and give each other strength, just as you are doing
now.

## *Final Instructions and Greetings*

12 Now, brothers and sisters, we ask you to appreciate those
who work hard among you, who lead you in the Lord and teach
you. 13 Respect them with a very special love because of the
work they do.

Live in peace with each other. 14 We ask you, brothers and
sisters, to warn those who do not work. Encourage the people
who are afraid. Help those who are weak. Be patient with
everyone. 15 Be sure that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but
always try to do what is good for each other and for all people.

16 Always be joyful. 17 Pray continually, 18 and give thanks
whatever happens. That is what God wants for you in Christ
Jesus.

19 Do not hold back the work of the Holy Spirit. 20 Do not treat
prophecy as if it were unimportant. 21 But test everything. Keep

what is good, [22]and stay away from everything that is evil.

[23]Now may God himself, the God of peace, make you pure, belonging only to him. May your whole self—spirit, soul, and body—be kept safe and without fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes. [24]You can trust the One who calls you to do that for you.

[25]Brothers and sisters, pray for us.

[26]Give each other a holy kiss when you meet. [27]I tell you by the authority of the Lord to read this letter to all the believers.

[28]The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

# October 19

## The Perfect Priest

*On the day when the Lord Jesus comes ... all the people who have believed will be amazed at Jesus.*

2 Thessalonians 1:10

When we see Christ, what will we see? We will see the perfect priest. "He was dressed in a long robe and had a gold band around his chest" (Revelation 1:13). The first readers of this message knew the significance of the robe and band. Jesus is wearing the clothing of a priest. A priest presents people to God and God to people.

You have known other priests. There have been others in your life, whether clergy or not, who sought to bring you to God. But they, too, needed a priest. Some needed a priest more than you did. They, like you, were sinful. Not so with Jesus. "Jesus is the kind of high priest we need. He is holy, sinless, pure, not influenced by sinners, and he is raised above the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26).

Jesus is the perfect priest.

from *When Christ Comes*

## Jeremiah 23:1—24:10

### *The Evil Leaders of Judah*

23 "How terrible it will be for the leaders of Judah, who are
scattering and destroying my people," says the LORD.

2 They are responsible for the people, so the LORD, the God of
Israel, says to them: "You have scattered my people and forced
them away and not taken care of them. So I will punish you for
the evil things you have done," says the LORD. 3 "I sent my people
to other countries, but I will gather those who are left alive and
bring them back to their own country. Then they will have many
children and grow in number. 4 I will place new leaders over my

people, who will take care of them. And my people will not be afraid or terrified again, and none of them will be lost," says the LORD.

## *The Good Branch Will Come*

5"The days are coming," says the LORD,
"when I will raise up a good branch in David's family.

He will be a king who will rule in a wise way;
he will do what is fair and right in the land.

6In his time Judah will be saved,
and Israel will live in safety.

This will be his name:
The LORD Does What Is Right.

7"So the days are coming," says the LORD, "when people will not say again: 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought Israel out of Egypt ...' 8But people will say something new: 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where he had sent them away ...' Then the people of Israel will live in their own land."

## *False Prophets Will Be Punished*

9A message to the prophets:

My heart is broken.
All my bones shake.

I'm like someone who is drunk,
like someone who has been overcome with wine.

This is because of the LORD
and his holy words.

10The land of Judah is full of people who are guilty of

adultery.
Because of this, the LORD cursed the land.
It has become a very sad place,
and the pastures have dried up.

The people are evil
and use their power in the wrong way.

11 "Both the prophets and the priests live as if there were no God.
I have found them doing evil things even in my own Temple," says the LORD.

12 "So they will be in danger.
They will be forced into darkness
where they will be defeated.

I will bring disaster on them
in the year I punish them," says the LORD.

13 "I saw the prophets of Samaria
do something wrong.

Those prophets prophesied by Baal
and led my people Israel away.

14 And I have seen the prophets of Jerusalem
do terrible things.

They are guilty of adultery
and live by lies.

They encourage evil people to keep on doing evil,
so the people don't stop sinning.

All of those people are like the city of Sodom.
The people of Jerusalem are like the city of Gomorrah to me!"

15So this is what the LORD All-Powerful says about the prophets:

“I will make those prophets eat bitter food
and drink poisoned water,

because the prophets of Jerusalem spread wickedness
through the whole country.”

16This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

“Don’t pay attention to what those prophets are saying to you.
They are trying to fool you.

They talk about visions their own minds made up,
not about visions from me.

17They say to those who hate me:
‘The LORD says: You will have peace.’

They say to all those who are stubborn and do as they please:
‘Nothing bad will happen to you.’

18But none of these prophets has stood in the meeting of angels
to see or hear the message of the LORD.
None of them has paid close attention to his message.

19Look, the punishment from the LORD
will come like a storm.

His anger will be like a hurricane.
It will come swirling down on the heads of those wicked people.

[20]The LORD's anger will not stop
until he finishes what he plans to do.

When that day is over,
you will understand this clearly.

[21]I did not send those prophets,
but they ran to tell their message.

I did not speak to them,
but they prophesied anyway.

[22]But if they had stood in the meeting of angels,
they would have told my message to my people.

They would have turned the people from their evil ways
and from doing evil.

[23]"I am a God who is near," says the LORD.
"I am also a God who is far away.

[24]No one can hide
where I cannot see him," says the LORD.

"I fill all of heaven and earth," says the LORD.
[25]"I have heard the prophets who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I have had a dream! I have had a dream!' [26]How long will this continue in the minds of these lying prophets? They prophesy from their own wishful thinking. [27]They are trying to make the people of Judah forget me by telling each other these dreams. In the same way, their ancestors forgot me and worshiped Baal. [28]Is straw the same thing as wheat?" says the LORD. "If a prophet wants to tell about his dreams, let him! But let the person who hears my message speak it truthfully! [29]Isn't my message like a fire?" says the LORD. "Isn't it like a hammer that smashes a rock?
[30]"So I am against the false prophets," says the LORD. "They keep stealing words from each other and say they are from me. [31]I am against the false prophets," says the LORD. "They use their own words and pretend it is a message from me. [32]I am against the prophets who prophesy false dreams," says the

LORD. “They mislead my people with their lies and false teachings! I did not send them or command them to do anything for me. They can’t help the people of Judah at all,” says the LORD.

## *The Sad Message from the LORD*

33“Suppose the people of Judah, a prophet, or a priest asks you: ‘Jeremiah, what is the message from the LORD?’ You will answer them and say, ‘You are a heavy load to the LORD, and I will throw you down, says the LORD.’ 34A prophet or a priest or one of the people might say, ‘This is a message from the LORD.’ That person has lied, so I will punish him and his whole family. 35This is what you will say to each other: ‘What did the LORD answer?’ or ‘What did the LORD say?’ 36But you will never again say, ‘The message of the LORD,’ because the only message you speak is your own words. You have changed the words of our God, the living God, the LORD All-Powerful. 37This is how you should speak to the prophets: ‘What answer did the LORD give you?’ or ‘What did the LORD say?’ 38But don’t say, ‘The message from the LORD.’ If you use these words, this is what the LORD says: Because you called it a ‘message from the LORD,’ though I told you not to use those words, 39I will pick you up and throw you away from me, along with Jerusalem, which I gave to your ancestors and to you. 40And I will make a disgrace of you forever; your shame will never be forgotten.”

## *The Good and Bad Figs*

24 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon captured Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim and king of Judah, his officers, and all the craftsmen and metalworkers of Judah. He took them away from Jerusalem and brought them to Babylon. It was then that the LORD showed me two baskets of figs arranged in front of the Temple of the LORD. 2One of the baskets had very good figs in it, like figs that ripen early in the season. But the other basket had figs too rotten to eat.

3The LORD said to me, “What do you see, Jeremiah?”

I answered, “I see figs. The good figs are very good, but the rotten figs are too rotten to eat.”

4Then the LORD spoke his word to me: 5“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I sent the people of Judah out of their country to live in the country of Babylon. I think of those people as good, like these good figs. 6I will look after them and bring them back to the land of Judah. I will not tear them down, but I will build them up. I will not pull them up, but I will plant them so they can grow. 7I will make them want to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God,

because they will return to me with their whole hearts.

8"'But the bad figs are too rotten to eat.' So this is what the LORD says: 'Zedekiah king of Judah, his officers, and all the people from Jerusalem who are left alive, even those who live in Egypt, will be like those rotten figs. 9I will make those people hated as an evil people by all the kingdoms of the earth. People will make fun of them and tell jokes about them and point fingers at them and curse them everywhere I scatter them. 10I will send war, hunger, and disease against them. I will attack them until they have all been killed. Then they will no longer be in the land I gave to them and their ancestors.'"

## Psalm 119:17–24

17Do good to me, your servant, so I can live,
so I can obey your word.

18Open my eyes to see
the miracles in your teachings.

19I am a stranger on earth.
Do not hide your commands from me.

20I wear myself out with desire
for your laws all the time.

21You scold proud people;
those who ignore your commands are cursed.

22Don't let me be insulted and hated
because I keep your rules.

23Even if princes speak against me,
I, your servant, will think about your demands.

24Your rules give me pleasure;

they give me good advice.

## Proverbs 27:15–16

15 A quarreling wife is as bothersome
as a continual dripping on a rainy day.

16 Stopping her is like stopping the wind
or trying to grab oil in your hand.

## 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

1 From Paul, Silas, and Timothy. To the church in Thessalonica
in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
2 Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ.

### *Paul Talks About God's Judgment*

3 We must always thank God for you, brothers and sisters.
This is only right, because your faith is growing more and more,
and the love that every one of you has for each other is
increasing. 4 So we brag about you to the other churches of God.
We tell them about the way you continue to be strong and have
faith even though you are being treated badly and are suffering
many troubles.
5 This is proof that God is right in his judgment. He wants you
to be counted worthy of his kingdom for which you are
suffering. 6 God will do what is right. He will give trouble to
those who trouble you. 7 And he will give rest to you who are
troubled and to us also when the Lord Jesus appears with
burning fire from heaven with his powerful angels. 8 Then he
will punish those who do not know God and who do not obey the
Good News about our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 Those people will be
punished with a destruction that continues forever. They will be
kept away from the Lord and from his great power. 10 This will
happen on the day when the Lord Jesus comes to receive glory
because of his holy people. And all the people who have
believed will be amazed at Jesus. You will be in that group,
because you believed what we told you.

[11]That is why we always pray for you, asking our God to help you live the kind of life he called you to live. We pray that with his power God will help you do the good things you want and perform the works that come from your faith. [12]We pray all this so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will have glory in you, and you will have glory in him. That glory comes from the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

# October 20

## Don’t Forget

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself … encourage you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.*

2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

Are you still in love with Jesus? Before you remember anything, remember him. If you forget anything, don’t forget him. Oh, but how quickly we forget. So much happens through the years. So many changes within. So many alterations without. And, somewhere, back there, we leave him. We don’t turn away from him … we just don’t take him with us. Assignments come. Promotions come. Budgets are made. Kids are born, and the Christ … the Christ is forgotten.

Has it been a while since you stared at the heavens in speechless amazement? Has it been a while since you realized God’s divinity and your carnality?

If it has, then you need to know something. He is still there. He hasn’t left.

from *Six Hours One Friday*

## Jeremiah 25:1—26:24

### *A Summary of Jeremiah’s Preaching*

25 This is the message that came to Jeremiah concerning all the
people of Judah. It came in the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of
Josiah was king of Judah and the first year Nebuchadnezzar was
king of Babylon. 2This is the message Jeremiah the prophet
spoke to all the people of Judah and Jerusalem:

3The LORD has spoken his word to me again and again for
these past twenty-three years. I have been a prophet since the
thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah. I have
spoken messages from the LORD to you from that time until
today, but you have not listened.

4The LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you over
and over again, but you have not listened or paid any attention
to them. 5Those prophets have said, “Stop your evil ways. Stop
doing what is wrong so you can stay in the land that the LORD
gave to you and your ancestors to live in forever. 6Don’t follow
other gods to serve them or to worship them. Don’t make me,
the LORD, angry by worshiping idols that are the work of your
own hands, or I will punish you.”
7“But you people of Judah did not listen to me,” says the
LORD. “You made me angry by worshiping idols that were the
work of your own hands, so I punished you.”
8So this is what the LORD All-Powerful says: “Since you have
not listened to my messages, 9I will send for all the peoples of
the north,” says the LORD, “along with my servant
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. I will bring them all against
Judah, those who live there, and all the nations around you, too.
I will completely destroy all those countries and leave them in
ruins forever. People will be shocked when they see how badly I
have destroyed those countries. 10I will bring an end to the
sounds of joy and happiness, the sounds of brides and
bridegrooms, and the sound of people grinding meal. And I will
take away the light of the lamp. 11That whole area will be an
empty desert, and these nations will be slaves of the king of
Babylon for seventy years.
12“But when the seventy years have passed, I will punish the
king of Babylon and his entire nation for their evil,” says the
LORD. “I will make that land a desert forever. 13I will make
happen all the terrible things I said about Babylonia—
everything Jeremiah prophesied about all those foreign nations,
the warnings written in this book. 14Even the Babylonians will
have to serve many nations and many great kings. I will give
them the punishment they deserve for all their own hands have
done.”

## *Judgment on the Nations*

15The LORD, the God of Israel, said this to me: “My anger is
like the wine in a cup. Take it from my hand and make all the
nations, to whom I am sending you, drink all of my anger from
this cup. 16They will drink my anger and stumble about and act
like madmen because of the war I am going to send among
them.”
17So I took the cup from the LORD’s hand and went to those
nations and made them drink from it. 18I served this wine to the
people of Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, and the kings and
officers of Judah, so they would become a ruin. Then people
would be shocked and would insult them and speak evil of them.
And so it has been to this day. 19I also made these people drink

of the LORD's anger: the king of Egypt, his servants, his officers, all his people, [20]and all the foreigners there; all the kings of the land of Uz; all the kings of the Philistines (the kings of the cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the people left at Ashdod); [21]the people of Edom, Moab, and Ammon; [22]all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; all the kings of the coastal countries to the west; [23]the people of Dedan and Tema and Buz; all who cut their hair short; [24]all the kings of Arabia; and the kings of the people who live in the desert; [25]all the kings of Zimri, Elam, and Media; [26]and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other. I made all the kingdoms on earth drink from the cup of the LORD's anger, but the king of Babylon will drink from this cup after all the others.

[27]"Then say to them, 'This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Drink this cup of my anger. Get drunk from it and vomit. Fall down and don't get up because of the war I am sending among you!'

[28]"If they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, say to them, 'The LORD All-Powerful says this: You must drink from this cup. [29]Look! I am already bringing disaster on Jerusalem, the city that is called by my name. Do you think you will not be punished? You will be punished! I am sending war on all the people of the earth, says the LORD All-Powerful.'

[30]"You, Jeremiah, will prophesy against them with all these words. Say to them:

'The LORD will roar from heaven
and will shout from his Holy Temple.
He will roar loudly against his land.

He will shout like people who walk on grapes to make wine;
he will shout against all who live on the earth.

[31]The noise will spread all over the earth,
because the LORD will accuse all the nations.

He will judge and tell what is wrong with all people,
and he will kill the evil people with a sword,'" says the LORD.

[32]This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

"Disasters will soon spread

from nation to nation.

They will come like a powerful storm
from the faraway places on earth.”

33 At that time those killed by the LORD will reach from one end
of the earth to the other. No one will cry for them or gather up
their bodies and bury them. They will be left lying on the
ground like dung.

34 Cry, you leaders! Cry out loud!
Roll around in the dust, leaders of the people!

It is now time for you to be killed.
You will fall and be scattered,
like pieces of a broken jar.

35 There will be no place for the leaders to hide;
they will not escape.

36 I hear the sound of the leaders shouting.
I hear the leaders of the people crying loudly,
because the LORD is destroying their land.

37 Those peaceful pastures will be like an empty desert,
because the LORD is very angry.

38 Like a lion, he has left his den.
Their land has been destroyed

because of the terrible war he brought,
because of his fierce anger.

## *Jeremiah’s Lesson at the Temple*

26 This message came from the LORD soon after Jehoiakim son of
Josiah became king of Judah. 2 This is what the LORD said:
“Jeremiah, stand in the courtyard of the Temple of the LORD.
Give this message to all the people of the towns of Judah who
are coming to worship at the Temple of the LORD. Tell them

everything I tell you to say; don't leave out a word. 3Maybe they will listen and stop their evil ways. If they will, I will change my mind about bringing on them the disaster that I am planning because of the evil they have done. 4Say to them: 'This is what the LORD says: You must obey me and follow my teachings that I gave you. 5You must listen to what my servants the prophets say to you. I have sent them to you again and again, but you did not listen. 6If you don't obey me, I will destroy my Temple in Jerusalem as I destroyed my Holy Tent at Shiloh. When I do, people all over the world will curse Jerusalem.'"

7The priests, the prophets, and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the Temple of the LORD. 8When Jeremiah finished speaking everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, prophets, and all the people grabbed Jeremiah. They said, "You must die! 9How dare you prophesy in the name of the LORD that this Temple will be destroyed like the one at Shiloh! How dare you say that Jerusalem will become a desert without anyone to live in it!" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the Temple of the LORD.

10Now when the officers of Judah heard about what was happening, they came out of the king's palace and went up to the Temple of the LORD and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate. 11Then the priests and prophets said to the officers and all the other people, "Jeremiah should be killed. He prophesied against Jerusalem, and you heard him yourselves."

12Then Jeremiah spoke these words to all the officers of Judah and all the other people: "The LORD sent me to say everything you have heard about this Temple and this city. 13Now change your lives and start doing good and obey the LORD your God. Then he will change his mind and not bring on you the disaster he has told you about. 14As for me, I am in your power. Do to me what you think is good and right. 15But be sure of one thing. If you kill me, you will be guilty of killing an innocent person. You will make this city and everyone who lives in it guilty, too! The LORD truly sent me to you to give you this message."

16Then the officers and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "Jeremiah must not be killed. What he told us comes from the LORD our God."

17Then some of the elders of Judah stood up and said to all the people, 18"Micah, from the city of Moresheth, was a prophet during the time Hezekiah was king of Judah. Micah said to all the people of Judah, 'This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

Jerusalem will be plowed like a field.
It will become a pile of rocks,
and the hill where the Temple stands will be covered with

bushes.’

19“Hezekiah king of Judah and the people of Judah did not
kill Micah. You know that Hezekiah feared the LORD and tried to
please the LORD. So the LORD changed his mind and did not bring
on Judah the disaster he had promised. If we hurt Jeremiah, we
will bring a terrible disaster on ourselves!”
20(Now there was another man who prophesied in the name
of the LORD. His name was Uriah son of Shemaiah from the city
of Kiriath Jearim. He preached the same things against
Jerusalem and the land of Judah that Jeremiah did. 21When King
Jehoiakim, all his army officers, and all the leaders of Judah
heard Uriah preach, King Jehoiakim wanted to kill Uriah. But
Uriah heard about it and was afraid. So he escaped to Egypt.
22Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Acbor and some
other men to Egypt, 23and they brought Uriah back from Egypt.
Then they took him to King Jehoiakim, who had Uriah killed
with a sword. His body was thrown into the burial place where
poor people are buried.)
24Ahikam son of Shaphan supported Jeremiah. So Ahikam did
not hand Jeremiah over to be killed by the people.

## Psalm 119:25–32

25I am about to die.
Give me life, as you have promised.

26I told you about my life, and you answered me.
Teach me your demands.

27Help me understand your orders.
Then I will think about your miracles.

28I am sad and tired.
Make me strong again as you have promised.

29Don’t let me be dishonest;
have mercy on me by helping me obey your teachings.

30 I have chosen the way of truth;
I have obeyed your laws.

31 I hold on to your rules.
LORD, do not let me be disgraced.

32 I will quickly obey your commands,
because you have made me happy.

## Proverbs 27:17

17 As iron sharpens iron,
so people can improve each other.

## 2 Thessalonians 2:1–17

### *Evil Things Will Happen*

2 Brothers and sisters, we have something to say about the
coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the time when we will meet
together with him. 2 Do not become easily upset in your thinking
or afraid if you hear that the day of the Lord has already come.
Someone may have said this in a prophecy or in a message or in
a letter as if it came from us. 3 Do not let anyone fool you in any
way. That day of the Lord will not come until the turning away[n]
from God happens and the Man of Evil,[n] who is on his way to
hell, appears. 4 He will be against and put himself above any so-
called god or anything that people worship. And that Man of
Evil will even go into God's Temple and sit there and say that he
is God.

5 I told you when I was with you that all this would happen.
Do you not remember? 6 And now you know what is stopping
that Man of Evil so he will appear at the right time. 7 The secret
power of evil is already working in the world, but there is one
who is stopping that power. And he will continue to stop it until
he is taken out of the way. 8 Then that Man of Evil will appear,
and the Lord Jesus will kill him with the breath that comes from
his mouth and will destroy him with the glory of his coming.

9The Man of Evil will come by the power of Satan. He will have great power, and he will do many different false miracles, signs, and wonders. 10He will use every kind of evil to trick those who are lost. They will die, because they refused to love the truth. (If they loved the truth, they would be saved.) 11For this reason God sends them something powerful that leads them away from the truth so they will believe a lie. 12So all those will be judged guilty who did not believe the truth, but enjoyed doing evil.

## *You Are Chosen for Salvation*

13Brothers and sisters, whom the Lord loves, God chose you from the beginning[n] to be saved. So we must always thank God for you. You are saved by the Spirit that makes you holy and by your faith in the truth. 14God used the Good News that we preached to call you to be saved so you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15So, brothers and sisters, stand strong and continue to believe the teachings we gave you in our speaking and in our letter.

16–17May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father encourage you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say. God loved us, and through his grace he gave us a good hope and encouragement that continues forever.

# October 21

## Take Heart!

*May the Lord lead your hearts into God's love and Christ's patience.*

2 Thessalonians 3:5

The majority is not always right. If the majority had ruled, the children of Israel never would have left Egypt. They would have voted to stay in bondage. If the majority had ruled, David never would have fought Goliath. His brothers would have voted for him to stay with the sheep. What's the point? You must listen to your own heart.

God says you're on your way to becoming a disciple when you can keep a clear head and a pure heart.

Do you ever wonder if everything will turn out right as long as you do everything right? Do you ever try to do something right and yet nothing seems to turn out like you planned? Take heart—when people do what is right, God remembers.

from *The Inspirational Study Bible*

## Jeremiah 27:1—28:17

### *Nebuchadnezzar Is Made Ruler*

27 The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah soon after Zedekiah son
of Josiah was made king of Judah. 2This is what the LORD said to
me: "Make a yoke out of straps and poles, and put it on the back
of your neck. 3Then send messages to the kings of Edom, Moab,
Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon by their messengers who have come to
Jerusalem to see Zedekiah king of Judah. 4Tell them to give this
message to their masters: 'The LORD All-Powerful, the God of
Israel, says: "Tell your masters: 5I made the earth, its people,
and all its animals with my great power and strength. I can give
the earth to anyone I want. 6Now I have given all these lands to
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant. I will make even

the wild animals obey him. 7All nations will serve
Nebuchadnezzar and his son and grandson. Then the time will
come for Babylon to be defeated, and many nations and great
kings will make Babylon their servant.

8"'"But if some nations or kingdoms refuse to serve
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and refuse to be under his
control, I will punish them with war, hunger, and terrible
diseases, says the LORD. I will use Nebuchadnezzar to destroy
them. 9So don't listen to your false prophets, those who use
magic to tell the future, those who explain dreams, the
mediums, or magicians. They all tell you, 'You will not be slaves
to the king of Babylon.' 10They are telling you lies that will
cause you to be taken far from your homeland. I will force you
to leave your homes, and you will die in another land. 11But the
nations who put themselves under the control of the king of
Babylon and serve him I will let stay in their own country, says
the LORD. The people from those nations will live in their own
land and farm it."'"

12I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said,
"Put yourself under the control of the king of Babylon and serve
him, and you will live. 13Why should you and your people die
from war, hunger, or disease, as the LORD said would happen to
those who do not serve the king of Babylon? 14But the false
prophets are saying, 'You will never be slaves to the king of
Babylon.' Don't listen to them because they are prophesying lies
to you! 15'I did not send them,' says the LORD. 'They are
prophesying lies and saying the message is from me. So I will
send you away, Judah. And you and those prophets who
prophesy to you will die.'"

16Then I, Jeremiah, said to the priests and all the people,
"This is what the LORD says: Those false prophets are saying,
'The Babylonians will soon return what they took from the
Temple of the LORD.' Don't listen to them! They are prophesying
lies to you. 17Don't listen to those prophets. But serve the king
of Babylon, and you will live. There is no reason for you to cause
Jerusalem to become a ruin. 18If they are prophets and have the
message from the LORD, let them pray to the LORD All-Powerful.
Let them ask that the items which are still in the Temple of the
LORD and in the king's palace and in Jerusalem not be taken
away to Babylon.

19"This is what the LORD All-Powerful says about those items
left in Jerusalem: the pillars, the large bronze bowl, which is
called the Sea, the stands that can be moved, and other things.
20Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take these away
when he took as captives Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of
Judah and all the other important people from Judah and
Jerusalem to Babylon. 21This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the
God of Israel, says about the items left in the Temple of the LORD
and in the king's palace and in Jerusalem: 22'All of them will also

be taken to Babylon. And they will stay there until the day I go to get them,' says the LORD. 'Then I will bring them back and return them to this place.'"

## *The False Prophet Hananiah*

28 It was in that same year, in the fifth month of Zedekiah's fourth year as king of Judah, soon after he began to rule. The prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, from the town of Gibeon, spoke to me in the Temple of the LORD in front of the priests and all the people. He said: 2"The LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: 'I have broken the yoke the king of Babylon has put on Judah. 3Before two years are over, I will bring back everything that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took to Babylon from the LORD's Temple. 4I will also bring back Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other captives from Judah who went to Babylon,' says the LORD. 'So I will break the yoke the king of Babylon put on Judah.'"

5Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in front of the priests and all the people who were standing in the Temple of the LORD. 6He said, "Amen! Let the LORD really do that! May the LORD make the message you prophesy come true. May he bring back here everything from the LORD's Temple and all the people who were taken as captives to Babylon.

7"But listen to what I am going to say to you and all the people. 8There were prophets long before we became prophets, Hananiah. They prophesied that war, hunger, and terrible diseases would come to many countries and great kingdoms. 9But if a prophet prophesies that we will have peace and that message comes true, he can be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD."

10Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off Jeremiah's neck and broke it. 11Hananiah said in front of all the people, "This is what the LORD says: 'In the same way I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He put that yoke on all the nations of the world, but I will break it before two years are over.'" After Hananiah had said that, Jeremiah left the Temple.

12The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke off of the prophet Jeremiah's neck. 13The LORD said, "Go and tell Hananiah, 'This is what the LORD says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but I will make a yoke of iron in its place! 14The LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: I will put a yoke of iron on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will be slaves to him. I will even give Nebuchadnezzar control over the wild animals.'"

15Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah,

“Listen, Hananiah! The LORD did not send you, and you have made the people of Judah trust in lies. 16So this is what the LORD says: ‘Soon I will remove you from the earth. You will die this year, because you taught the people to turn against the LORD.’”
17Hananiah died in the seventh month of that same year.

## Psalm 119:33–40

33LORD, teach me your demands,
and I will keep them until the end.

34Help me understand, so I can keep your teachings,
obeying them with all my heart.

35Lead me in the path of your commands,
because that makes me happy.

36Make me want to keep your rules
instead of wishing for riches.

37Keep me from looking at worthless things.
Let me live by your word.

38Keep your promise to me, your servant,
so you will be respected.

39Take away the shame I fear,
because your laws are good.

40How I want to follow your orders.
Give me life because of your goodness.

## Proverbs 27:18

18 Whoever tends a fig tree gets to eat its fruit,
and whoever takes care of his master will receive honor.

# 2 Thessalonians 3:1–18

## *Pray for Us*

3 And now, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the Lord's
teaching will continue to spread quickly and that people will
give honor to that teaching, just as happened with you. 2 And
pray that we will be protected from stubborn and evil people,
because not all people believe.

3 But the Lord is faithful and will give you strength and will
protect you from the Evil One. 4 The Lord makes us feel sure
that you are doing and will continue to do the things we told
you. 5 May the Lord lead your hearts into God's love and Christ's
patience.

## *The Duty to Work*

6 Brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus
Christ we command you to stay away from any believer who
refuses to work and does not follow the teaching we gave you.
7 You yourselves know that you should live as we live. We were
not lazy when we were with you. 8 And when we ate another
person's food, we always paid for it. We worked very hard night
and day so we would not be an expense to any of you. 9 We had
the right to ask you to help us, but we worked to take care of
ourselves so we would be an example for you to follow. 10 When
we were with you, we gave you this rule: "Anyone who refuses
to work should not eat."

11 We hear that some people in your group refuse to work.
They do nothing but busy themselves in other people's lives.
12 We command those people and beg them in the Lord Jesus
Christ to work quietly and earn their own food. 13 But you,
brothers and sisters, never become tired of doing good.

14 If some people do not obey what we tell you in this letter,
then take note of them. Have nothing to do with them so they
will feel ashamed. 15 But do not treat them as enemies. Warn
them as fellow believers.

## *Final Words*

16 Now may the Lord of peace give you peace at all times and

in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

[17]I, Paul, end this letter now in my own handwriting. All my letters have this to show they are from me. This is the way I write.

[18]The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

# October 22

# He Kept the Faith

*Continue to have faith and do what you know is right. Some people have rejected this, and their faith has been shipwrecked.*

1 Timothy 1:19

I sit a few feet from a man on death row. Jewish by birth. Tentmaker by trade. Apostle by calling. His days are marked. I'm curious about what bolsters this man as he nears his execution. So I ask some questions.

Do you have family, Paul? *I have none.*

What about your health? *My body is beaten and tired …*

Any awards? *Not on earth.*

Then what do you have, Paul? No belongings. No family … What do you have that matters?

*I have my faith. It's all I have. But it's all I need. I have kept the faith.*

Paul leans back against the wall of his cell and smiles.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## Jeremiah 29:1—30:24

### *A Letter to the Captives in Babylon*

29 This is the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from
Jerusalem to the elders who were among the captives, the
priests, and the prophets. He sent it to all the other people
Nebuchadnezzar had taken as captives from Jerusalem to
Babylon. 2(This letter was sent after all these people were taken
away: Jehoiachin the king and the queen mother; the officers
and leaders of Judah and Jerusalem; and the craftsmen and
metalworkers from Jerusalem.) 3Zedekiah king of Judah sent
Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah to Babylon
to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. So Jeremiah gave them this
letter to carry to Babylon:

4This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says to
all those people I sent away from Jerusalem as captives to
Babylon: 5"Build houses and settle in the land. Plant gardens
and eat the food they grow. 6Get married and have sons and
daughters. Find wives for your sons, and let your daughters be
married so they also may have sons and daughters. Have many
children in Babylon; don't become fewer in number. 7Also do
good things for the city where I sent you as captives. Pray to the
LORD for the city where you are living, because if good things
happen in the city, good things will happen to you also." 8The
LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: "Don't let the
prophets among you and the people who do magic fool you.
Don't listen to their dreams. 9They are prophesying lies to you,
saying that their message is from me. But I did not send them,"
says the LORD.

10This is what the LORD says: "Babylon will be powerful for
seventy years. After that time I will come to you, and I will keep
my promise to bring you back to Jerusalem. 11I say this because
I know what I am planning for you," says the LORD. "I have good
plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a
good future. 12Then you will call my name. You will come to me
and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13You will search for me.
And when you search for me with all your heart, you will find
me! 14I will let you find me," says the LORD. "And I will bring you
back from your captivity. I forced you to leave this place, but I
will gather you from all the nations, from the places I have sent
you as captives," says the LORD. "And I will bring you back to
this place."

15You might say, "The LORD has given us prophets here in
Babylon."

16But the LORD says this about the king who is sitting on
David's throne now and all the other people still in Jerusalem,
your relatives who did not go as captives to Babylon with you.
17The LORD All-Powerful says: "I will soon send war, hunger, and
terrible diseases against those still in Jerusalem. I will make
them like bad figs that are too rotten to eat. 18I will chase them
with war, hunger, and terrible diseases. I will make them hated
by all the kingdoms of the earth. People will curse them and be
shocked and will use them as a shameful example wherever I
make them go. 19This is because they have not listened to my
message," says the LORD. "I sent my message to them again and
again through my servants, the prophets, but they did not
listen," says the LORD.

20You captives, whom I forced to leave Jerusalem and go to
Babylon, listen to the message from the LORD. 21The LORD All-
Powerful, the God of Israel, says this about Ahab son of Kolaiah
and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah: "These two men have been
prophesying lies to you, saying that their message is from me.

But soon I will hand over those two prophets to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will kill them in front of you. 22Because of them, all the captives from Judah in Babylon will use this curse: 'May the LORD treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.' 23They have done evil things among the people of Israel. They are guilty of adultery with their neighbors' wives. They have also spoken lies and said those lies were a message from me. I did not tell them to do that. I know what they have done; I am a witness to it," says the LORD.

24Also give a message to Shemaiah from the Nehelamite family. 25The LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: "Shemaiah, you sent letters in your name to all the people in Jerusalem, to the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah, and to all the priests. 26You said to Zephaniah, 'The LORD has made you priest in place of Jehoiada. You are to be in charge of the Temple of the LORD. You should arrest any madman who acts like a prophet. Lock his hands and feet between wooden blocks, and put iron rings around his neck. 27Now Jeremiah from Anathoth is acting like a prophet. So why haven't you arrested him? 28Jeremiah has sent this message to us in Babylon: You will be there for a long time, so build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they grow.'"

29Zephaniah the priest read the letter to Jeremiah the prophet. 30Then the LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah: 31"Send this message to all the captives in Babylon: 'This is what the LORD says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Shemaiah has prophesied to you, but I did not send him. He has made you believe a lie. 32So the LORD says, I will soon punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his family. He will not see the good things I will do for my people, says the LORD. None of his family will be left alive among the people, because he has taught the people to turn against me.'"

## *Promises of Hope*

30 These are the words that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah. 2The LORD, the God of Israel, said: "Jeremiah, write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. 3The days will come when I will bring Israel and Judah back from captivity," says the LORD. "I will return them to the land I gave their ancestors, and they will own it!" says the LORD.

4The LORD spoke this message about the people of Israel and Judah: 5This is what the LORD said:

"We hear people crying from fear.
They are afraid; there is no peace.

[6]Ask this question, and consider it:
A man cannot have a baby.

So why do I see every strong man
holding his stomach in pain like a woman having a baby?
Why is everyone's face turning white like a dead man's face?

[7]This will be a terrible day!
There will never be another time like this.

This is a time of great trouble for the people of Jacob,
but they will be saved from it."

[8]The LORD All-Powerful says, "At that time
I will break the yoke from their necks

and tear off the ropes that hold them.
Foreign people will never again make my people slaves.

[9]They will serve the LORD their God
and David their king,
whom I will send to them.

[10]"So people of Jacob, my servants, don't be afraid.
Israel, don't be frightened," says the LORD.

"I will soon save you from that faraway place where you are captives.
I will save your family from that land.

The people of Jacob will be safe and have peace again;
there will be no enemy to frighten them.

[11]I am with you and will save you,"
says the LORD.

“I will completely destroy all those nations
where I scattered you,
but I will not completely destroy you.

I will punish you fairly,
but I will still punish you.”

12 This is what the LORD said:

“You people have a wound that cannot be cured;
your injury will not heal.

13 There is no one to argue your case
and no cure for your sores.
So you will not be healed.

14 All those nations who were your friends have forgotten you.
They don’t care about you.

I have hurt you as an enemy would.
I punished you very hard,

because your guilt was so great
and your sins were so many.

15 Why are you crying out about your injury?
There is no cure for your pain.

I did these things to you because of your great guilt,
because of your many sins.

16 But all those nations that destroyed you will now be destroyed.
All your enemies will become captives in other lands.

Those who stole from you will have their own things stolen.
Those who took things from you in war will have their

own things taken.

17 I will bring back your health
and heal your injuries,” says the LORD,

“because other people forced you away.
They said about you, ‘No one cares about Jerusalem!’”

18 This is what the LORD said:

“I will soon make the tents of Jacob’s people as they used to be,
and I will have pity on Israel’s houses.

The city will be rebuilt on its hill of ruins,
and the king’s palace will stand in its proper place.

19 People in those places will sing songs of praise.
There will be the sound of laughter.

I will give them many children
so their number will not be small.

I will bring honor to them
so no one will look down on them.

20 Their descendants will be as they were in the old days.
I will set them up as a strong people before me,

and I will punish the nations who have hurt them.

21 One of their own people will lead them;
their ruler will come from among them.

He will come near to me when I invite him.
Who would dare to come to me uninvited?” says the LORD.

22 “So you will be my people,
and I will be your God.”

23 Look! It is a storm from the LORD!
He is angry and has gone out to punish the people.

Punishment will come like a storm
crashing down on the evil people.

24 The LORD will stay angry
until he finishes punishing the people.

He will stay angry
until he finishes the punishment he planned.

When that day comes,
you will understand this.

## Psalm 119:41–48

41 LORD, show me your love,
and save me as you have promised.

42 I have an answer for people who insult me,
because I trust what you say.

43 Never keep me from speaking your truth,
because I depend on your fair laws.

44 I will obey your teachings
forever and ever.

45 So I will live in freedom,
because I want to follow your orders.

[46]I will discuss your rules with kings
and will not be ashamed.

[47]I enjoy obeying your commands,
which I love.

[48]I praise your commands, which I love,
and I think about your demands.

## Proverbs 27:19

[19]As water reflects your face,
so your mind shows what kind of person you are.

## 1 Timothy 1:1–20

[1] From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the command of God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope.

[2]To Timothy, a true child to me because you believe:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

### *Warning Against False Teaching*

[3]I asked you to stay longer in Ephesus when I went into Macedonia so you could command some people there to stop teaching false things. [4]Tell them not to spend their time on stories that are not true and on long lists of names in family histories. These things only bring arguments; they do not help God's work, which is done in faith. [5]The purpose of this command is for people to have love, a love that comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a true faith. [6]Some people have missed these things and turned to useless talk. [7]They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not understand either what they are talking about or what they are sure about.

[8]But we know that the law is good if someone uses it lawfully. [9]We also know that the law is not made for good people but for those who are against the law and for those who refuse

to follow it. It is for people who are against God and are sinful, who are unholy and ungodly, who kill their fathers and mothers, who murder, [10]who take part in sexual sins, who have sexual relations with people of the same sex, who sell slaves, who tell lies, who speak falsely, and who do anything against the true teaching of God. [11]That teaching is part of the Good News of the blessed God that he gave me to tell.

## *Thanks for God's Mercy*

[12]I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who gave me strength, because he trusted me and gave me this work of serving him. [13]In the past I spoke against Christ and persecuted him and did all kinds of things to hurt him. But God showed me mercy, because I did not know what I was doing. I did not believe. [14]But the grace of our Lord was fully given to me, and with that grace came the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

[15]What I say is true, and you should fully accept it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. [16]But I was given mercy so that in me, the worst of all sinners, Christ Jesus could show that he has patience without limit. His patience with me made me an example for those who would believe in him and have life forever. [17]To the King that rules forever, who will never die, who cannot be seen, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

[18]Timothy, my child, I am giving you a command that agrees with the prophecies that were given about you in the past. I tell you this so you can follow them and fight the good fight. [19]Continue to have faith and do what you know is right. Some people have rejected this, and their faith has been shipwrecked. [20]Hymenaeus and Alexander have done that, and I have given them to Satan so they will learn not to speak against God.

# October 23

## Dark Nights—God's Light

*Pray for all people, asking God for what they need and being thankful to him.*

1 Timothy 2:1

You wonder if it is a blessing or a curse to have a mind that never rests. But you would rather be a cynic than a hypocrite, so you continue to pray with one eye open and wonder:

about starving children
about the power of prayer
about Christians in cancer wards …

Tough questions. Throw-in-the-towel questions. Questions the disciples must have asked in the storm.

All they could see were black skies as they bounced in the battered boat …

[Then] a figure came to them walking on the water. It wasn't what they expected … They almost missed seeing the answer to their prayers.

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

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

## Jeremiah 31:1—32:44

### *The New Israel*

31 The LORD says, "At that time I will be God of all Israel's family
groups, and they will be my people."
2This is what the LORD says:

"The people who were not killed by the enemy's sword
found help in the desert.

I came to give rest to Israel.”

3And from far away the LORD appeared to his people and said,

“I love you people
with a love that will last forever.

That is why I have continued
showing you kindness.

4People of Israel, I will build you up again,
and you will be rebuilt.

You will pick up your tambourines again
and dance with those who are joyful.

5You will plant vineyards again
on the hills around Samaria.

The farmers will plant them
and enjoy their fruit.

6There will be a time when watchmen in the mountains of Ephraim shout this message:
‘Come, let’s go up to Jerusalem to worship the LORD our God!’”

7This is what the LORD says:

“Be happy and sing for the people of Jacob.
Shout for Israel, the greatest of the nations.

Sing your praises and shout this:
‘LORD, save your people,
those who are left alive from the nation of Israel!’

8Look, I will soon bring Israel from the country in the north,
and I will gather them from the faraway places on earth.

Some of the people are blind and crippled.
Some of the women are pregnant, and some are ready to give birth.
A great many people will come back.

9 They will be crying as they come,
but they will pray as I bring them back.

I will lead those people by streams of water
on an even road where they will not stumble.

I am Israel's father,
and Israel is my firstborn son.

10 "Nations, listen to the message from the LORD.
Tell this message in the faraway lands by the sea:

'The one who scattered the people of Israel will bring them back,
and he will watch over his people like a shepherd.'

11 The LORD will pay for the people of Jacob
and will buy them back from people stronger than they were.

12 The people of Israel will come to the high points of Jerusalem
and shout for joy.

Their faces will shine with happiness about all the good things from the LORD:
the grain, new wine, oil, young sheep, and young cows.

They will be like a garden that has plenty of water,
and they will not be troubled anymore.

13 Then young women of Israel will be happy and dance,
the young men and old men also.

I will change their sadness into happiness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sadness.

14 The priests will have more than enough sacrifices,
and my people will be filled with the good things I give them!” says the LORD.

15 This is what the LORD says:

“A voice was heard in Ramah
of painful crying and deep sadness:

Rachel crying for her children.
She refused to be comforted,
because her children are dead!”

16 But this is what the LORD says:

“Stop crying;
don’t let your eyes fill with tears.

You will be rewarded for your work!” says the LORD.
“The people will return from their enemy’s land.

17 So there is hope for you in the future,” says the LORD.
“Your children will return to their own land.

18 “I have heard Israel moaning:
‘LORD, you punished me, and I have learned my lesson.
I was like a calf that had never been trained.

Take me back so that I may come back.
You truly are the LORD my God.

19 LORD, after I wandered away from you,
I changed my heart and life.

After I understood,

I beat my breast with sorrow.

I was ashamed and disgraced,
because I suffered for the foolish things I did when I was young.’

20 “You know that Israel is my dear son,
The child I love.

Yes, I often speak against Israel,
but I still remember him.

I love him very much,
and I want to comfort him,” says the LORD.

21 “People of Israel, fix the road signs.
Put up signs to show you the way home.

Watch the road.
Pay attention to the road on which you travel.

People of Israel, come home,
come back to your towns.

22 You are an unfaithful daughter.
How long will you wander before you come home?

The LORD has made something new happen in the land:
A woman will go seeking a man.”

23 The LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: “I will again do good things for the people of Judah. At that time the people in the land of Judah and its towns will again use these words: ‘May the LORD bless you, home of what is good, holy mountain.’ 24 People in all the towns of Judah will live together in peace. Farmers and those who move around with their flocks will live together in peace. 25 I will give rest and strength to those who are weak and tired.”

26 After hearing that, I, Jeremiah, woke up and looked

around. My sleep had been very pleasant.
27 The LORD says, “The time is coming when I will help the
families of Israel and Judah and their children and animals to
grow. 28 In the past I watched over Israel and Judah, to pull
them up and tear them down, to destroy them and bring them
disaster. But now I will watch over them to build them up and
make them strong,” says the LORD.
29 “At that time people will no longer say:

‘The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and that caused the children to grind their teeth from the
sour taste.’

30 Instead, each person will die for his own sin; the person who
eats sour grapes will grind his own teeth.

## *The New Agreement*

31 “Look, the time is coming,” says the LORD,
“when I will make a new agreement

with the people of Israel
and the people of Judah.

32 It will not be like the agreement
I made with their ancestors

when I took them by the hand
to bring them out of Egypt.

I was a husband to them,
but they broke that agreement,” says the LORD.

33 “This is the agreement I will make
with the people of Israel at that time,” says the LORD:

“I will put my teachings in their minds
and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

34 People will no longer have to teach their neighbors and relatives
to know the LORD,

because all people will know me,
from the least to the most important," says the LORD.

"I will forgive them for the wicked things they did,
and I will not remember their sins anymore."

## *The LORD Will Never Leave Israel*

35 The LORD makes the sun shine in the day
and the moon and stars to shine at night.

He stirs up the sea so that its waves crash on the shore.
The LORD All-Powerful is his name.

This is what the LORD says:

36 "Only if these laws should ever fail,"
says the LORD,

"will Israel's descendants ever stop
being a nation before me."

37 This is what the LORD says:

"Only if people can measure the sky above
and learn the secrets of the earth below,

will I reject all the descendants of Israel
because of what they have done," says the LORD.

## *The New Jerusalem*

38 The LORD says, “The time is coming when Jerusalem will be
rebuilt for me—everything from the Tower of Hananel to the
Corner Gate. 39 The measuring line will stretch from the Corner
Gate straight to the hill of Gareb. Then it will turn to the place
named Goah. 40 The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes
are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the
east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate—all that area will be
holy to the LORD. The city of Jerusalem will never again be torn
down or destroyed.”

## *Jeremiah Buys a Field*

32 This is the word the LORD spoke to Jeremiah in the tenth year
Zedekiah was king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of
Nebuchadnezzar. 2 At that time the army of the king of Babylon
was surrounding Jerusalem. Jeremiah the prophet was under
arrest in the courtyard of the guard, which was at the palace of
the king of Judah.

3 Zedekiah king of Judah had put Jeremiah in prison there.
Zedekiah had asked, “Why have you prophesied the things you
have?” (Jeremiah had said, “This is what the LORD says: ‘I will
soon hand the city of Jerusalem over to the king of Babylon, and
he will capture it. 4 Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape from
the Babylonian army, but he will surely be handed over to the
king of Babylon. And he will speak to the king of Babylon face to
face and see him with his own eyes. 5 The king will take
Zedekiah to Babylon, where he will stay until I have punished
him,’ says the LORD. ‘If you fight against the Babylonians, you
will not succeed.’”)

6 While Jeremiah was in prison, he said, “The LORD spoke this
word to me: 7 Your cousin Hanamel, son of your uncle Shallum,
will come to you soon. Hanamel will say to you, ‘Jeremiah, you
are my nearest relative, so buy my field near the town of
Anathoth. It is your right and your duty to buy that field.’

8 “Then it happened just as the LORD had said. My cousin
Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said to
me, ‘Buy for yourself my field near Anathoth in the land of
Benjamin. It is your right and duty to buy it and own it.’ So I
knew this was a message from the LORD.

9 “I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel,
weighing out seven ounces of silver for him. 10 I signed the
record and sealed it and had some people witness it. I also
weighed out the silver on the scales. 11 Then I took both copies
of the record of ownership—the one that was sealed that had
the demands and limits of ownership, and the one that was not
sealed. 12 And I gave them to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of

Mahseiah. My cousin Hanamel, the other witnesses who signed the record of ownership, and many Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard saw me give the record of ownership to Baruch.

13"With all the people watching, I told Baruch, 14'This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Take both copies of the record of ownership—the sealed copy and the copy that was not sealed—and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. 15This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: In the future my people will once again buy houses and fields for grain and vineyards in the land of Israel.'

16"After I gave the record of ownership to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, 17Oh, Lord God, you made the skies and the earth with your very great power. There is nothing too hard for you to do. 18You show love and kindness to thousands of people, but you also bring punishment to children for their parents' sins. Great and powerful God, your name is the LORD All-Powerful. 19You plan and do great things. You see everything that people do, and you reward people for the way they live and for what they do. 20You did miracles and wonderful things in the land of Egypt. You have continued doing them in Israel and among the other nations even until today. So you have become well known. 21You brought your people, the Israelites, out of Egypt using signs and miracles and your great power and strength. You brought great terror on everyone. 22You gave them this land that you promised to their ancestors long ago, a fertile land. 23They came into this land and took it for their own, but they did not obey you or follow your teachings. They did not do everything you commanded. So you made all these terrible things happen to them.

24"Look! The enemy has surrounded the city and has built roads to the top of the walls to capture it. Because of war, hunger, and terrible diseases, the city will be handed over to the Babylonians who are attacking it. You said this would happen, and now you see it is happening. 25But now, Lord God, you tell me, 'Buy the field with silver and call in witnesses.' You tell me this while the Babylonian army is ready to capture the city."

26Then the LORD spoke this word to Jeremiah: 27"I am the LORD, the God of every person on the earth. Nothing is impossible for me. 28So this is what the LORD says: I will soon hand over the city of Jerusalem to the Babylonian army and to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who will capture it. 29The Babylonian army is already attacking the city of Jerusalem. They will soon enter it and start a fire to burn down the city and its houses. The people of Jerusalem offered sacrifices to Baal on the roofs[n] of those same houses and poured out drink offerings to other idols to make me angry. 30From their youth, the people of Israel and Judah have done only the things I said were wrong. They have made me angry by worshiping idols made with their

own hands," says the LORD. 31"From the day Jerusalem was built
until now, this city has made me angry, so angry that I must
remove it from my sight. 32I will destroy it, because of all the
evil the people of Israel and Judah have done. The people, their
kings and officers, their priests and prophets, all the people of
Judah, and the people of Jerusalem have made me angry. 33They
turned their backs to me, not their faces. I tried to teach them
again and again, but they wouldn't listen or learn. 34They put
their hateful idols in the place where I have chosen to be
worshiped, so they made it unclean. 35In the Valley of Ben
Hinnom they built places to worship Baal so they could burn
their sons and daughters as sacrifices to Molech. But I never
commanded them to do such a hateful thing. It never entered
my mind that they would do such a thing and cause Judah to
sin.

36"You are saying, 'Because of war, hunger, and terrible
diseases, the city will be handed over to the king of Babylon.'
But the LORD, the God of Israel, says about Jerusalem: 37I forced
the people of Israel and Judah to leave their land, because I was
furious and very angry with them. But soon I will gather them
from all the lands where I forced them to go, and I will bring
them back to this place, where they may live in safety. 38The
people of Israel and Judah will be my people, and I will be their
God. 39I will make them truly want to be one people with one
goal. They will truly want to worship me all their lives, for their
own good and for the good of their children after them.

40"I will make an agreement with them that will last forever.
I will never turn away from them; I will always do good to them.
I will make them want to respect me so they will never turn
away from me. 41I will enjoy doing good to them. And with my
whole being I will surely plant them in this land and make them
grow."

42This is what the LORD says: "I have brought this great
disaster to the people of Israel and Judah. In the same way I will
bring the good things that I promise to do for them. 43You are
saying, 'This land is an empty desert, without people or animals.
It has been handed over to the Babylonians.' But in the future,
people will again buy fields in this land. 44They will use their
money to buy fields. They will sign and seal their agreements
and call in witnesses. They will again buy fields in the land of
Benjamin, in the area around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah
and in the mountains, in the western hills, and in southern
Judah. I will make everything as good for them as it once was,"
says the LORD.

## Psalm 119:49–56

49 Remember your promise to me, your servant;
it gives me hope.

50 When I suffer, this comforts me:
Your promise gives me life.

51 Proud people always make fun of me,
but I do not reject your teachings.

52 I remember your laws from long ago,
and they comfort me, LORD.

53 I become angry with wicked people
who do not keep your teachings.

54 I sing about your demands
wherever I live.

55 LORD, I remember you at night,
and I will obey your teachings.

56 This is what I do:
I follow your orders.

## Proverbs 27:20

20 People will never stop dying and being destroyed,
and they will never stop wanting more than they have.

## 1 Timothy 2:1–15

## *Some Rules for Men and Women*

2 First, I tell you to pray for all people, asking God for what they
need and being thankful to him. 2Pray for rulers and for all who
have authority so that we can have quiet and peaceful lives full
of worship and respect for God. 3This is good, and it pleases
God our Savior, 4who wants all people to be saved and to know
the truth. 5There is one God and one mediator so that human
beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus, who is
himself human. 6He gave himself as a payment to free all
people. He is proof that came at the right time. 7That is why I
was chosen to tell the Good News and to be an apostle. (I am
telling the truth; I am not lying.) I was chosen to teach those
who are not Jews to believe and to know the truth.

8So, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up their
hands in a holy manner, without anger and arguments.

9Also, women should wear proper clothes that show respect
and self-control, not using braided hair or gold or pearls or
expensive clothes. 10Instead, they should do good deeds, which
is right for women who say they worship God.

11Let a woman learn by listening quietly and being ready to
cooperate in everything. 12But I do not allow a woman to teach
or to have authority over a man, but to listen quietly, 13because
Adam was formed first and then Eve. 14And Adam was not
tricked, but the woman was tricked and became a sinner. 15But
she will be saved through having children if she continues in
faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

# October 24

## God's Family of Friends

*That family is the church of the living God, the support and foundation of the truth.*

1 Timothy 3:15

God offers you a family of friends and friends who are family—his church. When you transfer your trust into Christ, he not only pardons you; he places you in his family of friends.

"Family" far and away outpaces any other biblical term to describe the church. "Brothers" or "brothers and sisters" appears a whopping 148 times between the Book of Acts and the Book of Revelation.

God heals his family through his family. In the church we use our gifts to love each other, honor one another, keep an eye on troublemakers, and carry each other's burdens.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Jeremiah 33:1—34:22

### *The Promise of the LORD*

33 While Jeremiah was still locked up in the courtyard of the
guards, the LORD spoke his word to him a second time: 2"These
are the words of the LORD, who made the earth, shaped it, and
gave it order, whose name is the LORD: 3'Judah, pray to me, and I
will answer you. I will tell you important secrets you have never
heard before.' 4This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says
about the houses in Jerusalem and the royal palaces of Judah
that have been torn down to be used in defense of the attack by
the Babylonian army: 5'Some people will come to fight against
the Babylonians. They will fill these houses with the bodies of
people I killed in my hot anger. I have turned away from this
city because of all the evil its people have done.
6"'But then I will bring health and healing to the people

there. I will heal them and let them enjoy great peace and safety. 7I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and make them strong countries as in the past. 8They sinned against me, but I will wash away that sin. They did evil and turned away from me, but I will forgive them. 9Then "Jerusalem" will be to me a name that brings joy! And people from all nations of the earth will praise it when they hear about the good things I am doing there. They will be surprised and shocked at all the good things and the peace I will bring to Jerusalem.'

10"You are saying, 'Our country is an empty desert, without people or animals.' But this is what the LORD says: It is now quiet in the streets of Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, without people or animals, but it will be noisy there soon! 11There will be sounds of joy and gladness and the happy sounds of brides and bridegrooms. There will be the sounds of people bringing to the Temple of the LORD their offerings of thanks to the LORD. They will say,

'Praise the LORD All-Powerful,
because the LORD is good!
His love continues forever!'

They will say this because I will again do good things for Judah, as I did in the beginning," says the LORD.

12This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "This place is empty now, without people or animals. But there will be shepherds in all the towns of Judah and pastures where they let their flocks rest. 13Shepherds will again count their sheep as the sheep walk in front of them. They will count them in the mountains and in the western hills, in southern Judah and the land of Benjamin, and around Jerusalem and the other towns of Judah!" says the LORD.

## *The Good Branch*

14The LORD says, "The time is coming when I will do the good thing I promised to the people of Israel and Judah.

15In those days and at that time,
I will make a good branch sprout from David's family.
He will do what is fair and right in the land.

16At that time Judah will be saved,
and the people of Jerusalem will live in safety.

The branch will be named:
The LORD Does What Is Right.”

17This is what the LORD says: “Someone from David’s family
will always sit on the throne of the family of Israel. 18And there
will always be priests from the family of Levi. They will always
stand before me to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings and
sacrifices to me.”
19The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah, saying: 20“This is
what the LORD says: I have an agreement with day and night
that they will always come at the right times. If you could
change that agreement, 21only then could you change my
agreement with David and Levi. Only then would my servant
David not have a descendant ruling as king on David’s throne.
And only then would the family of Levi not be priests serving me
in the Temple. 22But I will give many descendants to my servant
David and to the family group of Levi who serve me in the
Temple. They will be as many as the stars in the sky that no one
can count. They will be as many as the grains of sand on the
seashore that no one can measure.”
23The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah, saying: 24“Jeremiah,
have you heard what the people are saying? They say: ‘The LORD
turned away from the two families of Israel and Judah that he
chose.’ Now they don’t think of my people as a nation
anymore!”
25This is what the LORD says: “If I had not made my
agreement with day and night, and if I had not made the laws
for the sky and earth, 26only then would I turn away from
Jacob’s descendants. And only then would I not let the
descendants of David my servant rule over the descendants of
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will be kind to them and cause
good things to happen to them again.”

## *A Warning to Zedekiah*

34 The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah when Nebuchadnezzar
king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and all the
towns around it. Nebuchadnezzar had with him all his army and
the armies of all the kingdoms and peoples he ruled. 2This is
what the LORD, the God of Israel, said: “Jeremiah, go to
Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him: ‘This is what the LORD says:
I will soon hand the city of Jerusalem over to the king of
Babylon, and he will burn it down! 3You will not escape from the
king of Babylon; you will surely be captured and handed over to
him. You will see the king of Babylon with your own eyes, and
he will talk to you face to face. And you will go to Babylon. 4But,
Zedekiah king of Judah, listen to the promise of the LORD. This is
what the LORD says about you: You will not be killed with a
sword. 5You will die in a peaceful way. As people made funeral

fires to honor your ancestors, the kings who ruled before you, so people will make a funeral fire to honor you. They will cry for you and sadly say, “Ah, master!” I myself make this promise to you, says the LORD.’”

6So Jeremiah the prophet gave this message to Zedekiah in Jerusalem. 7This was while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the cities of Judah that had not yet been taken—Lachish and Azekah. These were the only strong, walled cities left in the land of Judah.

## *Slaves Are Mistreated*

8The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah. This was after King Zedekiah had made an agreement with all the people in Jerusalem to free all the Hebrew slaves. 9Everyone was supposed to free his Hebrew slaves, both male and female. No one was to keep a fellow Jew as a slave. 10All the officers and all the people accepted this agreement; they agreed to free their male and female slaves and no longer keep them as slaves. So all the slaves were set free. 11But after that, the people who had slaves changed their minds. So they took back the people they had set free and made them slaves again.

12Then the LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah: 13“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought your ancestors out of Egypt where they were slaves and made an agreement with them. 14I said to your ancestors: ‘At the end of every seven years, each one of you must set his Hebrew slaves free. If a fellow Hebrew has sold himself to you, you must let him go free after he has served you for six years.’ But your ancestors did not listen or pay attention to me. 15A short time ago you changed your hearts and did what I say is right. Each of you gave freedom to his fellow Hebrews who were slaves. And you even made an agreement before me in the place where I have chosen to be worshiped. 16But now you have changed your minds. You have shown you do not honor me. Each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free, and you have forced them to become your slaves again.

17“So this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me. You have not given freedom to your fellow Hebrews, neither relatives nor friends. But now I will give freedom, says the LORD, to war, to terrible diseases, and to hunger. I will make you hated by all the kingdoms of the earth. 18I will hand over the men who broke my agreement, who have not kept the promises they made before me. They cut a calf into two pieces before me and walked between the pieces.[n] 19These people made the agreement before me by walking between the pieces of the calf: the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the officers of the court, the priests, and all the people of the land. 20So I will hand them

over to their enemies and to everyone who wants to kill them. Their bodies will become food for the birds of the air and for the wild animals of the earth. 21I will hand Zedekiah king of Judah and his officers over to their enemies, and to everyone who wants to kill them, and to the army of the king of Babylon, even though they have left Jerusalem. 22I will give the order, says the LORD, to bring the Babylonian army back to Jerusalem. It will fight against Jerusalem, capture it, set it on fire, and burn it down. I will destroy the towns in Judah so that they become ruins where no one lives!”

## Psalm 119:57–64

57LORD, you are my share in life;
I have promised to obey your words.

58I prayed to you with all my heart.
Have mercy on me as you have promised.

59I thought about my life,
and I decided to follow your rules.

60I hurried and did not wait
to obey your commands.

61Wicked people have tied me up,
but I have not forgotten your teachings.

62In the middle of the night, I get up to thank you
because your laws are right.

63I am a friend to everyone who fears you,
to anyone who obeys your orders.

64LORD, your love fills the earth.
Teach me your demands.

## Proverbs 27:21

21 A hot furnace tests silver and gold,
and people are tested by the praise they receive.

## 1 Timothy 3:1–16

### *Elders in the Church*

3 What I say is true: Anyone wanting to become an overseer
desires a good work. 2 An overseer must not give people a
reason to criticize him, and he must have only one wife. He
must be self-controlled, wise, respected by others, ready to
welcome guests, and able to teach. 3 He must not drink too
much wine or like to fight, but rather be gentle and peaceable,
not loving money. 4 He must be a good family leader, having
children who cooperate with full respect. 5 (If someone does not
know how to lead the family, how can that person take care of
God's church?) 6 But an elder must not be a new believer, or he
might be too proud of himself and be judged guilty just as the
devil was. 7 An elder must also have the respect of people who
are not in the church so he will not be criticized by others and
caught in the devil's trap.

### *Deacons in the Church*

8 In the same way, deacons must be respected by others, not
saying things they do not mean. They must not drink too much
wine or try to get rich by cheating others. 9 With a clear
conscience they must follow the secret of the faith that God
made known to us. 10 Test them first. Then let them serve as
deacons if you find nothing wrong in them. 11 In the same way,
women[n] must be respected by others. They must not speak evil
of others. They must be self-controlled and trustworthy in
everything. 12 Deacons must have only one wife and be good
leaders of their children and their own families. 13 Those who
serve well as deacons are making an honorable place for
themselves, and they will be very bold in their faith in Christ
Jesus.

## *The Secret of Our Life*

14 Although I hope I can come to you soon, I am writing these
things to you now. 15 Then, even if I am delayed, you will know
how to live in the family of God. That family is the church of the
living God, the support and foundation of the truth. 16 Without
doubt, the secret of our life of worship is great:

He[n] was shown to us in a human body,
    proved right in spirit,

and seen by angels.
    He was proclaimed to the nations,

believed in by the world,
    and taken up in glory.

# October 25

# Eternal Instants

*You have done good things for your servant, as you have promised,* LORD*.*

Psalm 119:65

Eternal instants. You've had them. We all have. Sharing a porch swing on a summer evening with your grandchild. Seeing her face in the glow of a candle.

Putting your arm into your husband's as you stroll through the golden leaves and breathe the brisk autumn air.

Listening to your six-year-old thank God for everything from goldfish to Grandma.

Such moments are necessary because they remind us that everything is okay. The King is still on the throne and life is still worth living. Eternal instants remind us that love is still the greatest possession and the future is nothing to fear.

The next time an instant in your life begins to be eternal, let it.

from *God Came Near*

## Jeremiah 35:1—36:32

### *The Recabite Family Obeys God*

35 When Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah, the LORD
spoke his word to Jeremiah, saying: 2"Go to the family of Recab.
Invite them to come to one of the side rooms of the Temple of
the LORD, and offer them wine to drink."

3So I went to get Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah,[n] the son of
Habazziniah. And I gathered all of Jaazaniah's brothers and
sons and the whole family of the Recabites together. 4Then I
brought them into the Temple of the LORD. We went into the
room of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah, who was a man of
God. The room was next to the one where the officers stay and

above the room of Maaseiah son of Shallum, the doorkeeper in the Temple. 5Then I put some bowls full of wine and some cups before the men of the Recabite family. And I said to them, “Drink some wine.”

6But the Recabite men answered, “We never drink wine. Our ancestor Jonadab son of Recab gave us this command: ‘You and your descendants must never drink wine. 7Also you must never build houses, plant seeds, or plant vineyards, or do any of those things. You must live only in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are wanderers.’ 8So we Recabites have obeyed everything Jonadab our ancestor commanded us. Neither we nor our wives, sons, or daughters ever drink wine. 9We never build houses in which to live, or own fields or vineyards, or plant crops. 10We have lived in tents and have obeyed everything our ancestor Jonadab commanded us. 11But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked Judah, we said to each other, ‘Come, we must enter Jerusalem so we can escape the Babylonian army and the Aramean army.’ So we have stayed in Jerusalem.”

12Then the LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah: 13“This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Jeremiah, go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem: ‘You should learn a lesson and obey my message,’ says the LORD. 14‘Jonadab son of Recab ordered his descendants not to drink wine, and that command has been obeyed. Until today they have obeyed their ancestor’s command; they do not drink wine. But I, the LORD, have given you messages again and again, but you did not obey me. 15I sent all my servants the prophets to you again and again, saying, “Each of you must stop doing evil. You must change and be good. Do not follow other gods to serve them. If you obey me, you will live in the land I have given to you and your ancestors.” But you have not listened to me or paid attention to my message. 16The descendants of Jonadab son of Recab obeyed the commands their ancestor gave them, but the people of Judah have not obeyed me.’

17“So the LORD God All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will soon bring every disaster I said would come to Judah and to everyone living in Jerusalem. I spoke to those people, but they refused to listen. I called out to them, but they did not answer me.’”

18Then Jeremiah said to the Recabites, “This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘You have obeyed the commands of your ancestor Jonadab and have followed all of his teachings; you have done everything he commanded.’ 19So this is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘There will always be a descendant of Jonadab son of Recab to serve me.’”

## *Jehoiakim Burns Jeremiah’s Scroll*

36 The LORD spoke this word to Jeremiah during the fourth year
that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah: 2"Get a scroll.
Write on it all the words I have spoken to you about Israel and
Judah and all the nations. Write everything from when I first
spoke to you, when Josiah was king, until now. 3Maybe the
family of Judah will hear what disasters I am planning to bring
on them and will stop doing wicked things. Then I would forgive
them for the sins and the evil things they have done."

4So Jeremiah called for Baruch son of Neriah. Jeremiah
spoke the messages the LORD had given him, and Baruch wrote
those messages on the scroll. 5Then Jeremiah commanded
Baruch, "I cannot go to the Temple of the LORD. I must stay
here. 6So I want you to go to the Temple of the LORD on a day
when the people are fasting. Read from the scroll to all the
people of Judah who come into Jerusalem from their towns.
Read the messages from the LORD, which are the words you
wrote on the scroll as I spoke them to you. 7Perhaps they will
ask the LORD to help them. Perhaps each one will stop doing
wicked things, because the LORD has announced that he is very
angry with them." 8So Baruch son of Neriah did everything
Jeremiah the prophet told him to do. In the LORD's Temple he
read aloud the scroll that had the LORD's messages written on it.

9In the ninth month of the fifth year that Jehoiakim son of
Josiah was king, a fast was announced. All the people of
Jerusalem and everyone who had come into Jerusalem from the
towns of Judah were supposed to give up eating to honor the
LORD. 10At that time Baruch read to all the people there the
scroll containing Jeremiah's words. He read the scroll in the
Temple of the LORD in the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan, a
royal secretary. That room was in the upper courtyard at the
entrance of the New Gate of the Temple.

11Micaiah son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the
messages from the LORD that were on the scroll. 12Micaiah went
down to the royal secretary's room in the king's palace where
all of the officers were sitting: Elishama the royal secretary;
Delaiah son of Shemaiah; Elnathan son of Acbor; Gemariah son
of Shaphan; Zedekiah son of Hananiah; and all the other
officers. 13Micaiah told those officers everything he had heard
Baruch read to the people from the scroll.

14Then the officers sent a man named Jehudi son of
Nethaniah to Baruch. (Nethaniah was the son of Shelemiah,
who was the son of Cushi.) Jehudi said to Baruch, "Bring the
scroll that you read to the people and come with me."

So Baruch son of Neriah took the scroll and went with Jehudi
to the officers. 15Then the officers said to Baruch, "Please sit
down and read the scroll to us."

So Baruch read the scroll to them. 16When the officers heard
all the words, they became afraid and looked at each other.

They said to Baruch, “We must certainly tell the king about these words.” 17Then the officers asked Baruch, “Tell us, please, where did you get all these words you wrote on the scroll? Did you write down what Jeremiah said to you?”

18“Yes,” Baruch answered. “Jeremiah spoke them all to me, and I wrote them down with ink on this scroll.”

19Then the officers said to Baruch, “You and Jeremiah must go and hide, and don’t tell anyone where you are.”

20The officers put the scroll in the room of Elishama the royal secretary. Then they went to the king in the courtyard and told him all about the scroll. 21So King Jehoiakim sent Jehudi to get the scroll. Jehudi brought the scroll from the room of Elishama the royal secretary and read it to the king and to all the officers who stood around the king. 22It was the ninth month of the year, so King Jehoiakim was sitting in the winter apartment. There was a fire burning in a small firepot in front of him. 23After Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king cut those columns off of the scroll with a penknife and threw them into the firepot. Finally, the whole scroll was burned in the fire. 24King Jehoiakim and his servants heard everything that was said, but they were not frightened! They did not tear their clothes to show their sorrow. 25Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah even tried to talk King Jehoiakim out of burning the scroll, but he would not listen to them. 26Instead, the king ordered Jerahmeel son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel, and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the secretary and Jeremiah the prophet. But the LORD had hidden them.

27So King Jehoiakim burned the scroll where Baruch had written all the words Jeremiah had spoken to him. Then the LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah: 28“Get another scroll. Write all the words on it that were on the first scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up. 29Also say this to Jehoiakim king of Judah: ‘This is what the LORD says: You burned up that scroll and said, “Why, Jeremiah, did you write on it ‘the king of Babylon will surely come and destroy this land and the people and animals in it’?” 30So this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: Jehoiakim’s descendants will not sit on David’s throne. When Jehoiakim dies, his body will be thrown out on the ground. It will be left out in the heat of the day and in the cold frost of the night. 31I will punish Jehoiakim and his children and his servants, because they have done evil things. I will bring disasters upon them and upon all the people in Jerusalem and Judah—everything I promised but which they refused to hear.’”

32So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch son of Neriah, his secretary. As Jeremiah spoke, Baruch wrote on the scroll the same words that were on the scroll Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to the second scroll.

## Psalm 119:65–72

65 You have done good things for your servant,
as you have promised, LORD.

66 Teach me wisdom and knowledge
because I trust your commands.

67 Before I suffered, I did wrong,
but now I obey your word.

68 You are good, and you do what is good.
Teach me your demands.

69 Proud people have made up lies about me,
but I will follow your orders with all my heart.

70 Those people have no feelings,
but I love your teachings.

71 It was good for me to suffer
so I would learn your demands.

72 Your teachings are worth more to me
than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.

## Proverbs 27:22

22 Even if you ground up a foolish person like grain in a bowl,
you couldn’t remove the foolishness.

# 1 Timothy 4:1–16

## *A Warning About False Teachers*

4 Now the Holy Spirit clearly says that in the later times some
people will stop believing the faith. They will follow spirits that
lie and teachings of demons. 2Such teachings come from the
false words of liars whose consciences are destroyed as if by a
hot iron. 3They forbid people to marry and tell them not to eat
certain foods which God created to be eaten with thanks by
people who believe and know the truth. 4Everything God made
is good, and nothing should be refused if it is accepted with
thanks, 5because it is made holy by what God has said and by
prayer.

## *Be a Good Servant of Christ*

6By telling these things to the brothers and sisters, you will
be a good servant of Christ Jesus. You will be made strong by
the words of the faith and the good teaching which you have
been following. 7But do not follow foolish stories that disagree
with God's truth, but train yourself to serve God. 8Training your
body helps you in some ways, but serving God helps you in
every way by bringing you blessings in this life and in the future
life, too. 9What I say is true, and you should fully accept it.
10This is why we work and struggle:[n] We hope in the living God
who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

11Command and teach these things. 12Do not let anyone treat
you as if you are unimportant because you are young. Instead,
be an example to the believers with your words, your actions,
your love, your faith, and your pure life. 13Until I come,
continue to read the Scriptures to the people, strengthen them,
and teach them. 14Use the gift you have, which was given to you
through prophecy when the group of elders laid their hands on[n]
you. 15Continue to do those things; give your life to doing them
so your progress may be seen by everyone. 16Be careful in your
life and in your teaching. If you continue to live and teach
rightly, you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

# October 26

## Obsessed with Stuff

*Riches will not go on forever.*

Proverbs 27:24

In 1900 the average person living in the United States wanted seventy-two different things and considered eighteen of them essential. Today the average person wants five hundred things and considers one hundred of them essential.

Our obsession with stuff carries a hefty price tag. Eighty percent of us battle the pressure of overdue bills. We spend 110 percent of our disposable income trying to manage debt. And who can keep up? We no longer measure ourselves against the Joneses next door but against the star on the screen or the stud on the magazine cover. Hollywood's diamonds make yours look like a gumball-machine toy. Who can satisfy Madison Avenue? No one can. For that reason Jesus warns, "Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed" (Luke 12:15).

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Jeremiah 37:1—38:28

### *Jeremiah in Prison*

37 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had appointed Zedekiah son
of Josiah to be king of Judah. Zedekiah took the place of
Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim. 2But Zedekiah, his servants, and
the people of Judah did not listen to the words the LORD had
spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.

3Now King Zedekiah sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah and the
priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah with a message to Jeremiah
the prophet. This was the message: "Jeremiah, please pray to
the LORD our God for us."

4At that time Jeremiah had not yet been put into prison. So
he was free to go anywhere he wanted. 5The army of the king of

Egypt had marched from Egypt toward Judah. Now the Babylonian army had surrounded the city of Jerusalem. When they heard about the Egyptian army marching toward them, the Babylonian army left Jerusalem.

6The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah the prophet: 7"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Jehucal and Zephaniah, I know Zedekiah king of Judah sent you to seek my help. Tell this to King Zedekiah: 'The army of the king of Egypt came here to help you, but they will go back to Egypt. 8After that, the Babylonian army will return and attack Jerusalem and capture it and burn it down.'

9"This is what the LORD says: People of Jerusalem, do not fool yourselves. Don't say, 'The Babylonian army will surely leave us alone.' They will not! 10Even if you defeated all of the Babylonian army that is attacking you and there were only a few injured men left in their tents, they would come from their tents and burn down Jerusalem!"

11So the Babylonian army left Jerusalem to fight the army of the king of Egypt. 12Now Jeremiah tried to travel from Jerusalem to the land of Benjamin to get his share of the property that belonged to his family. 13When Jeremiah got to the Benjamin Gate of Jerusalem, the captain in charge of the guards arrested him. The captain's name was Irijah son of Shelemiah son of Hananiah. Irijah said, "You are leaving us to join the Babylonians!"

14But Jeremiah said to Irijah, "That's not true! I am not leaving to join the Babylonians." Irijah refused to listen to Jeremiah, so he arrested Jeremiah and took him to the officers of Jerusalem. 15Those rulers were very angry with Jeremiah and beat him. Then they put him in jail in the house of Jonathan the royal secretary, which had been made into a prison. 16So those people put Jeremiah into a cell in a dungeon, and Jeremiah was there for a long time.

17Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and had him brought to the palace. Zedekiah asked him in private, "Is there any message from the LORD?"

Jeremiah answered, "Yes, there is. Zedekiah, you will be handed over to the king of Babylon." 18Then Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What crime have I done against you or your officers or the people of Jerusalem? Why have you thrown me into prison? 19Where are your prophets that prophesied this message to you: 'The king of Babylon will not attack you or this land of Judah'? 20But now, my master, king of Judah, please listen to me, and please do what I ask of you. Do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the royal secretary, or I will die there!"

21So King Zedekiah gave orders for Jeremiah to be put under guard in the courtyard of the guard and to be given bread each day from the street of the bakers until there was no more bread

in the city. So he stayed under guard in the courtyard of the guard.

## *Jeremiah Is Thrown into a Well*

38 Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal
son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what
Jeremiah was telling all the people. He said: 2"This is what the
LORD says: 'Everyone who stays in Jerusalem will die from war,
or hunger, or terrible diseases. But everyone who surrenders to
the Babylonian army will live; they will escape with their lives
and live.' 3And this is what the LORD says: 'This city of Jerusalem
will surely be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon.
He will capture this city!'"

4Then the officers said to the king, "Jeremiah must be put to death! He is discouraging the soldiers who are still in the city, and all the people, by what he is saying to them. He does not want good to happen to us; he wants to ruin us."

5King Zedekiah said to them, "Jeremiah is in your control. I cannot do anything to stop you."

6So the officers took Jeremiah and put him into the well of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guards. The officers used ropes to lower Jeremiah into the well, which did not have any water in it, only mud. And Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

7But Ebed-Melech, a Cushite and a servant in the palace, heard that the officers had put Jeremiah into the well. As King Zedekiah was sitting at the Benjamin Gate, 8Ebed-Melech left the palace and went to the king. Ebed-Melech said to him, 9"My master and king, these rulers have acted in an evil way. They have treated Jeremiah the prophet badly. They have thrown him into a well and left him there to die! When there is no more bread in the city, he will starve to death."

10Then King Zedekiah commanded Ebed-Melech the Cushite, "Take thirty men from the palace and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the well before he dies."

11So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went to a room under the storeroom in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from that room. Then he let those rags down with some ropes to Jeremiah in the well. 12Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to be pads for the ropes." So Jeremiah did as Ebed-Melech said. 13The men pulled Jeremiah up with the ropes and lifted him out of the well. And Jeremiah stayed under guard in the courtyard of the guard.

## *Zedekiah Questions Jeremiah*

14Then King Zedekiah sent someone to get Jeremiah the
prophet and bring him to the third entrance to the Temple of
the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, “I am going to ask you
something. Do not hide anything from me, but tell me
everything honestly.”
15Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I give you an answer, you
will surely kill me. And even if I give you advice, you will not
listen to me.”
16But King Zedekiah made a secret promise to Jeremiah, “As
surely as the LORD lives who has given us breath and life, I will
not kill you. And I promise not to hand you over to the officers
who want to kill you.”
17Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “This is what the LORD God
All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you surrender to the
officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be saved. Jerusalem
will not be burned down, and you and your family will live.
18But if you refuse to surrender to the officers of the king of
Babylon, Jerusalem will be handed over to the Babylonian army,
and they will burn it down. And you yourself will not escape
from them.’”
19Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “I’m afraid of some
Jews who have already gone over to the side of the Babylonian
army. If the Babylonians hand me over to them, they will treat
me badly.”
20But Jeremiah answered, “The Babylonians will not hand
you over to the Jews. Obey the LORD by doing what I tell you.
Then things will go well for you, and your life will be saved.
21But if you refuse to surrender to the Babylonians, the LORD has
shown me what will happen. 22All the women left in the palace
of the king of Judah will be brought out and taken to the
important officers of the king of Babylon. Your women will make
fun of you with this song:

‘Your good friends misled you
and were stronger than you.

While your feet were stuck in the mud,
they left you.’

23“All your wives and children will be brought out and given
to the Babylonian army. You yourself will not even escape from
them. You will be taken prisoner by the king of Babylon, and
Jerusalem will be burned down.”
24Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Do not tell anyone that I
have been talking to you, or you will die. 25If the officers find
out I talked to you, they will come to you and say, ‘Tell us what
you said to King Zedekiah and what he said to you. Don’t keep

any secrets from us. If you don't tell us everything, we will kill you.' [26]If they ask you, tell them, 'I was begging the king not to send me back to Jonathan's house to die.'"

[27]All the officers did come to question Jeremiah. So he told them everything the king had ordered him to say. Then the officers said no more to Jeremiah, because no one had heard what Jeremiah and the king had discussed.

[28]So Jeremiah stayed under guard in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

## Psalm 119:73–80

[73]You made me and formed me with your hands.
Give me understanding so I can learn your commands.

[74]Let those who respect you rejoice when they see me,
because I put my hope in your word.

[75]LORD, I know that your laws are right
and that it was right for you to punish me.

[76]Comfort me with your love,
as you promised me, your servant.

[77]Have mercy on me so that I may live.
I love your teachings.

[78]Make proud people ashamed because they lied about me.
But I will think about your orders.

[79]Let those who respect you return to me,
those who know your rules.

[80]Let me obey your demands perfectly
so I will not be ashamed.

## Proverbs 27:23–27

23 Be sure you know how your sheep are doing,
and pay attention to the condition of your cattle.

24 Riches will not go on forever,
nor do governments go on forever.

25 Bring in the hay, and let the new grass appear.
Gather the grass from the hills.

26 Make clothes from the lambs' wool,
and sell some goats to buy a field.

27 There will be plenty of goat's milk
to feed you and your family
and to make your servant girls healthy.

## 1 Timothy 5:1—6:2

### *Rules for Living with Others*

5 Do not speak angrily to an older man, but plead with him as if
he were your father. Treat younger men like brothers, 2 older
women like mothers, and younger women like sisters. Always
treat them in a pure way.

3 Take care of widows who are truly widows. 4 But if a widow
has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to do their
duty to their own family and to repay their parents or
grandparents. That pleases God. 5 The true widow, who is all
alone, puts her hope in God and continues to pray night and day
for God's help. 6 But the widow who uses her life to please
herself is really dead while she is alive. 7 Tell the believers to do
these things so that no one can criticize them. 8 Whoever does
not care for his own relatives, especially his own family
members, has turned against the faith and is worse than

someone who does not believe in God.

9To be on the list of widows, a woman must be at least sixty
years old. She must have been faithful to her husband. 10She
must be known for her good works—works such as raising her
children, welcoming strangers, washing the feet of God's
people, helping those in trouble, and giving her life to do all
kinds of good deeds.

11But do not put younger widows on that list. After they give
themselves to Christ, they are pulled away from him by their
physical desires, and then they want to marry again. 12They will
be judged for not doing what they first promised to do.
13Besides that, they learn to waste their time, going from house
to house. And they not only waste their time but also begin to
gossip and busy themselves with other people's lives, saying
things they should not say. 14So I want the younger widows to
marry, have children, and manage their homes. Then no enemy
will have any reason to criticize them. 15But some have already
turned away to follow Satan.

16If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family,
she should care for them herself. The church should not have to
care for them. Then it will be able to take care of those who are
truly widows.

17The elders who lead the church well should receive double
honor, especially those who work hard by speaking and
teaching, 18because the Scripture says: "When an ox is working
in the grain, do not cover its mouth to keep it from eating,"[n]
and "A worker should be given his pay."[n]

19Do not listen to someone who accuses an elder, without
two or three witnesses. 20Tell those who continue sinning that
they are wrong. Do this in front of the whole church so that the
others will have a warning.

21Before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels, I
command you to do these things without showing favor of any
kind to anyone.

22Think carefully before you lay your hands on[n] anyone, and
don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

23Stop drinking only water, but drink a little wine to help
your stomach and your frequent sicknesses.

24The sins of some people are easy to see even before they
are judged, but the sins of others are seen only later. 25So also
good deeds are easy to see, but even those that are not easily
seen cannot stay hidden.

6 All who are slaves under a yoke should show full respect to
their masters so no one will speak against God's name and our
teaching. 2The slaves whose masters are believers should not
show their masters any less respect because they are believers.
They should serve their masters even better, because they are
helping believers they love.

You must teach and preach these things.

# October 27

# Nothing on Earth Satisfies

*We brought nothing into the world, so we can take nothing out. But, if we have food and clothes, we will be satisfied with that.*

1 Timothy 6:7–8

satisfied? That is one thing we are not. We are not satisfied … We take a vacation of a lifetime … We satiate ourselves with sun, fun, and good food. But we are not even on the way home before we dread the end of the trip and begin planning another.

We are not satisfied.

As a child we say, "If only I were a teenager." As a teen we say, "If only I were an adult," As an adult, "If only I were married." As a spouse, "If only I had kids"…

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

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

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## Jeremiah 39:1—40:16

### *The Fall of Jerusalem*

39 This is how Jerusalem was captured: Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army and
surrounded the city to attack it. This was during the tenth
month of the ninth year Zedekiah was king of Judah. 2This
lasted until the ninth day of the fourth month in Zedekiah's
eleventh year. Then the city wall was broken through. 3And all
these officers of the king of Babylon came into Jerusalem and
sat down at the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of the district of
Samgar; Nebo-Sarsekim, a chief officer; Nergal-Sharezer, an
important leader; and all the other important officers.

4When Zedekiah king of Judah and all his soldiers saw them,
they ran away. They left Jerusalem at night and went out from
the king's garden. They went through the gate that was
between the two walls and then headed toward the Jordan
Valley. 5But the Babylonian army chased them and caught up
with Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They captured him and
took him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was at the
town of Riblah in the land of Hamath. There Nebuchadnezzar
passed his sentence on Zedekiah. 6At Riblah the king of Babylon
killed Zedekiah's sons and all the important officers of Judah as
Zedekiah watched. 7Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes. He put
bronze chains on Zedekiah and took him to Babylon.

8The Babylonians set fire to the palace and to the houses of
the people, and they broke down the walls around Jerusalem.
9Nebuzaradan, commander of the king's special guards, took
the people left in Jerusalem, those captives who had
surrendered to him earlier, and the rest of the people of
Jerusalem, and he took them all away to Babylon. 10But
Nebuzaradan, commander of the guard, left some of the poorest
people of Judah behind. They owned nothing, but that day he
gave them vineyards and fields.

11Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given these orders
about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan, commander of the
guard: 12"Find Jeremiah and take care of him. Do not hurt him,
but do for him whatever he asks you." 13So Nebuchadnezzar
sent these men for Jeremiah: Nebuzaradan, commander of the
guards; Nebushazban, a chief officer; Nergal-Sharezer, an
important leader; and all the other officers of the king of
Babylon. 14They had Jeremiah taken out of the courtyard of the
guard. Then they turned him over to Gedaliah son of Ahikam
son of Shaphan, who had orders to take Jeremiah back home.
So they took him home, and he stayed among the people left in
Judah.

15While Jeremiah was guarded in the courtyard, the LORD
spoke his word to him: 16"Jeremiah, go and tell Ebed-Melech
the Cushite this message: 'This is what the LORD All-Powerful,
the God of Israel, says: Very soon I will make my words about
Jerusalem come true through disaster, not through good times.
You will see everything come true with your own eyes. 17But I
will save you on that day, Ebed-Melech, says the LORD. You will
not be handed over to the people you fear. 18I will surely save
you, Ebed-Melech. You will not die from a sword, but you will
escape and live. This will happen because you have trusted in
me, says the LORD.'"

## *Jeremiah Is Set Free*

40 The LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah after Nebuzaradan,

commander of the guards, had set Jeremiah free at the city of Ramah. He had found Jeremiah in Ramah bound in chains with all the captives from Jerusalem and Judah who were being taken away to Babylon. 2When commander Nebuzaradan found Jeremiah, Nebuzaradan said to him, “The LORD your God announced this disaster would come to this place. 3And now the LORD has done everything he said he would do. This disaster happened because the people of Judah sinned against the LORD and did not obey him. 4But today I am freeing you from the chains on your wrists. If you want to, come with me to Babylon, and I will take good care of you. But if you don’t want to come, then don’t. Look, the whole country is open to you. Go wherever you wish.” 5Before Jeremiah turned to leave, Nebuzaradan said, “Or go back to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan. The king of Babylon has chosen him to be governor over the towns of Judah. Go and live with Gedaliah among the people, or go anywhere you want.”

Then Nebuzaradan gave Jeremiah some food and a present and let him go. 6So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him there. He lived among the people who were left behind in Judah.

## *The Short Rule of Gedaliah*

7Some officers and their men from the army of Judah were still out in the open country. They heard that the king of Babylon had put Gedaliah son of Ahikam in charge of the people who were left in the land: the men, women, and children who were the poorest. They were the ones who were not taken to Babylon as captives. 8So these soldiers came to Gedaliah at Mizpah: Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan sons of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite, and their men.

9Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, made a promise to them, saying, “Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon. Then everything will go well for you. 10I myself will live in Mizpah and will speak for you before the Babylonians who come to us here. Harvest the wine, the summer fruit, and the oil, and put what you harvest in your storage jars. Live in the towns you control.”

11The Jews in Moab, Ammon, Edom, and other countries also heard that the king of Babylon had left a few Jews alive in the land. And they heard the king of Babylon had chosen Gedaliah as governor over them. (Gedaliah was the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan.) 12When the people of Judah heard this news, they came back to Judah from all the countries where they had been scattered. They came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and gathered a large harvest of wine and summer fruit.

[13]Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers of Judah
still in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. [14]They
said to him, “Don’t you know that Baalis king of the Ammonite
people wants you dead? He has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah
to kill you.” But Gedaliah son of Ahikam did not believe them.
[15]Then Johanan son of Kareah spoke to Gedaliah in private at
Mizpah. He said, “Let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah.
No one will know anything about it. We should not let Ishmael
kill you. Then all the Jews gathered around you would be
scattered to different countries again, and the few people of
Judah who are left alive would be lost.”
[16]But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah,
“Do not kill Ishmael! The things you are saying about Ishmael
are not true.”

## Psalm 119:81–88

[81]I am weak from waiting for you to save me,
but I hope in your word.

[82]My eyes are tired from looking for your promise.
When will you comfort me?

[83]Even though I am like a wine bag going up in smoke,
I do not forget your demands.

[84]How long will I live?
When will you judge those who are hurting me?

[85]Proud people have dug pits to trap me.
They have nothing to do with your teachings.

[86]All of your commands can be trusted.
Liars are hurting me. Help me!

[87]They have almost put me in the grave,
but I have not rejected your orders.

88 Give me life by your love
so I can obey your rules.

## Proverbs 28:1

28 Evil people run even though no one is chasing them,
but good people are as brave as a lion.

## 1 Timothy 6:3–21

### *False Teaching and True Riches*

3 Anyone who has a different teaching does not agree with
the true teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that
shows the true way to serve God. 4 This person is full of pride
and understands nothing, but is sick with a love for arguing and
fighting about words. This brings jealousy, fighting, speaking
against others, evil mistrust, 5 and constant quarrels from those
who have evil minds and have lost the truth. They think that
serving God is a way to get rich.

6 Serving God does make us very rich, if we are satisfied with
what we have. 7 We brought nothing into the world, so we can
take nothing out. 8 But, if we have food and clothes, we will be
satisfied with that. 9 Those who want to become rich bring
temptation to themselves and are caught in a trap. They want
many foolish and harmful things that ruin and destroy people.
10 The love of money causes all kinds of evil. Some people have
left the faith, because they wanted to get more money, but they
have caused themselves much sorrow.

### *Some Things to Remember*

11 But you, man of God, run away from all those things.
Instead, live in the right way, serve God, have faith, love,
patience, and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith,
grabbing hold of the life that continues forever. You were called
to have that life when you confessed the good confession before
many witnesses. 13 In the sight of God, who gives life to
everything, and of Christ Jesus, I give you a command. Christ
Jesus made the good confession when he stood before Pontius

Pilate. [14]Do what you were commanded to do without wrong or blame until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. [15]God will make that happen at the right time. He is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords. [16]He is the only One who never dies. He lives in light so bright no one can go near it. No one has ever seen God, or can see him. May honor and power belong to God forever. Amen.

[17]Command those who are rich with things of this world not to be proud. Tell them to hope in God, not in their uncertain riches. God richly gives us everything to enjoy. [18]Tell the rich people to do good, to be rich in doing good deeds, to be generous and ready to share. [19]By doing that, they will be saving a treasure for themselves as a strong foundation for the future. Then they will be able to have the life that is true life.

[20]Timothy, guard what God has trusted to you. Stay away from foolish, useless talk and from the arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge." [21]By saying they have that "knowledge," some have missed the true faith.

Grace be with you.

# October 28

## Examine Your Tools

*Keep using the gift God gave you … Let it grow, as a small flame grows into a fire.*

2 Timothy 1:6

when I was six years old, my father built us a house. *Architectural Digest* didn't notice, but my mom sure did. Dad constructed it, board by board, every day after work. My youth didn't deter him from giving me a job. He tied an empty nail apron around my waist, placed a magnet in my hands, and sent me on daily patrols around the building site, carrying my magnet only inches off the ground.

One look at my tools and you could guess my job. Stray-nail collector.

One look at yours and the same can be said. Brick by brick, life by life, God is creating a kingdom, a "spiritual temple" (1 Peter 2:5). He entrusted you with a key task in the project. Examine your tools, and discover it. Your ability unveils your destiny.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Jeremiah 41:1—42:22

41 In the seventh month Ishmael son of Nethaniah and ten of his
men came to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah. (Nethaniah
was the son of Elishama.) Now Ishmael was a member of the
king's family and had been one of the officers of the king of
Judah. While they were eating a meal with Gedaliah at Mizpah,
2 Ishmael and his ten men got up and killed Gedaliah son of
Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with a sword. (Gedaliah was the
man the king of Babylon had chosen as governor over Judah.)
3 Ishmael also killed all the Jews and the Babylonian soldiers
who were there with Gedaliah at Mizpah.
4 The day after Gedaliah was murdered, before anyone knew
about it, 5 eighty men came to Mizpah bringing grain offerings

and incense to the Temple of the LORD. Those men from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria had shaved off their beards, torn their clothes, and cut themselves.[n] 6Ishmael son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, crying as he walked. When he met them, he said, “Come with me to meet Gedaliah son of Ahikam.” 7So they went into Mizpah. Then Ishmael son of Nethaniah and his men killed seventy of them and threw the bodies into a deep well. 8But the ten men who were left alive said to Ishmael, “Don’t kill us! We have wheat and barley and oil and honey that we have hidden in a field.” So Ishmael let them live and did not kill them with the others. 9Now the well where he had thrown all the bodies had been made by King Asa as a part of his defenses against Baasha king of Israel. But Ishmael son of Nethaniah put dead bodies in it until it was full.

10Ishmael captured all the other people in Mizpah: the king’s daughters and all the other people who were left there. They were the ones whom Nebuzaradan commander of the guard had chosen Gedaliah son of Ahikam to take care of. So Ishmael son of Nethaniah captured those people, and he started to cross over to the country of the Ammonites.

11Johanan son of Kareah and all his army officers with him heard about all the evil things Ishmael son of Nethaniah had done. 12So they took their men and went to fight Ishmael son of Nethaniah and caught him near the big pool of water at Gibeon. 13When the captives Ishmael had taken saw Johanan and the army officers, they were glad. 14So all the people Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned around and ran to Johanan son of Kareah. 15But Ishmael son of Nethaniah and eight of his men escaped from Johanan and ran away to the Ammonites.

16So Johanan son of Kareah and all his army officers saved the captives that Ishmael son of Nethaniah had taken from Mizpah after he murdered Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Among those left alive were soldiers, women, children, and palace officers. And Johanan brought them back from the town of Gibeon.

## *The Escape to Egypt*

17–18Johanan and the other army officers were afraid of the Babylonians. Since the king of Babylon had chosen Gedaliah son of Ahikam to be governor of Judah but Ishmael son of Nethaniah had murdered him, Johanan was afraid that the Babylonians would be angry. So they decided to run away to Egypt. On the way they stayed at Geruth Kimham, near the town of Bethlehem.

42 While there, Johanan son of Kareah and Jezaniah son of Hoshaiah went to Jeremiah the prophet. All the army officers and all the people, from the least important to the greatest,

went along, too. 2They said to him, “Jeremiah, please listen to what we ask. Pray to the LORD your God for all the people left alive from the family of Judah. At one time there were many of us, but you can see that there are few of us now. 3So pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do.”

4Then Jeremiah the prophet answered, “I understand what you want me to do. I will pray to the LORD your God as you have asked. I will tell you everything he says and not hide anything from you.”

5Then the people said to Jeremiah, “May the LORD be a true and loyal witness against us if we don’t do everything the LORD your God sends you to tell us. 6It does not matter if we like the message or not. We will obey the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you. We will obey what he says so good things will happen to us.”

7Ten days later the LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah. 8Then Jeremiah called for Johanan son of Kareah, the army officers with him, and all the other people, from the least important to the greatest. 9Jeremiah said to them, “You sent me to ask the LORD for what you wanted. This is what the God of Israel says: 10‘If you will stay in Judah, I will build you up and not tear you down. I will plant you and not pull you up, because I am sad about the disaster I brought on you. 11Now you fear the king of Babylon, but don’t be afraid of him. Don’t be afraid of him,’ says the LORD, ‘because I am with you. I will save you and rescue you from his power. 12I will be kind to you, and he will also treat you with mercy and let you stay in your land.’

13“But if you say, ‘We will not stay in Judah,’ you will disobey the LORD your God. 14Or you might say, ‘No, we will go and live in Egypt. There we will not see war, or hear the trumpets of war, or be hungry.’ 15If you say that, listen to the message of the LORD, you who are left alive from Judah. This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you make up your mind to go and live in Egypt, these things will happen: 16You are afraid of war, but it will find you in the land of Egypt. And you are worried about hunger, but it will follow you into Egypt, and you will die there. 17Everyone who goes to live in Egypt will die in war or from hunger or terrible disease. No one who goes to Egypt will live; no one will escape the terrible things I will bring to them.’

18“This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘I showed my anger against the people of Jerusalem. In the same way I will show my anger against you when you go to Egypt. Other nations will speak evil of you. People will be shocked by what will happen to you. You will become a curse word, and people will insult you. And you will never see Judah again.’

19“You who are left alive in Judah, the LORD has told you,

‘Don’t go to Egypt.’ Be sure you understand this; I warn you today 20that you are making a mistake that will cause your deaths. You sent me to the LORD your God, saying, ‘Pray to the LORD our God for us. Tell us everything the LORD our God says, and we will do it.’ 21So today I have told you, but you have not obeyed the LORD your God in all that he sent me to tell you. 22So now be sure you understand this: You want to go to live in Egypt, but you will die there by war, hunger, or terrible diseases.”

## Psalm 119:89–96

89LORD, your word is everlasting;
it continues forever in heaven.

90Your loyalty will go on and on;
you made the earth, and it still stands.

91All things continue to this day because of your laws,
because all things serve you.

92If I had not loved your teachings,
I would have died from my sufferings.

93I will never forget your orders,
because you have given me life by them.

94I am yours. Save me.
I want to obey your orders.

95Wicked people are waiting to destroy me,
but I will think about your rules.

96Everything I see has its limits,
but your commands have none.

## Proverbs 28:2

2 When a country is lawless, it has one ruler after another;
but when it is led by a leader with understanding and knowledge, it continues strong.

## 2 Timothy 1:1–18

1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. God sent me to tell about the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.
2 To Timothy, a dear child to me:
Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

### *Encouragement for Timothy*

3 I thank God as I always mention you in my prayers, day and night. I serve him, doing what I know is right as my ancestors did. 4 Remembering that you cried for me, I want very much to see you so I can be filled with joy. 5 I remember your true faith. That faith first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I know you now have that same faith. 6 This is why I remind you to keep using the gift God gave you when I laid my hands on[n] you. Now let it grow, as a small flame grows into a fire. 7 God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a spirit of power and love and self-control.
8 So do not be ashamed to tell people about our Lord Jesus, and do not be ashamed of me, in prison for the Lord. But suffer with me for the Good News. God, who gives us the strength to do that, 9 saved us and made us his holy people. That was not because of anything we did ourselves but because of God's purpose and grace. That grace was given to us through Christ Jesus before time began, 10 but it is now shown to us by the coming of our Savior Christ Jesus. He destroyed death, and through the Good News he showed us the way to have life that cannot be destroyed. 11 I was chosen to tell that Good News and to be an apostle and a teacher. 12 I am suffering now because I tell the Good News, but I am not ashamed, because I know Jesus, the One in whom I have believed. And I am sure he is able to protect what he has trusted me with until that day.[n]
13 Follow the pattern of true teachings that you heard from me in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Protect the truth

that you were given; protect it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

15 You know that everyone in Asia has left me, even Phygelus and Hermogenes. 16 May the Lord show mercy to the family of Onesiphorus, who has often helped me and was not ashamed that I was in prison. 17 When he came to Rome, he looked eagerly for me until he found me. 18 May the Lord allow him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. You know how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

# October 29

# Remember Jesus

*Remember Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead … This is the Good News I preach.*

2 Timothy 2:8

IN a letter written within earshot of the sharpening of the blade that would sever his head, Paul urged Timothy to remember. You can almost picture the old warrior smiling as he wrote the words. "Remember Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead … This is the Good News I preach" …

When times get hard, remember Jesus. When people don't listen, remember Jesus. When tears come, remember Jesus. When disappointment is your bed partner, remember Jesus.

Remember holiness in tandem with humanity. Remember the sick who were healed with callused hands. Remember the dead called from the grave with a Galilean accent. Remember the eyes of God that wept human tears.

from *Six Hours One Friday*

## Jeremiah 43:1—44:30

43 So Jeremiah finished telling the people the message from the LORD their God; he told them everything the LORD their God had sent him to tell them.

2Azariah son of Hoshaiah, Johanan son of Kareah, and some other men were too proud. They said to Jeremiah, "You are lying! The LORD our God did not send you to say, 'You must not go to Egypt to live there.' 3Baruch son of Neriah is causing you to be against us. He wants you to hand us over to the Babylonians so they can kill us or capture us and take us to Babylon."

4So Johanan, the army officers, and all the people disobeyed the LORD's command to stay in Judah. 5But Johanan son of Kareah and the army officers led away those who were left alive from Judah. They were the people who had run away from the

Babylonians to other countries but then had come back to live in Judah. 6They led away the men, women, and children, and the king's daughters. Nebuzaradan commander of the guard had put Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan in charge of those people. Johanan also took Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah. 7These people did not listen to the LORD. So they all went to Egypt to the city of Tahpanhes.

8In Tahpanhes the LORD spoke his word to Jeremiah: 9"Take some large stones. Bury them in the clay in the brick pavement in front of the king of Egypt's palace in Tahpanhes. Do this while the Jews are watching you. 10Then say to them, 'This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: I will soon send for my servant, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. I will set his throne over these stones I have buried, and he will spread his covering for shade above them. 11He will come here and attack Egypt. He will bring death to those who are supposed to die. He will make prisoners of those who are to be taken captive, and he will bring war to those who are to be killed with a sword. 12Nebuchadnezzar will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt and burn them. And he will take the idols away as captives. As a shepherd wraps himself in his clothes, so Nebuchadnezzar will wrap Egypt around him. Then he will safely leave Egypt. 13He will destroy the stone pillars in the temple of the sun god in Egypt, and he will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt.'"

## *Disaster in Egypt*

44 Jeremiah received a message from the LORD for all the Jews living in Egypt—in the cities of Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis, and in southern Egypt. This was the message: 2"The LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: You saw all the terrible things I brought on Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, which are ruins today with no one living in them. 3It is because the people who lived there did evil. They made me angry by burning incense and worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your ancestors ever knew. 4I sent all my servants, the prophets, to you again and again. By them I said to you, 'Don't do this terrible thing that I hate.' 5But they did not listen or pay attention. They did not stop doing evil things and burning incense to other gods. 6So I showed my great anger against them. I poured out my anger in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem so they are only ruins and piles of stones today.

7"Now the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Why are you doing such great harm to yourselves? You are cutting off the men and women, children and babies from the family of Judah, leaving yourselves without anyone from the family of

Judah. [8]Why do you want to make me angry by making idols?
Why do you burn incense to the gods of Egypt, where you have
come to live? You will destroy yourselves. Other nations will
speak evil of you and make fun of you. [9]Have you forgotten
about the evil things your ancestors did? And have you
forgotten the evil the kings and queens of Judah did? Have you
forgotten about the evil you and your wives did? These things
were done in the country of Judah and in the streets of
Jerusalem. [10]Even to this day the people of Judah are still too
proud. They have not learned to respect me or to follow my
teachings. They have not obeyed the laws I gave you and your
ancestors.

[11]"So this is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel,
says: I am determined to bring disasters on you. I will destroy
the whole family of Judah. [12]The few who were left alive from
Judah were determined to go to Egypt and settle there, but they
will all die in Egypt. They will be killed in war or die from
hunger. From the least important to the greatest, they will be
killed in war or die from hunger. Other nations will speak evil
about them. People will be shocked by what has happened to
them. They will become a curse word, and people will insult
them. [13]I will punish those people who have gone to live in
Egypt, just as I punished Jerusalem, using swords, hunger, and
terrible diseases. [14]Of the people of Judah who were left alive
and have gone to live in Egypt, none will escape my
punishment. They want to return to Judah and live there, but
none of them will live to return to Judah, except a few people
who will escape."

[15]A large group of the people of Judah who lived in southern
Egypt were meeting together. Among them were many women
of Judah who were burning incense to other gods, and their
husbands knew it. All these people said to Jeremiah, [16]"We will
not listen to the message from the LORD that you spoke to us.
[17]We promised to make sacrifices to the Queen Goddess, and
we will certainly do everything we promised. We will burn
incense and pour out drink offerings to worship her, just as we,
our ancestors, kings, and officers did in the past. All of us did
these things in the towns of Judah and in the streets of
Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were
successful, and nothing bad happened to us. [18]But since we
stopped making sacrifices to the Queen Goddess and stopped
pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had great problems.
Our people have also been killed in war and by hunger."

[19]The women said, "Our husbands knew what we were
doing. We had their permission to burn incense to the Queen
Goddess and to pour out drink offerings to her. Our husbands
knew we were making cakes that looked like her and were
pouring out drink offerings to her."

[20]Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people—men and women—

who answered him. 21He said to them, “The LORD remembered
that you and your ancestors, kings and officers, and the people
of the land burned incense in the towns of Judah and in the
streets of Jerusalem. He remembered and thought about it.
22Then he could not be patient with you any longer. He hated
the terrible things you did. So he made your country an empty
desert, where no one lives. Other people curse that country.
And so it is today. 23All this happened because you burned
incense to other gods. You sinned against the LORD. You did not
obey him or follow his teachings or the laws he gave you. You
did not keep your part of the agreement with him. So this
disaster has happened to you. It is there for you to see.”

24Then Jeremiah said to all those men and women, “People of
Judah who are now in Egypt, hear the word of the LORD: 25The
LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: You and your wives
did what you said you would do. You said, ‘We will certainly
keep the promises we made. We promised to make sacrifices to
the Queen Goddess and to pour out drink offerings to her.’ So,
go ahead. Do the things you promised, and keep your promises.
26But hear the word of the LORD. Listen, all you Jews living in
Egypt. The LORD says, ‘I have sworn by my great name: The
people of Judah now living in Egypt will never again use my
name to make promises. They will never again say in Egypt, “As
surely as the Lord God lives … ” 27I am watching over them, not
to take care of them, but to hurt them. The Jews who live in
Egypt will die from swords or hunger until they are all
destroyed. 28A few will escape being killed by the sword and
will come back to Judah from Egypt. Then, of the people of
Judah who came to live in Egypt, those who are left alive will
know if my word or their word came true. 29I will give you a
sign that I will punish you here in Egypt,’ says the LORD. ‘When
you see it happen, you will know that my promises to hurt you
will really happen.’ 30This is what the LORD says: ‘Hophra king of
Egypt has enemies who want to kill him. Soon I will hand him
over to his enemies just as I handed Zedekiah king of Judah
over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who wanted to kill
him.’”

## Psalm 119:97–104

97How I love your teachings!
I think about them all day long.

98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
because they are mine forever.

99 I am wiser than all my teachers,
because I think about your rules.

100 I have more understanding than the elders,
because I follow your orders.

101 I have avoided every evil way
so I could obey your word.

102 I haven't walked away from your laws,
because you yourself are my teacher.

103 Your promises are sweet to me,
sweeter than honey in my mouth!

104 Your orders give me understanding,
so I hate lying ways.

## Proverbs 28:3

3 Rulers who mistreat the poor
are like a hard rain that destroys the crops.

## 2 Timothy 2:1–26

### *A Loyal Soldier of Christ Jesus*

2 You then, Timothy, my child, be strong in the grace we have in
Christ Jesus. 2 You should teach people whom you can trust the
things you and many others have heard me say. Then they will

be able to teach others. [3]Share in the troubles we have like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [4]A soldier wants to please the enlisting officer, so no one serving in the army wastes time with everyday matters. [5]Also an athlete who takes part in a contest must obey all the rules in order to win. [6]The farmer who works hard should be the first person to get some of the food that was grown. [7]Think about what I am saying, because the Lord will give you the ability to understand everything.

[8]Remember Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, who is from the family of David. This is the Good News I preach, [9]and I am suffering because of it to the point of being bound with chains like a criminal. But God's teaching is not in chains. [10]So I patiently accept all these troubles so that those whom God has chosen can have the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. With that salvation comes glory that never ends.

[11]This teaching is true:

If we died with him, we will also live with him.

[12]If we accept suffering, we will also rule with him.

If we say we don't know him, he will say he doesn't know us.

[13]If we are not faithful, he will still be faithful,
because he must be true to who he is.

## *A Worker Pleasing to God*

[14]Continue teaching these things, warning people in God's presence not to argue about words. It does not help anyone, and it ruins those who listen. [15]Make every effort to give yourself to God as the kind of person he will approve. Be a worker who is not ashamed and who uses the true teaching in the right way. [16]Stay away from foolish, useless talk, because that will lead people further away from God. [17]Their evil teaching will spread like a sickness inside the body. Hymenaeus and Philetus are like that. [18]They have left the true teaching, saying that the rising from the dead has already taken place, and so they are destroying the faith of some people. [19]But God's strong foundation continues to stand. These words are written on the seal: "The Lord knows those who belong to him,"[n] and "Everyone who wants to belong to the Lord must stop doing wrong."

[20]In a large house there are not only things made of gold and silver, but also things made of wood and clay. Some things are used for special purposes, and others are made for ordinary jobs. [21]All who make themselves clean from evil will be used for special purposes. They will be made holy, useful to the Master, ready to do any good work.

[22]But run away from the evil desires of youth. Try hard to live right and to have faith, love, and peace, together with those who trust in the Lord from pure hearts. [23]Stay away from foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they grow into quarrels. [24]And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, a good teacher, and patient. [25]The Lord's servant must gently teach those who disagree. Then maybe God will let them change their minds so they can accept the truth. [26]And they may wake up and escape from the trap of the devil, who catches them to do what he wants.

# October 30

## One Step at a Time

*Your word is like a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.*

Psalm 119:105

Arthur Hays Sulzberger was the publisher of the *New York Times* during the Second World War. Because of the world conflict, he found it almost impossible to sleep. He was never able to banish worries from his mind until he adopted as his motto these five words—"one step enough for me"—taken from the hymn "Lead Kindly Light."

God isn't going to let you see the distant scene either. So you might as well quit looking for it. He promises a lamp unto our feet, not a crystal ball into the future. We do not need to know what will happen tomorrow.

God is leading you. Leave tomorrow's problems until tomorrow.

from *Traveling Light*

## Jeremiah 45:1—46:28

### *A Message to Baruch*

45 It was the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king
of Judah. Jeremiah the prophet told these things to Baruch son
of Neriah, and Baruch wrote them on a scroll: 2"This is what the
LORD, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: 3You have said,
'How terrible it is for me! The LORD has given me sorrow along
with my pain. I am tired because of my suffering and cannot
rest.'"
4The LORD said, "Say this to Baruch: 'This is what the LORD
says: I will soon tear down what I have built, and I will pull up
what I have planted everywhere in Judah. 5Baruch, you are
looking for great things for yourself. Don't look for them,
because I will bring disaster on all the people, says the LORD.

You will have to go many places, but I will let you escape alive wherever you go.’”

## *Messages to the Nations*

46 The LORD spoke this word to Jeremiah the prophet about the nations:

2This message is to Egypt. It is about the army of Neco king of Egypt, which was defeated at the city of Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. This was in the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah. This is the LORD’s message to Egypt:

3“Prepare your shields, large and small,
and march out for battle!

4Harness the horses
and get on them!

Go to your places for battle
and put on your helmets!

Polish your spears.
Put on your armor!

5What do I see?
That army is terrified,

and the soldiers are running away.
Their warriors are defeated.

They run away quickly
without looking back.
There is terror on every side!” says the LORD.

6“The fast runners cannot run away;
the strong soldiers cannot escape.

They stumble and fall
in the north, by the Euphrates River.

7 Who is this, rising up like the Nile River,
like strong, fast rivers?

8 Egypt rises up like the Nile River,
like strong, fast rivers.

Egypt says, ‘I will rise up and cover the earth.
I will destroy cities and the people in them!’

9 Horsemen, charge into battle!
Chariot drivers, drive hard!

March on, brave soldiers—
soldiers from the countries of Cush and Put who carry shields,
soldiers from Lydia who use bows.

10 “But that day belongs to the Lord God All-Powerful.
At that time he will give those people the punishment they deserve.

The sword will kill until it is finished,
until it satisfies its thirst for their blood.

The Lord God All-Powerful will offer a sacrifice
in the land of the north, by the Euphrates River.

11 “Go up to Gilead and get some balm,
people of Egypt!

You have prepared many medicines,
but they will not work;
you will not be healed.

12 The nations have heard of your shame,
and your cries fill all the earth.

One warrior has run into another;
both of them have fallen down together!”

13 This is the message the LORD spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon’s coming to attack Egypt:

14 “Announce this message in Egypt, and preach it in Migdol.
Preach it also in the cities of Memphis and Tahpanhes:

‘Get ready for war,
because the battle is all around you.’

15 Egypt, why were your warriors killed?
They could not stand because the LORD pushed them down.

16 They stumbled again and again
and fell over each other.

They said, ‘Get up. Let’s go back
to our own people and our homeland.
We must get away from our enemy’s sword!’

17 In their homelands those soldiers called out,
‘The king of Egypt is only a lot of noise.
He missed his chance for glory!’”

18 The King’s name is the LORD All-Powerful.
He says, “As surely as I live,

a powerful leader will come.
He will be like Mount Tabor among the mountains,
like Mount Carmel by the sea.

19 People of Egypt, pack your things
to be taken away as captives,

because Memphis will be destroyed.
It will be a ruin, and no one will live there.

20 “Egypt is like a beautiful young cow,
but a horsefly is coming
from the north to attack her.

21 The hired soldiers in Egypt’s army
are like fat calves,

because even they all turn and run away together;
they do not stand strong against the attack.

Their time of destruction is coming;
they will soon be punished.

22 Egypt is like a hissing snake that is trying to escape.
The enemy comes closer and closer.

They come against Egypt with axes
like men who cut down trees.

23 They will chop down Egypt’s army
as if it were a great forest,” says the LORD.

“There are more enemy soldiers than locusts;
there are too many to count.

24 The people of Egypt will be ashamed.
They will be handed over to the enemy from the north.”

25 The LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: “Very soon I will punish Amon, the god of the city of Thebes. And I will punish Egypt, her kings, her gods, and the people who depend

on the king. [26]I will hand those people over to their enemies,
who want to kill them. I will give them to Nebuchadnezzar king
of Babylon and his officers. But in the future, Egypt will live in
peace as it once did," says the LORD.

### *A Message to Israel*

[27]"People of Jacob, my servants, don't be afraid;
don't be frightened, Israel.

I will surely save you from those faraway places
and your children from the lands where they are captives.

The people of Jacob will have peace and safety again,
and no one will make them afraid.

[28]People of Jacob, my servants, do not be afraid,
because I am with you," says the LORD.

"I will completely destroy the many different nations
where I scattered you.
But I will not completely destroy you.

I will punish you fairly,
but I will not let you escape your punishment."

## Psalm 119:105–112

[105]Your word is like a lamp for my feet
and a light for my path.

[106]I will do what I have promised
and obey your fair laws.

107 I have suffered for a long time.
LORD, give me life by your word.

108 LORD, accept my willing praise
and teach me your laws.

109 My life is always in danger,
but I haven't forgotten your teachings.

110 Wicked people have set a trap for me,
but I haven't strayed from your orders.

111 I will follow your rules forever,
because they make me happy.

112 I will try to do what you demand
forever, until the end.

## Proverbs 28:4

4 Those who disobey what they have been taught praise the wicked,
but those who obey what they have been taught are against them.

## 2 Timothy 3:1—4:8

### *The Last Days*

3 Remember this! In the last days there will be many troubles,
2 because people will love themselves, love money, brag, and be proud. They will say evil things against others and will not obey their parents or be thankful or be the kind of people God wants.
3 They will not love others, will refuse to forgive, will gossip, and will not control themselves. They will be cruel, will hate what is

good, [4]will turn against their friends, and will do foolish things without thinking. They will be conceited, will love pleasure instead of God, [5]and will act as if they serve God but will not have his power. Stay away from those people. [6]Some of them go into homes and get control of silly women who are full of sin and are led by many evil desires. [7]These women are always learning new teachings, but they are never able to understand the truth fully. [8]Just as Jannes and Jambres were against Moses, these people are against the truth. Their thinking has been ruined, and they have failed in trying to follow the faith. [9]But they will not be successful in what they do, because as with Jannes and Jambres, everyone will see that they are foolish.

## *Obey the Teachings*

[10]But you have followed what I teach, the way I live, my goal, faith, patience, and love. You know I never give up. [11]You know how I have been hurt and have suffered, as in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. I have suffered, but the Lord saved me from all those troubles. [12]Everyone who wants to live as God desires, in Christ Jesus, will be persecuted. [13]But people who are evil and cheat others will go from bad to worse. They will fool others, but they will also be fooling themselves.

[14]But you should continue following the teachings you learned. You know they are true, because you trust those who taught you. [15]Since you were a child you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise. And that wisdom leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16]All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives, for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right. [17]Using the Scriptures, the person who serves God will be capable, having all that is needed to do every good work.

[4] I give you a command in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, the One who will judge the living and the dead, and by his coming and his kingdom: [2]Preach the Good News. Be ready at all times, and tell people what they need to do. Tell them when they are wrong. Encourage them with great patience and careful teaching, [3]because the time will come when people will not listen to the true teaching but will find many more teachers who please them by saying the things they want to hear. [4]They will stop listening to the truth and will begin to follow false stories. [5]But you should control yourself at all times, accept troubles, do the work of telling the Good News, and complete all the duties of a servant of God.

[6]My life is being given as an offering to God, and the time has come for me to leave this life. [7]I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8]Now, a crown is

being held for me—a crown for being right with God. The Lord, the judge who judges rightly, will give the crown to me on that day[n]—not only to me but to all those who have waited with love for him to come again.

# October 31

## The Proper View of Self

*But the Lord stayed with me and gave me strength.*

2 Timothy 4:17

There are two extremes of poor I-sight. Self-loving and self-loathing. We swing from one side to the other. Promotions and demotions bump us back and forth. One day too high on self, the next too hard on self. Neither is correct. Self-elevation and self-deprecation are equally inaccurate. Where is the truth?

Smack-dab in the middle. Dead center between "I can do anything" and "I can't do anything" lies "I can do all things through Christ, because he gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Neither omnipotent nor impotent, neither God's MVP nor God's mistake. Not self-secure or insecure, but God-secure—a self-worth based in our identity as children of God. The proper view of self is in the middle.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

## Jeremiah 47:1—48:47

### *A Message to the Philistines*

47 Before the king of Egypt attacked the city of Gaza, the LORD
spoke his word to Jeremiah the prophet. This message is to the
Philistine people.
2 This is what the LORD says:

"See, the enemy is gathering in the north like rising waters.
They will become like an overflowing stream

and will cover the whole country like a flood,

even the towns and the people living in them.

Everyone living in that country
will cry for help;
the people will cry painfully.

3 They will hear the sound of the running horses
and the noisy chariots
and the rumbling chariot wheels.

Parents will not help their children to safety,
because they will be too weak to help.

4 The time has come
to destroy all the Philistines.

It is time to destroy all who are left alive
who could help the cities of Tyre and Sidon.

The LORD will soon destroy the Philistines,
those left alive from the island of Crete.

5 The people from the city of Gaza will be sad and shave their heads.
The people from the city of Ashkelon will be made silent.

Those left alive from the valley,
how long will you cut yourselves? [n]

6 "You cry, 'Sword of the LORD,
how long will you keep fighting?

Return to your holder.
Stop and be still.'

7 But how can his sword rest

when the LORD has given it a command?

He has ordered it
to attack Ashkelon and the seacoast.”

## *A Message to Moab*

48 This message is to the country of Moab. This is what the LORD
All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says:

“How terrible it will be for the city of Nebo,
because it will be ruined.

The town of Kiriathaim will be disgraced and captured;
the strong city will be disgraced and shattered.

2Moab will not be praised again.
Men in the town of Heshbon plan Moab’s defeat.
They say, ‘Come, let us put an end to that nation!’

Town of Madmen,[n] you will also be silenced.
The sword will chase you.

3Listen to the cries from the town of Horonaim,
cries of much confusion and destruction.

4Moab will be broken up.
Her little children will cry for help.

5Moab’s people go up the path to the town of Luhith,
crying loudly as they go.

On the road down to Horonaim,
cries of pain and suffering can be heard.

6Run! Run for your lives!
Go like a bush being blown through the desert.

[7]You trust in the things you do and in your wealth,
so you also will be captured.

The god Chemosh will go into captivity
and his priests and officers with him.

[8]The destroyer will come against every town;
not one town will escape.

The valley will be ruined,
and the high plain will be destroyed,
as the LORD has said.

[9]Give wings to Moab,
because she will surely leave her land.

Moab's towns will become empty,
with no one to live in them.

[10]A curse will be on anyone who doesn't do what the LORD says,
and a curse will be on anyone who holds back his sword from killing.

[11]"The people of Moab have never known trouble.
They are like wine left to settle;

they have never been poured from one jar to another.
They have not been taken into captivity.

So they taste as they did before,
and their smell has not changed.

[12]A time is coming," says the LORD,
"When I will send people to pour you from your jars.

They will empty Moab's jars
and smash her jugs.

13 The people of Israel trusted that god in the town of Bethel,
and they were ashamed when there was no help.
In the same way Moab will be ashamed of their god Chemosh.

14 "You cannot say, 'We are warriors!
We are brave men in battle!'

15 The destroyer of Moab and her towns has arrived.
Her best young men will be killed!" says the King,
whose name is the LORD All-Powerful.

16 "The end of Moab is near,
and she will soon be destroyed.

17 All you who live around Moab,
all you who know her, cry for her.

Say, 'The ruler's power is broken;
Moab's power and glory are gone.'

18 "You people living in the town of Dibon, come down from your place of honor
and sit on the dry ground,

because the destroyer of Moab has come against you.
And he has destroyed your strong, walled cities.

19 You people living in the town of Aroer,
stand next to the road and watch.

See the man running away and the woman escaping.
Ask them, 'What happened?'

[20]Moab is filled with shame, because she is ruined.
Cry, Moab, cry out!

Announce at the Arnon River
that Moab is destroyed.

[21]People on the high plain have been punished.
Judgment has come to these towns:
Holon, Jahzah, and Mephaath;
[22] Dibon, Nebo, and Beth Diblathaim;
[23] Kiriathaim, Beth Gamul, and Beth Meon;
[24] Kerioth and Bozrah.
Judgment has come to all the towns of Moab, far and near.

[25]Moab's strength has been cut off,
and its arm broken!" says the LORD.

[26]"The people of Moab thought they were greater than the LORD,
so punish them until they act as if they are drunk.

Moab will fall and roll around in its own vomit,
and people will even make fun of it.

[27]Moab, you made fun of Israel.
Israel was caught in the middle of a gang of thieves.

When you spoke about Israel,
you shook your head and acted as if you were better than it.

[28]People in Moab, leave your towns empty
and go live among the rocks.

Be like a dove that makes its nest
at the entrance of a cave.

29 “We have heard that the people of Moab are proud,
very proud.

They are proud, very proud,
and in their hearts they think they are important.”

30 The LORD says,
“I know Moab’s great pride, but it is useless.
Moab’s bragging accomplishes nothing.

31 So I cry sadly for Moab,
for everyone in Moab.
I moan for the people from the town of Kir Hareseth.

32 I cry with the people of the town of Jazer
for you, the grapevines of the town of Sibmah.

In the past your vines spread all the way to the sea,
as far as the sea of Jazer.

But the destroyer has taken over
your fruit and grapes.

33 Joy and happiness are gone
from the large, rich fields of Moab.

I have stopped the flow of wine from the winepresses.
No one walks on the grapes with shouts of joy.

There are shouts,
but not shouts of joy.

34 “Their crying can be heard from Moabite towns,
from Heshbon to Elealeh and Jahaz.

It can be heard from Zoar as far away as Horonaim and

Eglath Shelishiyah.
Even the waters of Nimrim are dried up.

35 I will stop Moab
from making burnt offerings at the places of worship
and from burning incense to their gods," says the LORD.

36 "My heart cries sadly for Moab like a flute playing a funeral song.
It cries like a flute for the people from Kir Hareseth.
The money they made has all been taken away.

37 Every head has been shaved
and every beard cut off.

Everyone's hands are cut,
and everyone wears rough cloth around his waist.[n]

38 People are crying on every roof[n] in Moab
and in every public square.

There is nothing but sadness,
because I have broken Moab
like a jar no one wants," says the LORD.

39 "Moab is shattered! The people are crying!
Moab turns away in shame!

People all around her make fun of her.
The things that happened fill them with great fear."

40 This is what the LORD says:

"Look! Someone is coming, like an eagle diving down from the sky
and spreading its wings over Moab.

41 The towns of Moab will be captured,
and the strong, walled cities will be defeated.

At that time Moab's warriors will be frightened,
like a woman who is having a baby.

42 The nation of Moab will be destroyed,
because they thought they were greater than the LORD.

43 Fear, deep pits, and traps wait for you,
people of Moab," says the LORD.

44 "People will run from fear,
but they will fall into the pits.

Anyone who climbs out of the pits
will be caught in the traps.

I will bring the year of punishment to Moab," says the LORD.

45 "People have run from the powerful enemy
and have gone to Heshbon for safety.

But fire started in Heshbon;
a blaze has spread from the hometown of Sihon king of Moab.

It burned up the leaders of Moab
and destroyed those proud people.

46 How terrible it is for you, Moab!
The people who worship Chemosh have been destroyed.

Your sons have been taken captive,
and your daughters have been taken away.

47 “But in days to come,
I will make good things happen again to Moab,” says the LORD.

This ends the judgment on Moab.

## Psalm 119:113–120

113 I hate disloyal people,
but I love your teachings.

114 You are my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in your word.

115 Get away from me, you who do evil,
so I can keep my God’s commands.

116 Support me as you promised so I can live.
Don’t let me be embarrassed because of my hopes.

117 Help me, and I will be saved.
I will always respect your demands.

118 You reject those who ignore your demands,
because their lies mislead them.

119 You throw away the wicked of the world like trash.
So I will love your rules.

120 I shake in fear of you;
I respect your laws.

## Proverbs 28:5

[5]Evil people do not understand justice,
but those who follow the LORD understand it completely.

## 2 Timothy 4:9–22

### *Personal Words*

[9]Do your best to come to me as soon as you can, [10]because Demas, who loved this world, left me and went to Thessalonica. Crescens went to Galatia, and Titus went to Dalmatia. [11]Luke is the only one still with me. Get Mark and bring him with you when you come, because he can help me in my work here. [12]I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. [13]When I was in Troas, I left my coat there with Carpus. So when you come, bring it to me, along with my books, particularly the ones written on parchment.[n]

[14]Alexander the metalworker did many harmful things against me. The Lord will punish him for what he did. [15]You also should be careful that he does not hurt you, because he fought strongly against our teaching.

[16]The first time I defended myself, no one helped me; everyone left me. May they be forgiven. [17]But the Lord stayed with me and gave me strength so I could fully tell the Good News to all those who are not Jews. So I was saved from the lion's mouth. [18]The Lord will save me when anyone tries to hurt me, and he will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. Glory forever and ever be the Lord's. Amen.

### *Final Greetings*

[19]Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the family of Onesiphorus. [20]Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. [21]Try as hard as you can to come to me before winter.

Eubulus sends greetings to you. Also Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters in Christ greet you.

[22]The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

# November 1

## The Lord Is Peace

*Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.*

Titus 1:4

The Lord came to Gideon and told him he was to lead his people in victory over the Midianites. That's like God telling a housewife to stand up to her abusive husband or a high school student to take on drug peddlers or a preacher to preach the truth to a congregation of Pharisees. "Y-y-you-b-b-better get somebody else," we stammer. But then God reminds us that he knows we can't, but he can, and to prove it he gives a wonderful gift. He brings a spirit of peace. A peace before the storm. A peace beyond logic … He gave it to David after he showed him Goliath; he gave it to Saul after he showed him the Good News; he gave it to Jesus after he showed him the Cross. And he gave it to Gideon. So Gideon, in turn, gave the name to God. He built an altar and named it Jehovah-shalom, the LORD is peace (Judges 6:24).

from *The Great House of God*

## Jeremiah 49:1—50:46

### *A Message to Ammon*

49 This message is to the Ammonite people.This is what the LORD says:

"Do you think that Israel has no children?
Do you think there is no one to take the land when the parents die?

If that were true, why did Molech take Gad's land
and why did Molech's people settle in Gad's towns?"

2The LORD says,

"The time will come when I will make Rabbah,
the capital city of the Ammonites, hear the battle cry.

It will become a hill covered with ruins,
and the towns around it will be burned.

Those people forced Israel out of that land,
but now Israel will force them out!" says the LORD.

3"People in the town of Heshbon, cry sadly because the town of Ai is destroyed!
Those who live in Rabbah, cry out!

Put on your rough cloth to show your sadness, and cry loudly.
Run here and there for safety inside the walls,

because Molech will be taken captive
and his priests and officers with him.

4You brag about your valleys
and about the fruit in your valleys.

You are like an unfaithful child
who believes his treasures will save him.
You think, 'Who would attack me?'

5I will soon bring terror on you
from everyone around you,"
says the Lord God All-Powerful.

"You will all be forced to run away,

and no one will be able to gather you.

6 “But the time will come
when I will make good things happen to the Ammonites again,”
says the LORD.

## *A Message to Edom*

7 This message is to Edom. This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

“Is there no more wisdom in the town of Teman?
Can the wise men of Edom no longer give good advice?
Have they lost their wisdom?

8 You people living in the town of Dedan,
run away and hide in deep caves,

because I will bring disaster on the people of Esau.
It is time for me to punish them.

9 If workers came and picked the grapes from your vines,
they would leave a few grapes behind.

If robbers came at night,
they would steal only enough for themselves.

10 But I will strip Edom bare.
I will find all their hiding places,
so they will not be able to hide from me.

The children, relatives, and neighbors will die,
and Edom will be no more.

11 Leave the orphans, and I will take care of them.
Your widows also can trust in me.”

12This is what the LORD says: “Some people did not deserve to
be punished, but they had to drink from the cup of suffering
anyway. People of Edom, you deserve to be punished, so you will
not escape punishment. You must certainly drink from the cup
of suffering.” 13The LORD says, “I swear by my own name that
the city of Bozrah will become a pile of ruins! People will be
shocked by what happened there. They will insult that city and
speak evil of it. And all the towns around it will become ruins
forever.”

14I have heard a message from the LORD.
A messenger has been sent among the nations, saying,

“Gather your armies to attack it!
Get ready for battle!”

15“Soon I will make you the smallest of nations,
and you will be greatly hated by everyone.

16Edom, you frightened other nations,
but your pride has fooled you.

You live in the hollow places of the cliff
and control the high places of the hills.

Even if you build your home as high as an eagle’s nest,
I will bring you down from there,” says the LORD.

17“Edom will be destroyed.
People who pass by will be shocked to see the destroyed
cities,
and they will be amazed at all her injuries.

18Edom will be destroyed like the cities of Sodom and
Gomorrah
and the towns around them,” says the LORD.

“No one will live there!
No one will stay in Edom.

19 “Like a lion coming up from the thick bushes near the Jordan River
to attack a strong pen for sheep,

I will suddenly chase Edom from its land.
Who is the one I have chosen to do this?

There is no one like me,
no one who can take me to court.
None of their leaders can stand up against me.”

20 So listen to what the LORD has planned to do against Edom.
Listen to what he has decided to do to the people in the town of Teman.

He will surely drag away the young ones of Edom.
Their hometowns will surely be shocked at what happens to them.

21 At the sound of Edom’s fall, the earth will shake.
Their cry will be heard all the way to the Red Sea.

22 The LORD is like an eagle swooping down
and spreading its wings over the city of Bozrah.

At that time Edom’s soldiers will become very frightened,
like a woman having a baby.

## *A Message to Damascus*

23 This message is to the city of Damascus:

“The towns of Hamath and Arpad are put to shame,
because they have heard bad news.

They are discouraged.
They are troubled like the tossing sea.

[24]The city of Damascus has become weak.
The people want to run away;
they are ready to panic.

The people feel pain and suffering,
like a woman giving birth to a baby.

[25]Damascus was a city of my joy.
Why have the people not left that famous city yet?

[26]Surely the young men will die in the city squares,
and all her soldiers will be killed at that time," says the LORD All-Powerful.

[27]"I will set fire to the walls of Damascus,
and it will completely burn the strong cities of King Ben-Hadad."

## *A Message to Kedar and Hazor*

[28]This message is to the tribe of Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated. This is what the LORD says:

"Go and attack the people of Kedar,
and destroy the people of the East.

[29]Their tents and flocks will be taken away.
Their belongings will be carried off—
their tents, all their goods, and their camels.

Men will shout to them,
'Terror on every side!'

[30]"Run away quickly!
People in Hazor, find a good place to hide!" says the LORD.

"Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has made plans against

you
and wants to defeat you.

31 “Get up! Attack the nation that is comfortable,
that is sure no one will defeat it,” says the LORD.

“It does not have gates or fences to protect it.
Its people live alone.

32 The enemy will steal their camels
and their large herds of cattle as war prizes.

I will scatter the people who cut their hair short to every part of the earth,
and I will bring disaster on them from everywhere,” says the LORD.

33 “The city of Hazor will become a home for wild dogs;
it will be an empty desert forever.

No one will live there,
and no one will stay in it.”

## *A Message to Elam*

34 Soon after Zedekiah became king of Judah, the LORD spoke this word to Jeremiah the prophet. This message is to the nation of Elam.
35 This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

“I will soon break Elam’s bow,
its greatest strength.

36 I will bring the four winds against Elam
from the four corners of the skies.

I will scatter its people everywhere the four winds blow;
its captives will go to every nation.

37 I will terrify Elam in front of their enemies,
who want to destroy them.

I will bring disaster to Elam
and show them how angry I am!” says the LORD.

“I will send a sword to chase Elam
until I have killed them all.

38 I will set up my throne in Elam to show that I am king,
and I will destroy its king and its officers!” says the LORD.

39 “But I will make good things happen to Elam again
in the future,” says the LORD.

## *A Message to Babylon*

50 This is the message the LORD spoke to Babylon and the Babylonian people through Jeremiah the prophet.

2 “Announce this to the nations.
Lift up a banner and tell them.
Speak the whole message and say:

‘Babylon will be captured.
The god Bel will be put to shame,
and the god Marduk will be afraid.

Babylon’s gods will be put to shame,
and her idols will be afraid!’

3 A nation from the north will attack Babylon
and make it like an empty desert.

No one will live there;
both people and animals will run away.”

4 The LORD says, “At that time
the people of Israel and Judah will come together.
They will cry and look for the LORD their God.

5 Those people will ask how to go to Jerusalem
and will start in that direction.

They will come and join themselves to the LORD.
They will make an agreement with him that will last forever,
an agreement that will never be forgotten.

6 “My people have been like lost sheep.
Their leaders have led them in the wrong way

and made them wander around in the mountains and hills.
They forgot where their resting place was.

7 Whoever saw my people hurt them.
And those enemies said, ‘We did nothing wrong.

Those people sinned against the LORD, their true resting place,
the God their fathers trusted.’

8 “Run away from Babylon,
and leave the land of the Babylonians.
Be like the goats that lead the flock.

9 I will soon bring against Babylon
many great nations from the north.

They will take their places for war against it,
and it will be captured by people from the north.

Their arrows are like trained soldiers
who do not return from war with empty hands.

10 The enemy will take all the wealth from the Babylonians.
Those enemy soldiers will get all they want," says the LORD.

11 "Babylon, you are excited and happy,
because you took my land.

You dance around like a young cow in the grain.
Your laughter is like the neighing of male horses.

12 Your mother will be very ashamed;
the woman who gave birth to you will be disgraced.

Soon Babylonia will be the least important of all the nations.
She will be an empty, dry desert.

13 Because of the LORD's anger,
no one will live there.
She will be completely empty.

Everyone who passes by Babylon will be shocked.
They will shake their heads when they see all her injuries.

14 "Take your positions for war against Babylon,
all you soldiers with bows.

Shoot your arrows at Babylon! Do not save any of them,
because Babylon has sinned against the LORD.

15 Soldiers around Babylon, shout the war cry!
Babylon has surrendered, her towers have fallen,
and her walls have been torn down.

The LORD is giving her people the punishment they deserve.
You nations should give her what she deserves;
do to her what she has done to others.

16 Don’t let the people from Babylon plant their crops
or gather the harvest.

The soldiers treated their captives cruelly.
Now, let everyone go back home.
Let everyone run to his own country.

17 “The people of Israel are like a flock of sheep that are scattered
from being chased by lions.

The first lion to eat them up
was the king of Assyria.

The last lion to crush their bones
was Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”

18 So this is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says:

“I will punish the king of Babylon and his country
as I punished the king of Assyria.

19 But I will bring the people of Israel back to their own pasture.
They will eat on Mount Carmel and in Bashan.

They will eat and be full
on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead.”

20 The LORD says,
“At that time people will try to find Israel’s guilt,
but there will be no guilt.

People will try to find Judah’s sins,
but no sins will be found,

because I will leave a few people alive from Israel and Judah,

and I will forgive their sins.

21 “Attack the land of Merathaim.
Attack the people who live in Pekod.

Chase them, kill them, and completely destroy them.
Do everything I commanded you!” says the LORD.

22 “The noise of battle can be heard all over the country;
it is the noise of much destruction.

23 Babylon was the hammer of the whole earth,
but how broken and shattered that hammer is now.

It is truly the most ruined
of all the nations.

24 Babylon, I set a trap for you,
and you were caught before you knew it.

You fought against the LORD,
so you were found and taken prisoner.

25 The LORD has opened up his storeroom
and brought out the weapons of his anger,

because the Lord God All-Powerful has work to do
in the land of the Babylonians.

26 Come against Babylon from far away.
Break open her storehouses of grain.
Pile up her dead bodies like heaps of grain.

Completely destroy Babylon
and do not leave anyone alive.

27 Kill all the young men in Babylon;
let them be killed like animals.

How terrible it will be for them, because the time has come for their defeat;
it is time for them to be punished.

28 Listen to the people running to escape the country of Babylon!
They are telling Jerusalem

how the LORD our God is punishing Babylon as it deserves
for destroying his Temple.

29 "Call for the archers
to come against Babylon.

Tell them to surround the city,
and let no one escape.

Pay her back for what she has done;
do to her what she has done to other nations.

Babylon acted with pride against the LORD,
the Holy One of Israel.

30 So her young men will be killed in her streets.
All her soldiers will die on that day," says the LORD.

31 "Babylon, you are too proud, and I am against you,"
says the Lord God All-Powerful.

"The time has come
for you to be punished.

32 Proud Babylon will stumble and fall,

and no one will help her get up.

I will start a fire in her towns,
and it will burn up everything around her.”

33This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

“The people of Israel
and Judah are slaves.

The enemy took them as prisoners
and won’t let them go.

34But God is strong and will buy them back.
His name is the LORD All-Powerful.

He will surely defend them with power
so he can give rest to their land.
But he will not give rest to those living in Babylon.”

35The LORD says,

“Let a sword kill the people living in Babylon
and her officers and wise men!

36Let a sword kill her false prophets,
and they will become fools.

Let a sword kill her warriors,
and they will be full of terror.

37Let a sword kill her horses and chariots
and all the soldiers hired from other countries!
Then they will be like frightened women.

Let a sword attack her treasures,
so they will be taken away.

[38]Let a sword attack her waters
so they will be dried up.

She is a land of idols,
and the people go crazy with fear over them.

[39]“Desert animals and hyenas will live there,
and owls will live there,

but no people will ever live there again.
She will never be filled with people again.

[40]God completely destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah
and the towns around them,” says the LORD.

“In the same way no people will live in Babylon,
and no human being will stay there.

[41]“Look! An army is coming from the north.
A powerful nation and many kings
are coming together from all around the world.

[42]Their armies have bows and spears.
The soldiers are cruel and have no mercy.

As the soldiers come riding on their horses,
the sound is loud like the roaring sea.

They stand in their places, ready for battle.
They are ready to attack you, city of Babylon.

[43]The king of Babylon heard about those armies,
and he became helpless with fear.

Distress has gripped him.

His pain is like that of a woman giving birth to a baby.

44 “Like a lion coming up from the thick bushes near the Jordan River
to attack a strong pen for sheep,

I will suddenly chase the people of Babylon from their land.
Who is the one I have chosen to do this?

There is no one like me,
no one who can take me to court.
None of their leaders can stand up against me.”

45 So listen to what the LORD has planned to do against Babylon.
Listen to what he has decided to do to the people in the city of Babylon.

He will surely drag away the young ones of Babylon.
Their hometowns will surely be shocked at what happens to them.

46 At the sound of Babylon’s capture, the earth will shake.
People in all nations will hear Babylon’s cry of distress.

## Psalm 119:121–128

121 I have done what is fair and right.
Don’t leave me to those who wrong me.

122 Promise that you will help me, your servant.
Don’t let proud people wrong me.

123 My eyes are tired from looking for your salvation
and for your good promise.

124 Show your love to me, your servant,
and teach me your demands.

125 I am your servant. Give me wisdom
so I can understand your rules.

126 LORD, it is time for you to do something,
because people have disobeyed your teachings.

127 I love your commands
more than the purest gold.

128 I respect all your orders,
so I hate lying ways.

## Proverbs 28:6

6 It is better to be poor and innocent
than to be rich and wicked.

## Titus 1:1–16

1 From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I was sent to help the faith of God's chosen people and to help them know the truth that shows people how to serve God. 2 That faith and that knowledge come from the hope for life forever, which God promised to us before time began. And God cannot lie. 3 At the right time God let the world know about that life through preaching. He trusted me with that work, and I preached by the command of God our Savior.

4 To Titus, my true child in the faith we share:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

### *Titus' Work in Crete*

5 I left you in Crete so you could finish doing the things that

still needed to be done and so you could appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. [6]An elder must not be guilty of doing wrong, must have only one wife, and must have believing children. They must not be known as children who are wild and do not cooperate. [7]As God's managers, overseers must not be guilty of doing wrong, being selfish, or becoming angry quickly. They must not drink too much wine, like to fight, or try to get rich by cheating others. [8]Overseers must be ready to welcome guests, love what is good, be wise, live right, and be holy and self-controlled. [9]By holding on to the trustworthy word just as we teach it, overseers can help people by using true teaching, and they can show those who are against the true teaching that they are wrong.

[10]There are many people who refuse to cooperate, who talk about worthless things and lead others into the wrong way—mainly those who insist on circumcision to be saved. [11]These people must be stopped, because they are upsetting whole families by teaching things they should not teach, which they do to get rich by cheating people. [12]Even one of their own prophets said, "Cretans are always liars, evil animals, and lazy people who do nothing but eat." [13]The words that prophet said are true. So firmly tell those people they are wrong so they may become strong in the faith, [14]not accepting Jewish false stories and the commands of people who reject the truth. [15]To those who are pure, all things are pure, but to those who are full of sin and do not believe, nothing is pure. Both their minds and their consciences have been ruined. [16]They say they know God, but their actions show they do not accept him. They are hateful people, they refuse to obey, and they are useless for doing anything good.

# November 2

## Grace Teaches Us

*He gave himself for us so he might pay the price to free us from all evil and to make us pure people who belong only to him.*

Titus 2:14

DO we ever compromise tonight, knowing we'll confess tomorrow? It's easy to be like the fellow visiting Las Vegas who called the preacher, wanting to know the hours of the Sunday service. The preacher was impressed. "Most people who come to Las Vegas don't do so to go to church."

"Oh, I'm not coming for the church. I'm coming for the gambling and parties and wild women. If I have half as much fun as I intend to, I'll need a church come Sunday morning."

Is that the intent of grace? Is God's goal to promote disobedience? Hardly. "Grace ... teaches us not to live against God nor to do the evil things the world wants to do. Instead, that grace teaches us to live in the present age in a wise and right way and in a way that shows we serve God" (Titus 2:11–12). God's grace has released us from selfishness. Why return?

from *In the Grip of Grace*

## Jeremiah 51:1—52:34

51 This is what the LORD says:"I will soon cause a destroying wind to blow
against Babylon and the Babylonian people.

2I will send foreign people to destroy Babylon
like a wind that blows chaff away.
They will destroy the land.

Armies will surround the city
when the day of disaster comes upon her.

3 Don’t let the Babylonian soldiers prepare their bows to shoot.
Don’t even let them put on their armor.

Don’t feel sorry for the young men of Babylon,
but completely destroy her army.

4 They will be killed in the land of the Babylonians
and will die in her streets.

5 The Lord God All-Powerful
did not leave Israel and Judah,

even though they were completely guilty
in the presence of the Holy One of Israel.

6 “Run away from Babylon
and save your lives!
Don’t stay and be killed because of Babylon’s sins.

It is time for the LORD to punish Babylon;
he will give Babylon the punishment she deserves.

7 Babylon was like a gold cup in the LORD’s hand
that made the whole earth drunk.

The nations drank Babylon’s wine,
so they went crazy.

8 Babylon has suddenly fallen and been broken.
Cry for her!

Get balm for her pain,

and maybe she can be healed.

9 “Foreigners in Babylon say, ‘We tried to heal Babylon,
but she cannot be healed.

So let us leave her and each go to his own country.
Babylon’s punishment is as high as the sky;
it reaches to the clouds.’

10 “The people of Judah say, ‘The LORD has shown us to be right.
Come, let us tell in Jerusalem
what the LORD our God has done.’

11 “Sharpen the arrows!
Pick up your shields!

The LORD has stirred up the kings of the Medes,
because he wants to destroy Babylon.

The LORD will punish them as they deserve
for destroying his Temple.

12 Lift up a banner against the walls of Babylon!
Bring more guards.

Put the watchmen in their places,
and get ready for a secret attack!

The LORD will certainly do what he has planned
and what he said he would do against the people of Babylon.

13 People of Babylon, you live near much water
and are rich with many treasures,

but your end as a nation has come.

It is time to stop you from robbing other nations.

14 The LORD All-Powerful has promised in his own name:
'Babylon, I will surely fill you with so many enemy soldiers they will be like a swarm of locusts.
They will stand over you and shout their victory.'

15 "The LORD made the earth by his power.
He used his wisdom to build the world
and his understanding to stretch out the skies.

16 When he thunders, the waters in the skies roar.
He makes clouds rise in the sky all over the earth.

He sends lightning with the rain
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

17 "People are so stupid and know so little.
Goldsmiths are made ashamed by their idols,

because those statues are only false gods.
They have no breath in them.

18 They are worth nothing; people make fun of them.
When they are judged, they will be destroyed.

19 But God, who is Jacob's Portion, is not like the idols.
He made everything,

and he chose Israel to be his special people.
The LORD All-Powerful is his name.

20 "You are my war club,
my battle weapon.

I use you to smash nations.

I use you to destroy kingdoms.

21 I use you to smash horses and riders.
I use you to smash chariots and drivers.

22 I use you to smash men and women.
I use you to smash old people and young people.
I use you to smash young men and young women.

23 I use you to smash shepherds and flocks.
I use you to smash farmers and oxen.
I use you to smash governors and officers.

24 "But I will pay back Babylon and all the Babylonians for all the evil things they did to Jerusalem in your sight," says the LORD.
25 The LORD says,

"Babylon, you are a destroying mountain,
and I am against you.
You have destroyed the whole land.

I will put my hand out against you.
I will roll you off the cliffs,
and I will make you a burned-out mountain.

26 People will not find any rocks in Babylon big enough for cornerstones.
People will not take any rocks from Babylon to use for the foundation of a building,
because your city will be just a pile of ruins forever," says the LORD.

27 "Lift up a banner in the land!
Blow the trumpet among the nations!

Get the nations ready for battle against Babylon.
Call these kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz to fight against her.

Choose a commander to lead the army against Babylon.
Send so many horses that they are like a swarm of locusts.

28 Get the nations ready for battle against Babylon—
the kings of the Medes,
their governors and all their officers,
and all the countries they rule.

29 The land shakes and moves in pain,
because the LORD will do what he has planned to Babylon.

He will make Babylon an empty desert,
where no one will live.

30 Babylon's warriors have stopped fighting.
They stay in their protected cities.

Their strength is gone,
and they have become like frightened women.

Babylon's houses are burning.
The bars of her gates are broken.

31 One messenger follows another;
messenger follows messenger.

They announce to the king of Babylon
that his whole city has been captured.

32 The river crossings have been captured,
and the swamplands are burning.

All of Babylon's soldiers are terribly afraid."

33 This is what the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says:

“The city of Babylon is like a threshing floor,
where people crush the grain at harvest time.
The time to harvest Babylon is coming soon.”

34“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has defeated and destroyed us.
In the past he took our people away,
and we became like an empty jar.

He was like a giant snake that swallowed us.
He filled his stomach with our best things.
Then he spit us out.

35Babylon did terrible things to hurt us.
Now let those things happen to Babylon,”
say the people of Jerusalem.

“The people of Babylon killed our people.
Now let them be punished for what they did,” says Jerusalem.

36So this is what the LORD says:

“I will soon defend you, Judah,
and make sure that Babylon is punished.

I will dry up Babylon’s sea
and make her springs become dry.

37Babylon will become a pile of ruins,
a home for wild dogs.

People will be shocked by what happened there.
No one will live there anymore.

38Babylon’s people roar like young lions;
they growl like baby lions.

39 While they are stirred up,
I will give a feast for them
and make them drunk.

They will shout and laugh.
And they will sleep forever and never wake up!” says the LORD.

40 “I will take the people of Babylon to be killed.
They will be like lambs,
like sheep and goats waiting to be killed.

41 “How Babylon has been defeated!
The pride of the whole earth has been taken captive.

People from other nations are shocked at what happened to Babylon,
and the things they see make them afraid.

42 The sea has risen over Babylon;
its roaring waves cover her.

43 Babylon’s towns are ruined and empty.
It has become a dry, desert land,

a land where no one lives.
People do not even travel through Babylon.

44 I will punish the god Bel in Babylon.
I will make him spit out what he has swallowed.

Nations will no longer come to Babylon;
even the wall around the city will fall.

45 “Come out of Babylon, my people!
Run for your lives!
Run from the LORD’s great anger.

46 Don’t lose courage;
rumors will spread through the land, but don’t be afraid.

One rumor comes this year, and another comes the next year.
There will be rumors of terrible fighting in the country,
of rulers fighting against rulers.

47 The time will surely come
when I will punish the idols of Babylon,

and the whole land will be disgraced.
There will be many dead people lying all around.

48 Then heaven and earth and all that is in them
will shout for joy about Babylon.

They will shout because the army comes from the north
to destroy Babylon,” says the LORD.

49 “Babylon must fall, because she killed people from Israel.
She killed people from everywhere on earth.

50 You who have escaped being killed with swords,
leave Babylon! Don’t wait!
Remember the LORD in the faraway land
and think about Jerusalem.”

51 “We people of Judah are disgraced,
because we have been insulted.
We have been shamed,

because strangers have gone into
the holy places of the LORD’s Temple!”

52 So the LORD says, “The time is coming soon
when I will punish the idols of Babylon.

Wounded people will cry with pain
all over that land.

53 Even if Babylon grows until she touches the sky,
and even if she makes her highest cities strong,
I will send people to destroy her," says the LORD.

54 "Sounds of people crying are heard in Babylon.
Sounds of people destroying things
are heard in the land of the Babylonians.

55 The LORD is destroying Babylon
and making the loud sounds of the city become silent.

Enemies come roaring in like ocean waves.
The roar of their voices is heard all around.

56 The army has come to destroy Babylon.
Her soldiers have been captured,
and their bows are broken,

because the LORD is a God who punishes people for the evil they do.
He gives them the full punishment they deserve.

57 I will make Babylon's rulers and wise men drunk,
and her governors, officers, and soldiers, too.

Then they will sleep forever and never wake up," says the King,
whose name is the LORD All-Powerful.

58 This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:

"Babylon's thick wall will be completely pulled down
and her high gates burned.

The people will work hard, but it won't help;

their work will only become fuel for the flames!”

## *A Message to Babylon*

59This is the message that Jeremiah the prophet gave to the officer Seraiah son of Neriah, who was the son of Mahseiah. Seraiah went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year Zedekiah was king of Judah. His duty was to arrange the king’s food and housing on the trip. 60Jeremiah had written on a scroll all the terrible things that would happen to Babylon, all these words about Babylon. 61Jeremiah said to Seraiah, “As soon as you come to Babylon, be sure to read this message so all the people can hear you. 62Then say, ‘LORD, you have said that you will destroy this place so that no people or animals will live in it. It will be an empty ruin forever.’ 63After you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates River. 64Then say, ‘In the same way Babylon will sink and will not rise again because of the terrible things I will make happen here. Her people will fall.’”

The words of Jeremiah end here.

## *The Fall of Jerusalem*

52 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother’s name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah,[n] and she was from Libnah. 2Zedekiah did what the LORD said was wrong, just as Jehoiakim had done. 3All this happened in Jerusalem and Judah because the LORD was angry with them. Finally, he threw them out of his presence.

Zedekiah turned against the king of Babylon. 4Then Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. They made a camp around the city and built devices all around the city walls to attack it. This happened on Zedekiah’s ninth year, tenth month, and tenth day as king. 5And the city was under attack until Zedekiah’s eleventh year as king.

6By the ninth day of the fourth month, the hunger was terrible in the city; there was no food for the people to eat. 7Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army of Judah ran away at night. They left the city through the gate between the two walls by the king’s garden. Even though the Babylonians were surrounding the city, Zedekiah and his men headed toward the Jordan Valley.

8But the Babylonian army chased King Zedekiah and caught him in the plains of Jericho. All of his army was scattered from him. 9So the Babylonians captured Zedekiah and took him to the king of Babylon at the town of Riblah in the land of Hamath.

There he passed sentence on Zedekiah. [10]At Riblah the king of Babylon killed Zedekiah's sons as he watched. The king also killed all the officers of Judah. [11]Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and put bronze chains on him, and took him to Babylon. And the king kept Zedekiah in prison there until the day he died.

[12]Nebuzaradan, commander of the king's special guards and servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem on the tenth day of the fifth month. This was in Nebuchadnezzar's nineteenth year as king of Babylon. [13]Nebuzaradan set fire to the Temple of the LORD, the palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every important building was burned. [14]The whole Babylonian army, led by the commander of the king's special guards, broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. [15]Nebuzaradan, the commander of the king's special guards, took captive some of the poorest people, those who were left in Jerusalem, those who had surrendered to the king of Babylon, and the skilled craftsmen who were left in Jerusalem. [16]But Nebuzaradan left behind some of the poorest people of the land to take care of the vineyards and fields.

[17]The Babylonians broke into pieces the bronze pillars, the bronze stands, and the large bronze bowl, called the Sea, which were in the Temple of the LORD. Then they carried all the bronze pieces to Babylon. [18]They also took the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, bowls, dishes, and all the bronze objects used to serve in the Temple. [19]The commander of the king's special guards took away bowls, pans for carrying hot coals, large bowls, pots, lampstands, pans, and bowls used for drink offerings. He took everything that was made of pure gold or silver.

[20]There was so much bronze that it could not be weighed: two pillars, the large bronze bowl called the Sea with the twelve bronze bulls under it, and the movable stands, which King Solomon had made for the Temple of the LORD.

[21]Each of the pillars was about twenty-seven feet high, eighteen feet around, and hollow inside. The wall of each pillar was three inches thick. [22]The bronze capital on top of the one pillar was about seven and one-half feet high. It was decorated with a net design and bronze pomegranates all around it. The other pillar also had pomegranates and was like the first pillar. [23]There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides of the pillars. There was a total of a hundred pomegranates above the net design.

[24]The commander of the king's special guards took as prisoners Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank, and the three doorkeepers. [25]He also took from the city the officer in charge of the soldiers, seven people who advised the king, the royal secretary who selected people for the army, and sixty other men from Judah who were in the city when it

fell. [26]Nebuzaradan, the commander, took these people and brought them to the king of Babylon at the town of Riblah. [27]There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them killed.

So the people of Judah were led away from their country as captives. [28]This is the number of the people Nebuchadnezzar took away as captives: in the seventh year, 3,023 Jews; [29]in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year, 832 people from Jerusalem; [30]in Nebuchadnezzar's twenty-third year, Nebuzaradan, commander of the king's special guards, took 745 Jews as captives.

In all 4,600 people were taken captive.

### *Jehoiachin Is Set Free*

[31]Jehoiachin king of Judah was in prison in Babylon for thirty-seven years. The year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon he let Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison. He set Jehoiachin free on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month. [32]Evil-Merodach spoke kindly to Jehoiachin and gave him a seat of honor above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. [33]So Jehoiachin put away his prison clothes, and for the rest of his life, he ate at the king's table. [34]Every day the king of Babylon gave Jehoiachin an allowance. This lasted as long as he lived, until the day Jehoiachin died.

## Psalm 119:129–136

[129]Your rules are wonderful.
That is why I keep them.

[130]Learning your words gives wisdom
and understanding for the foolish.

[131]I am nearly out of breath.
I really want to learn your commands.

[132]Look at me and have mercy on me
as you do for those who love you.

133 Guide my steps as you promised;
don’t let any sin control me.

134 Save me from harmful people
so I can obey your orders.

135 Show your kindness to me, your servant.
Teach me your demands.

136 Tears stream from my eyes,
because people do not obey your teachings.

## Proverbs 28:7–8

7 Children who obey what they have been taught are wise,
but friends of troublemakers disgrace their parents.

8 Some people get rich by overcharging others,
but their wealth will be given to those who are kind to the poor.

## Titus 2:1–15

### *Following the True Teaching*

2 But you must tell everyone what to do to follow the true teaching. 2 Teach older men to be self-controlled, serious, wise, strong in faith, in love, and in patience.

3 In the same way, teach older women to be holy in their behavior, not speaking against others or enslaved to too much wine, but teaching what is good. 4 Then they can teach the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be wise and pure, to be good workers at home, to be kind, and to yield to their husbands. Then no one will be able to criticize the teaching God gave us.

6 In the same way, encourage young men to be wise. 7 In every

way be an example of doing good deeds. When you teach, do it with honesty and seriousness. [8]Speak the truth so that you cannot be criticized. Then those who are against you will be ashamed because there is nothing bad to say about us.

[9]Slaves should yield to their own masters at all times, trying to please them and not arguing with them. [10]They should not steal from them but should show their masters they can be fully trusted so that in everything they do they will make the teaching of God our Savior attractive.

[11]That is the way we should live, because God's grace that can save everyone has come. [12]It teaches us not to live against God nor to do the evil things the world wants to do. Instead, that grace teaches us to live in the present age in a wise and right way and in a way that shows we serve God. [13]We should live like that while we wait for our great hope and the coming of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. [14]He gave himself for us so he might pay the price to free us from all evil and to make us pure people who belong only to him—people who are always wanting to do good deeds.

[15]Say these things and encourage the people and tell them what is wrong in their lives, with all authority. Do not let anyone treat you as if you were unimportant.

# November 3

## Call It Grace

*Being made right with God by his grace, we could have the hope of receiving the life that never ends.*

Titus 3:7

You may be decent. You may pay taxes and kiss your kids and sleep with a clean conscience. But apart from Christ you aren't holy. So how can you go to heaven? Only believe. Accept the work already done, the work of Jesus on the cross.

Accept the goodness of Jesus Christ. Abandon your own works and accept his. Abandon your own decency and accept his. Stand before God in his name, not yours.

It's that easy? There was nothing easy about it at all. The cross was heavy, the blood was real, and the price was extravagant. It would have bankrupted you or me, so he paid it for us. Call it simple. Call it a gift. But don't call it easy.

Call it what it is. Call it grace.

from *A Gentle Thunder*

### Lamentations 1:1—2:22

#### *Jerusalem Cries over Her Loss*

1 Jerusalem once was full of people, but now the city is empty.

Jerusalem once was a great city among the nations,
but now she[n] is like a widow.

She was like a queen of all the other cities,
but now she is a slave.

[2]She cries loudly at night,
and tears are on her cheeks.

There is no one to comfort her;
all who loved her are gone.

All her friends have turned against her
and are now her enemies.

[3]Judah has gone into captivity
where she suffers and works hard.

She lives among other nations,
but she has found no rest.

Those who chased her caught her
when she was in trouble.

[4]The roads to Jerusalem are sad,
because no one comes for the feasts.

No one passes through her gates.
Her priests groan,

her young women are suffering,
and Jerusalem suffers terribly.

[5]Her foes are now her masters.
Her enemies enjoy the wealth they have taken.

The LORD is punishing her
for her many sins.

Her children have gone away
as captives of the enemy.

[6]The beauty of Jerusalem
has gone away.

Her rulers are like deer
that cannot find food.

They are weak
and run from the hunters.

[7]Jerusalem is suffering and homeless.
She remembers all the good things
from the past.

But her people were defeated by the enemy,
and there was no one to help her.

When her enemies saw her,
they laughed to see her ruined.

[8]Jerusalem sinned terribly,
so she has become unclean.

Those who honored her now hate her,
because they have seen her nakedness.

She groans
and turns away.

[9]She made herself dirty by her sins
and did not think about what would happen to her.

Her defeat was surprising,
and no one could comfort her.

She says, “LORD, see how I suffer,
because the enemy has won.”

10 The enemy reached out and took
all her precious things.

She even saw foreigners
enter her Temple.

The LORD had commanded foreigners
never to enter the meeting place of his people.

11 All of Jerusalem's people groan,
looking for bread.

They are trading their precious things for food
so they can stay alive.

The city says, "Look, LORD, and see.
I am hated."

12 Jerusalem says, "You who pass by on the road don't seem to care.
Come, look at me and see:

Is there any pain like mine?
Is there any pain like that he has caused me?

The LORD has punished me
on the day of his great anger.

13 "He sent fire from above
that went down into my bones.

He stretched out a net for my feet
and turned me back.

He made me so sad and lonely
that I am weak all day.

14 “He has noticed my sins;
they are tied together by his hands;

they hang around my neck.
He has turned my strength into weakness.

The LORD has handed me over
to those who are stronger than I.

15 “The LORD has rejected
all my mighty men inside my walls.

He brought an army against me
to destroy my young men.

As if in a winepress, the LORD has crushed
the capital city of Judah.

16 “I cry about these things;
my eyes overflow with tears.

There is no one near to comfort me,
no one who can give me strength again.

My children are left sad and lonely,
because the enemy has won.”

17 Jerusalem reaches out her hands,
but there is no one to comfort her.

The LORD commanded the people of Jacob
to be surrounded by their enemies.

Jerusalem is now unclean
like those around her.

[18]Jerusalem says, “The LORD is right,
but I refused to obey him.

Listen, all you people,
and look at my pain.

My young women and men
have gone into captivity.

[19]“I called out to my friends,
but they turned against me.

My priests and my elders
have died in the city

while looking for food
to stay alive.

[20]“Look at me, LORD. I am upset
and greatly troubled.

My heart is troubled,
because I have been so stubborn.

Out in the streets, the sword kills;
inside the houses, death destroys.

[21]“People have heard my groaning,
and there is no one to comfort me.

All my enemies have heard of my trouble,
and they are happy you have done this to me.

Now bring that day you have announced
so that my enemies will be like me.

22 “Look at all their evil.
Do to them what you have done to me
because of all my sins.

I groan over and over again,
and I am afraid.”

## *The Lord Destroyed Jerusalem*

2 Look how the LORD in his angerhas brought Jerusalem to shame.

He has thrown down the greatness of Israel
from the sky to the earth;

he did not remember the Temple, his footstool,
on the day of his anger.

2 The LORD swallowed up without mercy
all the houses of the people of Jacob;

in his anger he pulled down
the strong places of Judah.

He threw her kingdom and its rulers
down to the ground in dishonor.

3 In his anger he has removed
all the strength of Israel;

he took away his power from Israel
when the enemy came.

He burned against the people of Jacob like a flaming fire
that burns up everything around it.

[4]Like an enemy, he prepared to shoot his bow,
and his hand was against us.

Like an enemy, he killed
all the good-looking people;

he poured out his anger like fire
on the tents of Jerusalem.

[5]The LORD was like an enemy;
he swallowed up Israel.

He swallowed up all her palaces
and destroyed all her strongholds.

He has caused more moaning and groaning
for Judah.

[6]He cut down his Temple like a garden;
he destroyed the meeting place.

The LORD has made Jerusalem forget
the set feasts and Sabbath days.

He has rejected the king and the priest
in his great anger.

[7]The LORD has rejected his altar
and abandoned his Temple.

He has handed over to the enemy
the walls of Jerusalem's palaces.

Their uproar in the LORD's Temple
was like that of a feast day.

[8]The LORD planned to destroy
the wall around Jerusalem.

He measured the wall
and did not stop himself from destroying it.

He made the walls and defenses sad;
together they have fallen.

[9]Jerusalem's gates have fallen to the ground;
he destroyed and smashed the bars of the gates.

Her king and her princes are among the nations.
The teaching of the LORD has stopped,

and the prophets do not have
visions from the LORD.

[10]The elders of Jerusalem
sit on the ground in silence.

They throw dust on their heads
and put on rough cloth to show their sadness.

The young women of Jerusalem
bow their heads to the ground in sorrow.

[11]My eyes have no more tears,
and I am sick to my stomach.

I feel empty inside,
because my people have been destroyed.

Children and babies are fainting
in the streets of the city.

[12]They ask their mothers,
“Where is the grain and wine?”

They faint like wounded soldiers
in the streets of the city
and die in their mothers’ arms.

[13]What can I say about you, Jerusalem?
What can I compare you to?

What can I say you are like?
How can I comfort you, Jerusalem?

Your ruin is as deep as the sea.
No one can heal you.

[14]Your prophets saw visions,
but they were false and worth nothing.

They did not point out your sins
to keep you from being captured.

They preached what was false
and led you wrongly.

[15]All who pass by on the road
clap their hands at you;

they make fun of Jerusalem
and shake their heads.

They ask, “Is this the city that people called
the most beautiful city,
the happiest place on earth?”

[16]All your enemies open their mouths
to speak against you.

They make fun and grind their teeth in anger.
They say, “We have swallowed you up.

This is the day we were waiting for!
We have finally seen it happen.”

17 The LORD has done what he planned;
he has kept his word
that he commanded long ago.

He has destroyed without mercy,
and he has let your enemies laugh at you.
He has strengthened your enemies.

18 The people cry out to the LORD.
Wall of Jerusalem,

let your tears flow
like a river day and night.

Do not stop
or let your eyes rest.

19 Get up, cry out in the night,
even as the night begins.

Pour out your heart like water
in prayer to the Lord.

Lift up your hands in prayer to him
for the life of your children

who are fainting with hunger
on every street corner.

20 Jerusalem says: “Look, LORD, and see
to whom you have done this.

Women eat their own babies,
the children they have cared for.

Priests and prophets are killed
in the Temple of the Lord.

21 “People young and old
lie outside on the ground.

My young women and young men
have been killed by the sword.

You killed them on the day of your anger;
you killed them without mercy.

22 “You invited terrors to come against me on every side,
as if you were inviting them to a feast.

No one escaped or remained alive
on the day of the LORD’s anger.

My enemy has killed
those I cared for and brought up.”

## Psalm 119:137–144

137 LORD, you do what is right,
and your laws are fair.

138 The rules you commanded are right
and completely trustworthy.

139 I am so upset I am worn out,
because my enemies have forgotten your words.

140 Your promises are proven,
so I, your servant, love them.

141 I am unimportant and hated,
but I have not forgotten your orders.

142 Your goodness continues forever,
and your teachings are true.

143 I have had troubles and misery,
but I love your commands.

144 Your rules are always good.
Help me understand so I can live.

## Proverbs 28:9–10

9 If you refuse to obey what you have been taught,
your prayers will not be heard.

10 Those who lead good people to do wrong
will be ruined by their own evil,
but the innocent will be rewarded with good things.

## Titus 3:1–15

### *The Right Way to Live*

3 Remind the believers to yield to the authority of rulers and
government leaders, to obey them, to be ready to do good, 2 to
speak no evil about anyone, to live in peace, and to be gentle
and polite to all people.

3 In the past we also were foolish. We did not obey, we were
wrong, and we were slaves to many things our bodies wanted
and enjoyed. We spent our lives doing evil and being jealous.

People hated us, and we hated each other. [4]But when the kindness and love of God our Savior was shown, [5]he saved us because of his mercy. It was not because of good deeds we did to be right with him. He saved us through the washing that made us new people through the Holy Spirit. [6]God poured out richly upon us that Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Savior. [7]Being made right with God by his grace, we could have the hope of receiving the life that never ends.

[8]This teaching is true, and I want you to be sure the people understand these things. Then those who believe in God will be careful to use their lives for doing good. These things are good and will help everyone.

[9]But stay away from those who have foolish arguments and talk about useless family histories and argue and quarrel about the law. Those things are worth nothing and will not help anyone. [10]After a first and second warning, avoid someone who causes arguments. [11]You can know that such people are evil and sinful; their own sins prove them wrong.

## *Some Things to Remember*

[12]When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to stay there this winter. [13]Do all you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey so that they have everything they need. [14]Our people must learn to use their lives for doing good deeds to provide what is necessary so that their lives will not be useless.

[15]All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.

# November 4

## Words of Strength

*The love you have shown to God's people has refreshed them.*

Philemon 7

"when you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger" (Ephesians 4:29). Before you speak, ask: Will what I'm about to say help others become stronger? You have the ability, with your words, to make a person stronger. Your words are to their soul what a vitamin is to their body. If you had food and saw someone starving, would you not share it? If you had water and saw someone dying of thirst, would you not give it? Of course you would. Then won't you do the same for their hearts? Your words are food and water!

Do not withhold encouragement from the discouraged.

Do not keep affirmation from the beaten down!

Speak words that make people stronger. Believe in them as God has believed in you.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Lamentations 3:1—5:22

### *The Meaning of Suffering*

3 I am a man who has seen the sufferingthat comes from the
rod of the LORD's
anger.

2He led me
into darkness, not light.

3 He turned his hand against me
again and again, all day long.

4 He wore out my flesh and skin
and broke my bones.

5 He surrounded me with sadness
and attacked me with grief.

6 He made me sit in the dark,
like those who have been dead a long time.

7 He shut me in so I could not get out;
he put heavy chains on me.

8 I cry out and beg for help,
but he ignores my prayer.

9 He blocked my way with a stone wall
and led me in the wrong direction.

10 He is like a bear ready to attack me,
like a lion in hiding.

11 He led me the wrong way and let me stray
and left me without help.

12 He prepared to shoot his bow
and made me the target for his arrows.

13 He shot me in the kidneys
with the arrows from his bag.

14 I was a joke to all my people,
who make fun of me with songs all day long.

15 The LORD filled me with misery;
he made me drunk with suffering.

16 He broke my teeth with gravel
and trampled me into the dirt.

17 I have no more peace.
I have forgotten what happiness is.

18 I said, “My strength is gone,
and I have no hope in the LORD.”

19 LORD, remember my suffering and my misery,
my sorrow and trouble.

20 Please remember me
and think about me.

21 But I have hope
when I think of this:

22 The LORD’s love never ends;
his mercies never stop.

23 They are new every morning;
LORD, your loyalty is great.

24 I say to myself, “The LORD is mine,
so I hope in him.”

25 The LORD is good to those who hope in him,
to those who seek him.

26 It is good to wait quietly
for the LORD to save.

[27]It is good for someone to work hard
while he is young.

[28]He should sit alone and be quiet;
the LORD has given him hard work to do.

[29]He should bow down to the ground;
maybe there is still hope.

[30]He should let anyone slap his cheek;
he should be filled with shame.

[31]The LORD will not reject
his people forever.

[32]Although he brings sorrow,
he also has mercy and great love.

[33]He does not like to punish people
or make them sad.

[34]He sees if any prisoner of the earth
is crushed under his feet;

[35]he sees if someone is treated unfairly
before the Most High God;

[36]the Lord sees
if someone is cheated in his case in court.

[37]Nobody can speak and have it happen
unless the Lord commands it.

[38]Both bad and good things
come by the command of the Most High God.

39 No one should complain
when he is punished for his sins.

40 Let us examine and see what we have done
and then return to the LORD.

41 Let us lift up our hands and pray from our hearts
to God in heaven:

42 "We have sinned and turned against you,
and you have not forgiven us.

43 "You wrapped yourself in anger and chased us;
you killed us without mercy.

44 You wrapped yourself in a cloud,
and no prayer could get through.

45 You made us like scum and trash
among the other nations.

46 "All of our enemies
open their mouths and speak against us.

47 We have been frightened and fearful,
ruined and destroyed."

48 Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
because my people are destroyed.

49 My tears flow continually,
without stopping,

50 until the LORD looks down
and sees from heaven.

51 I am sad when I see
what has happened to all the women of my city.

52 Those who are my enemies for no reason
hunted me like a bird.

53 They tried to kill me in a pit;
they threw stones at me.

54 Water came up over my head,
and I said, “I am going to die.”

55 I called out to you, LORD,
from the bottom of the pit.

56 You heard me calling, “Do not close your ears
and ignore my gasps and shouts.”

57 You came near when I called to you;
you said, “Don’t be afraid.”

58 Lord, you have taken my case
and given me back my life.

59 LORD, you have seen how I have been wronged.
Now judge my case for me.

60 You have seen how my enemies took revenge on me
and made evil plans against me.

61 LORD, you have heard their insults
and all their evil plans against me.

62 The words and thoughts of my enemies
are against me all the time.

63 Look! In everything they do
they make fun of me with songs.

64 Pay them back, LORD,
for what they have done.

65 Make them stubborn,
and put your curse on them.

66 Chase them in anger, LORD,
and destroy them from under your heavens.

## *The Attack on Jerusalem*

4 See how the gold has lost its shine,
how the pure gold has dulled!

The stones of the Temple are scattered
at every street corner.

2 The precious people of Jerusalem
were more valuable than gold,

but now they are thought of as clay jars
made by the hands of a potter.

3 Even wild dogs give their milk
to feed their young,

but my people are cruel
like ostriches in the desert.

4 The babies are so thirsty
their tongues stick to the roofs of their mouths.

Children beg for bread,
but no one gives them any.

5 Those who once ate fine foods
are now starving in the streets.

People who grew up wearing nice clothes
now pick through trash piles.

6 My people have been punished
more than Sodom was.

Sodom was destroyed suddenly,
and no hands reached out to help her.

7 Our princes were purer than snow,
and whiter than milk.

Their bodies were redder than rubies;
they looked like sapphires.

8 But now they are blacker than coal,
and no one recognizes them in the streets.

Their skin hangs on their bones;
it is as dry as wood.

9 Those who were killed in the war were better off
than those killed by hunger.

They starve in pain and die,
because there is no food from the field.

10 With their own hands kind women
cook their own children.

They became food
when my people were destroyed.

11 The LORD turned loose all of his anger;
he poured out his strong anger.

He set fire to Jerusalem,
burning it down to the foundations.

12 Kings of the earth and people of the world
could not believe

that enemies and foes
could enter the gates of Jerusalem.

13 It happened because her prophets sinned
and her priests did evil.

They killed in the city
those who did what was right.

14 They wandered in the streets
as if they were blind.

They were dirty with blood,
so no one would touch their clothes.

15 “Go away! You are unclean,” people shouted at them.
“Get away! Get away! Don’t touch us!”

So they ran away and wandered.
Even the other nations said, “Don’t stay here.”

16 The LORD himself scattered them
and did not look after them anymore.

No one respects the priests
or honors the elders.

17 Also, our eyes grew tired,
looking for help that never came.

We kept watch from our towers
for a nation to save us.

18 Our enemies hunted us,
so we could not even walk in the streets.

Our end is near. Our time is up.
Our end has come.

19 Those who chased us
were faster than eagles in the sky.

They ran us into the mountains
and ambushed us in the desert.

20 The LORD's appointed king, who was our very breath,
was caught in their traps.

We had said about him, "We will be protected by him
among the nations."

21 Be happy and glad, people of Edom,
you who live in the land of Uz.

The cup of God's anger will come to you;
then you will get drunk and go naked.

22 Your punishment is complete, Jerusalem.
He will not send you into captivity again.

But the LORD will punish the sins of Edom;
he will uncover your evil.

## *A Prayer to the Lord*

5 Remember, LORD, what happened to us.
Look and see our disgrace.

2 Our land has been turned over to strangers;
our houses have been given to foreigners.

3 We are like orphans with no father;
our mothers are like widows.

4 We have to buy the water we drink;
we must pay for the firewood.

5 Those who chase after us want to catch us by the neck.
We are tired and find no rest.

6 We made an agreement with Egypt
and with Assyria to get enough food.

7 Our ancestors sinned against you, but they are gone;
now we suffer because of their sins.

8 Slaves have become our rulers,
and no one can save us from them.

9 We risk our lives to get our food;
we face death in the desert.

10 Our skin is hot like an oven;
we burn with starvation.

11 The enemy abused the women of Jerusalem
and the girls in the cities of Judah.

12 Princes were hung by the hands;
they did not respect our elders.

13 The young men ground grain at the mill,
and boys stumbled under loads of wood.

14 The elders no longer sit at the city gates;
the young men no longer sing.

15 We have no more joy in our hearts;
our dancing has turned to sadness.

16 The crown has fallen from our head.
How terrible it is because we sinned.

17 Because of this we are afraid,
and now our eyes are dim.

18 Mount Zion is empty,
and wild dogs wander around it.

19 But you rule forever, LORD.
You will be King from now on.

20 Why have you forgotten us for so long?
Have you left us forever?

21 Bring us back to you, LORD, and we will return.
Make our days as they were before,

22 or have you completely rejected us?
Are you so angry with us?

## Psalm 119:145–152

145 LORD, I call to you with all my heart.
Answer me, and I will keep your demands.

146 I call to you.
Save me so I can obey your rules.

147 I wake up early in the morning and cry out.
I hope in your word.

148 I stay awake all night
so I can think about your promises.

149 Listen to me because of your love;
LORD, give me life by your laws.

150 Those who love evil are near,
but they are far from your teachings.

151 But, LORD, you are also near,
and all your commands are true.

152 Long ago I learned from your rules
that you made them to continue forever.

## Proverbs 28:11

11 Rich people may think they are wise,
but the poor with understanding will prove them wrong.

# Philemon 1–25

[1]From Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and from Timothy, our brother.

To Philemon, our dear friend and worker with us; [2]to Apphia, our sister; to Archippus, a worker with us; and to the church that meets in your home:

[3]Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## *Philemon's Love and Faith*

[4]I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers, [5]because I hear about the love you have for all God's holy people and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus. [6]I pray that the faith you share may make you understand every blessing we have in Christ. [7]I have great joy and comfort, my brother, because the love you have shown to God's people has refreshed them.

## *Accept Onesimus as a Brother*

[8]So, in Christ, I could be bold and order you to do what is right. [9]But because I love you, I am pleading with you instead. I, Paul, an old man now and also a prisoner for Christ Jesus, [10]am pleading with you for my child Onesimus, who became my child while I was in prison. [11]In the past he was useless to you, but now he has become useful for both you and me.

[12]I am sending him back to you, and with him I am sending my own heart. [13]I wanted to keep him with me so that in your place he might help me while I am in prison for the Good News. [14]But I did not want to do anything without asking you first so that any good you do for me will be because you want to do it, not because I forced you. [15]Maybe Onesimus was separated from you for a short time so you could have him back forever— [16]no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a loved brother. I love him very much, but you will love him even more, both as a person and as a believer in the Lord.

[17]So if you consider me your partner, welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me. [18]If he has done anything wrong to you or if he owes you anything, charge that to me. [19]I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back, and I will say nothing about what you owe me for your own life. [20]So, my brother, I ask that you do this for me in the Lord: Refresh my heart in Christ. [21]I write this letter, knowing that you will do

what I ask you and even more.

22 One more thing—prepare a room for me in which to stay,
because I hope God will answer your prayers and I will be able
to come to you.

## *Final Greetings*

23 Epaphras, a prisoner with me for Christ Jesus, sends
greetings to you. 24 And also Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and
Luke, workers together with me, send greetings.

25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

# November 5

## Forgiveness Follows Failure

*In the past God spoke … many times and in many different ways. But now … God has spoken to us through his Son.*

Hebrews 1:1–2

God, motivated by love and directed by divinity, surprised everyone. He became a man. In an untouchable mystery, he disguised himself as a carpenter and lived in a dusty Judaean village. Determined to prove his love for his creation, he walked incognito through his own world. His callused hands touched wounds and his compassionate words touched hearts …

But as beautiful as this act of incarnation was, it was not the zenith. Like a master painter God reserved his masterpiece until the end. All the earlier acts of love had been leading to this one. The angels hushed and the heavens paused to witness the finale. God unveils the canvas and the ultimate act of creative compassion is revealed.

God on a cross. The Creator being sacrificed for the creation. God convincing man once and for all that forgiveness still follows failure.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

## Ezekiel 1:1—2:10

### *Ezekiel's Vision of Living Creatures*

1 It was the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month of
our captivity. I was by the Kebar River among the people who
had been carried away as captives. The sky opened, and I saw
visions of God.

2 It was the fifth day of the month of the fifth year that King
Jehoiachin had been a prisoner. 3 The LORD spoke his word to
Ezekiel son of Buzi in the land of the Babylonians by the Kebar
River. There he felt the power of the LORD.

4When I looked, I saw a stormy wind coming from the north.
There was a great cloud with a bright light around it and fire
flashing out of it. Something that looked like glowing metal was
in the center of the fire. 5Inside the cloud was what looked like
four living creatures, who were shaped like humans, 6but each
of them had four faces and four wings. 7Their legs were
straight. Their feet were like a calf's hoofs and sparkled like
polished bronze. 8The living creatures had human hands under
their wings on their four sides. All four of them had faces and
wings, 9and their wings touched each other. The living
creatures did not turn when they moved, but each went straight
ahead.
10Their faces looked like this: Each living creature had a
human face and the face of a lion on the right side and the face
of an ox on the left side. And each one also had the face of an
eagle. 11That was what their faces looked like. Their wings were
spread out above. Each had two wings that touched one of the
other living creatures and two wings that covered its body.
12Each went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, the
living creatures would also go, without turning. 13The living
creatures looked like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire
went back and forth among the living creatures. It was bright,
and lightning flashed from it. 14The living creatures ran back
and forth like bolts of lightning.
15Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on
the ground by each of the living creatures with its four faces.
16The wheels and the way they were made were like this: They
looked like sparkling chrysolite. All four of them looked the
same, like one wheel crossways inside another wheel. 17When
they moved, they went in any one of the four directions, without
turning as they went. 18The rims of the wheels were high and
frightening and were full of eyes all around.
19When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside
them. When the living creatures were lifted up from the ground,
the wheels also were lifted up. 20Wherever the spirit would go,
the living creatures would go. And the wheels were lifted up
beside them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in
the wheels. 21When the living creatures moved, the wheels
moved. When the living creatures stopped, the wheels stopped.
And when the living creatures were lifted from the ground, the
wheels were lifted beside them, because the spirit of the living
creatures was in the wheels.
22Now, over the heads of the living creatures was something
like a dome that sparkled like ice and was frightening. 23And
under the dome the wings of the living creatures were
stretched out straight toward one another. Each living creature
also had two wings covering its body. 24I heard the sound of
their wings, like the roaring sound of the sea, as they moved. It

was like the voice of God Almighty, a roaring sound like a noisy army. When the living creatures stopped, they lowered their wings.

25A voice came from above the dome over the heads of the living creatures. When the living creatures stopped, they lowered their wings. 26Now above the dome there was something that looked like a throne. It looked like a sapphire gem. And on the throne was a shape like a human. 27Then I noticed that from the waist up the shape looked like glowing metal with fire inside. From the waist down it looked like fire, and a bright light was all around. 28The surrounding glow looked like the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day. It seemed to look like the glory of the LORD. So when I saw it, I bowed facedown on the ground and heard a voice speaking.

### *The Lord Speaks to Ezekiel*

2 He said to me, “Human, stand up on your feet so I may speak with you.” 2While he spoke to me, the Spirit entered me and put me on my feet. Then I heard the LORD speaking to me.

3He said, “Human, I am sending you to the people of Israel. That nation has turned against me and broken away from me. They and their ancestors have sinned against me until this very day. 4I am sending you to people who are stubborn and who do not obey. You will say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says.’ 5They may listen, or they may not, since they are a people who have turned against me. But they will know that a prophet has been among them. 6You, human, don’t be afraid of the people or their words. Even though they may be like thorny branches and stickers all around you, and though you may feel like you live with poisonous insects, don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid of their words or their looks, because they are a people who turn against me. 7But speak my words to them. They may listen, or they may not, because they turn against me. 8But you, human, listen to what I say to you. Don’t turn against me as those people do. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.”

9Then I looked and saw a hand stretched out to me, and a scroll was in it. 10He opened the scroll in front of me. Funeral songs, sad writings, and words about troubles were written on the front and back.

## Psalm 119:153–160

153See my suffering and rescue me,

because I have not forgotten your teachings.

154 Argue my case and save me.
Let me live by your promises.

155 Wicked people are far from being saved,
because they do not want your demands.

156 LORD, you are very kind;
give me life by your laws.

157 Many enemies are after me,
but I have not rejected your rules.

158 I see those traitors, and I hate them,
because they do not obey what you say.

159 See how I love your orders.
LORD, give me life by your love.

160 Your words are true from the start,
and all your laws will be fair forever.

## Proverbs 28:12

12 When good people triumph, there is great happiness,
but when the wicked get control, everybody hides.

## Hebrews 1:1–14

### *God Spoke Through His Son*

1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets
many times and in many different ways. 2But now in these last
days God has spoken to us through his Son. God has chosen his
Son to own all things, and through him he made the world. 3The
Son reflects the glory of God and shows exactly what God is
like. He holds everything together with his powerful word.
When the Son made people clean from their sins, he sat down at
the right side of God, the Great One in heaven. 4The Son
became much greater than the angels, and God gave him a
name that is much greater than theirs.
5This is because God never said to any of the angels,

"You are my Son.
Today I have become your Father."

Psalm 2:7

Nor did God say of any angel,

"I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son."

2 Samuel 7:14

6And when God brings his firstborn Son into the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him."[n]

Psalm 97:7

7This is what God said about the angels:

"God makes his angels become like winds.
He makes his servants become like flames of fire."

Psalm 104:4

8But God said this about his Son:

"God, your throne will last forever and ever.
You will rule your kingdom with fairness.

9You love right and hate evil,
so God has chosen you from among your friends;
he has set you apart with much joy."

Psalm 45:6–7

10 God also says,

"LORD, in the beginning you made the earth,
and your hands made the skies.

11 They will be destroyed, but you will remain.
They will all wear out like clothes.

12 You will fold them like a coat.
And, like clothes, you will change them.

But you never change,
and your life will never end."

Psalm 102:25–27

13 And God never said this to an angel:

"Sit by me at my right side
until I put your enemies under your control."[n]

Psalm 110:1

14 All the angels are spirits who serve God and are sent to help those who will receive salvation.

# November 6

## He Knows How You Feel

*And now he can help those who are tempted, because he himself suffered and was tempted.*

Hebrews 2:18

Jesus was angry enough to purge the temple, hungry enough to eat raw grain, distraught enough to weep in public, fun loving enough to be called a drunkard, winsome enough to attract kids, weary enough to sleep in a storm-bounced boat, poor enough to sleep on dirt and borrow a coin for a sermon illustration, radical enough to get kicked out of town, responsible enough to care for his mother, tempted enough to know the smell of Satan, and fearful enough to sweat blood.

But why? Why would heaven's finest Son endure earth's toughest pain? So you would know that "he can help those who are tempted."

Whatever you are facing, he knows how you feel.

from *Next Door Savior*

## Ezekiel 3:1—4:17

3 Then the LORD said to me, "Human, eat what you find; eat this
scroll. Then go and speak to the people of Israel." 2So I opened
my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.
3He said to me, "Human, eat this scroll which I am giving
you, and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was as
sweet as honey in my mouth.
4Then he said to me, "Human, go to the people of Israel, and
speak my words to them. 5You are not being sent to people
whose speech you can't understand, whose language is difficult.
You are being sent to Israel. 6You are not being sent to many
nations whose speech you can't understand, whose language is
difficult, whose words you cannot understand. If I had sent you
to them, they would have listened to you. 7But the people of
Israel will not be willing to listen to you, because they are not

willing to listen to me. Yes, all the people of Israel are stubborn and will not obey. 8See, I now make you as stubborn and as hard as they are. 9I am making you as hard as a diamond, harder than stone. Don't be afraid of them or be frightened by them, though they are a people who turn against me."

10Also, he said to me, "Human, believe all the words I will speak to you, and listen carefully to them. 11Then go to the captives, your own people, and say to them, 'The Lord God says this.' Tell them this whether they listen or not."

12Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a loud rumbling sound behind me, saying, "Praise the glory of the LORD in heaven." 13I heard the wings of the living creatures touching each other and the sound of the wheels by them. It was a loud rumbling sound. 14So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away. I was unhappy and angry, and I felt the great power of the LORD. 15I came to the captives from Judah, who lived by the Kebar River at Tel Abib. I sat there seven days where these people lived, feeling shocked.

## *Israel's Warning*

16After seven days the LORD spoke his word to me again. He said, 17"Human, I now make you a watchman for Israel. Any time you hear a word from my mouth, warn them for me. 18When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' you must warn them so they may live. If you don't speak out to warn the wicked to stop their evil ways, they will die in their sin. But I will hold you responsible for their death. 19If you warn the wicked and they do not turn from their wickedness or their evil ways, they will die because of their sin. But you will have saved your life.

20"Again, those who do right may turn away from doing good and do evil. If I make something bad happen to them, they will die. Because you have not warned them, they will die because of their sin, and the good they did will not be remembered. But I will hold you responsible for their deaths. 21But if you have warned those good people not to sin, and they do not sin, they will surely live, because they believed the warning. And you will have saved your life."

22Then I felt the power of the LORD there. He said to me, "Get up and go out to the plain. There I will speak to you." 23So I got up and went out to the plain. I saw the glory of the LORD standing there, like the glory I saw by the Kebar River, and I bowed facedown on the ground.

24Then the Spirit entered me and made me stand on my feet. He spoke to me and said, "Go, shut yourself up in your house. 25As for you, human, the people will tie you up with ropes so that you will not be able to go out among them. 26Also, I will

make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so you will be silent. You will not be able to argue with the people, even though they turn against me. 27But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth, and you will say to them, 'The Lord God says this.' Those who will listen, let them listen. Those who refuse, let them refuse, because they are a people who turn against me.

## *The Map of Jerusalem*

4 "Now, human, get yourself a brick, put it in front of you, and draw a map of Jerusalem on it. 2Then surround it with an army. Build battle works against the city and a dirt road to the top of the city walls. Set up camps around it, and put heavy logs in place to break down the walls. 3Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up like an iron wall between you and the city. Turn your face toward the city as if to attack it and then attack. This is a sign to Israel.

4"Then lie down on your left side, and take the guilt of Israel on yourself. Their guilt will be on you for the number of days you lie on your left side. 5I have given you the same number of days as the years of the people's sin. So you will have the guilt of Israel's sin on you for three hundred ninety days.

6"After you have finished these three hundred ninety days, lie down a second time, on your right side. You will then have the guilt of Judah on you. I will give it to you for forty days, a day for each year of their sin. 7Then you will look toward Jerusalem, which is being attacked. With your arm bare, you will prophesy against Jerusalem. 8I will put ropes on you so you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have finished the days of your attack on Jerusalem.

9"Take wheat, barley, beans, small peas, and millet seeds, and put them in one bowl, and make them into bread for yourself. You will eat it the three hundred ninety days you lie on your side. 10You will eat eight ounces of food every day at set times. 11You will drink about two-thirds of a quart of water every day at set times. 12Eat your food as you would eat a barley cake, baking it over human dung where the people can see." 13Then the LORD said, "In the same way Israel will eat unclean food among the nations where I force them to go."

14But I said, "No, Lord God! I have never been made unclean. From the time I was young until now I've never eaten anything that died by itself or was torn by animals. Unclean meat has never entered my mouth."

15"Very well," he said. "Then I will give you cow's dung instead of human dung to use for your fire to bake your bread."

16He also said to me, "Human, I am going to cut off the supply of bread to Jerusalem. They will eat the bread that is measured out to them, and they will worry as they eat. They will

drink water that is measured out to them, and they will be in shock as they drink it. [17]This is because bread and water will be hard to find. The people will be shocked at the sight of each other, and they will become weak because of their sin.

## Psalm 119:161–168

[161]Leaders attack me for no reason,
but I fear your law in my heart.

[162]I am as happy over your promises
as if I had found a great treasure.

[163]I hate and despise lies,
but I love your teachings.

[164]Seven times a day I praise you
for your fair laws.

[165]Those who love your teachings will find true peace,
and nothing will defeat them.

[166]I am waiting for you to save me, LORD.
I will obey your commands.

[167]I obey your rules,
and I love them very much.

[168]I obey your orders and rules,
because you know everything I do.

## Proverbs 28:13

13 If you hide your sins, you will not succeed.
If you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy.

# Hebrews 2:1–18

## *Our Salvation Is Great*

2 So we must be more careful to follow what we were taught.
Then we will not stray away from the truth. 2 The teaching God
spoke through angels was shown to be true, and anyone who
did not follow it or obey it received the punishment that was
earned. 3 So surely we also will be punished if we ignore this
great salvation. The Lord himself first told about this salvation,
and those who heard him testified it was true. 4 God also
testified to the truth of the message by using wonders, great
signs, many kinds of miracles, and by giving people gifts
through the Holy Spirit, just as he wanted.

## *Christ Became like Humans*

5 God did not choose angels to be the rulers of the new world
that was coming, which is what we have been talking about. 6 It
is written in the Scriptures,

"Why are people even important to you?
Why do you take care of human beings?

7 You made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.[n]

8 You put all things under their control."

Psalm 8:4–6

When God put everything under their control, there was
nothing left that they did not rule. Still, we do not yet see them
ruling over everything. 9 But we see Jesus, who for a short time
was made lower than the angels. And now he is wearing a
crown of glory and honor because he suffered and died. And by
God's grace, he died for everyone.

10 God is the One who made all things, and all things are for
his glory. He wanted to have many children share his glory, so

he made the One who leads people to salvation perfect through suffering.

[11]Jesus, who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. [12]He says,

"Then, I will tell my brothers and sisters about you;
I will praise you in the public meeting."

Psalm 22:22

[13]He also says,

"I will trust in God."

Isaiah 8:17

And he also says,

"I am here, and with me are the children God has given me."

Isaiah 8:18

[14]Since these children are people with physical bodies, Jesus himself became like them. He did this so that, by dying, he could destroy the one who has the power of death—the devil— [15]and free those who were like slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. [16]Clearly, it is not angels that Jesus helps, but the people who are from Abraham.[n] [17]For this reason Jesus had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way so he could be their merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. Then Jesus could die in their place to take away their sins. [18]And now he can help those who are tempted, because he himself suffered and was tempted.

# November 7

# God's Passion and Plan

*Let your word help me understand.*

Psalm 119:169

The purpose of the Bible is simply to proclaim God's plan to save His children. It asserts that man is lost and needs to be saved. And it communicates the message that Jesus is the God in the flesh sent to save his children.

Though the Bible was written over sixteen centuries by at least forty authors, it has one central theme—salvation through faith in Christ. Begun by Moses in the lonely desert of Arabia and finished by John on the lonely Isle of Patmos, it is held together by a strong thread: God's passion and God's plan to save his children.

What a vital truth! Understanding the purpose of the Bible is like setting the compass in the right direction. Calibrate it correctly, and you'll journey safely. But fail to set it, and who knows where you'll end up.

from *"How to Study the Bible"*

## Ezekiel 5:1—6:14

### *Ezekiel Cuts His Hair*

5 "Now, human, take a sharp sword, and use it like a barber's
razor to shave your head and beard. Then take scales and weigh
and divide the hair. 2Burn one-third with fire in the middle of
the city when the days of the attack on Jerusalem are over. Then
take one-third and cut it up with the knife all around the city.
And scatter one-third to the wind. This is how I will chase them
with a sword. 3Also take a few of these hairs and tie them in the
folds of your clothes. 4Take a few more and throw them into the
fire and burn them up. From there a fire will spread to all the
people of Israel.

5 “This is what the Lord God says: This is Jerusalem. I have put
her at the center of the nations with countries all around her.
6 But she has refused to obey my laws and has been more evil
than the nations. She has refused to obey my rules, even more
than nations around her. The people of Jerusalem have rejected
my laws and have not lived by my rules.
7 “So this is what the Lord God says: You have caused more
trouble than the nations around you. You have not followed my
rules or obeyed my laws. You have not even obeyed the laws of
the nations around you.
8 “So this is what the Lord God says: I myself am against you,
and I will punish you as the nations watch. 9 I will do things
among you that I have not done before and that I will never do
anything like again, because you do the things I hate. 10 So
parents among you will eat their children, and children will eat
their parents. I will punish you and will scatter to the winds all
who are left alive. 11 So the Lord God says: You have made my
Temple unclean with all your evil idols and the hateful things
you do. Because of this, as surely as I live, I will cut you off. I
will have no pity, and I will show no mercy. 12 A third of you will
die by disease or be destroyed by hunger inside your walls. A
third will fall dead by the sword outside your walls. And a third
I will scatter in every direction as I chase them with a sword.
13 Then my anger will come to an end. I will use it up against
them, and then I will be satisfied. Then they will know that I,
the LORD, have spoken. After I have carried out my anger
against them, they will know how strongly I felt.
14 “I will make you a ruin and a shame among the nations
around you, to be seen by all who pass by. 15 Then the nations
around you will shame you and make fun of you. You will be a
warning and a terror to them. This will happen when I punish
you in my great anger. I, the LORD, have spoken. 16 I will send a
time of hunger to destroy you, and then I will make your hunger
get even worse, and I will cut off your supply of food. 17 I will
send a time of hunger and wild animals against you, and they
will kill your children. Disease and death will sweep through
your people, and I will bring the sword against you to kill you. I,
the LORD, have spoken.”

## *Prophecies Against the Mountains*

6 Again the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2 “Human, look
toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them.
3 Say, ‘Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord God.
The Lord God says this to the mountains, the hills, the ravines,
and the valleys: I will bring a sword against you, and I will
destroy your places of idol worship. 4 Your altars will be
destroyed and your incense altars broken down. Your people

will be killed in front of your idols. 5I will lay the dead bodies of
the Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones
around your altars. 6In all the places you live, cities will become
empty. The places of idol worship will be ruined; your altars will
become lonely ruins. Your idols will be broken and brought to
an end. Your incense altars will be cut down, and the things you
made will be wiped out. 7Your people will be killed and fall
among you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

8"'But I will leave some people alive; some will not be killed
by the nations when you are scattered among the foreign lands.
9Then those who have escaped will remember me, as they live
among the nations where they have been taken as captives.
They will remember how I was hurt because they were
unfaithful to me and turned away from me and desired to
worship their idols. They will hate themselves because of the
evil things they did that I hate. 10Then they will know that I am
the LORD. I did not bring this terrible thing on them for no
reason.

11"'This is what the Lord God says: Clap your hands, stamp
your feet, and groan because of all the hateful, evil things the
people of Israel have done. They will die by war, hunger, and
disease. 12The person who is far away will die by disease. The
one who is nearby will die in war. The person who is still alive
and has escaped these will die from hunger. So I will carry out
my anger on them. 13Their people will lie dead among their
idols around the altars, on every high hill, on all the mountain
tops, and under every green tree and leafy oak—all the places
where they offered sweet-smelling incense to their idols. Then
you will know that I am the LORD. 14I will use my power against
them to make the land empty and wasted from the desert to
Diblah, wherever they live. Then they will know that I am the
LORD.'"

## Psalm 119:169–176

169Hear my cry to you, LORD.
Let your word help me understand.

170Listen to my prayer;
save me as you promised.

171Let me speak your praise,

because you have taught me your demands.

172 Let me sing about your promises,
because all your commands are fair.

173 Give me your helping hand,
because I have chosen your commands.

174 I want you to save me, LORD.
I love your teachings.

175 Let me live so I can praise you,
and let your laws help me.

176 I have wandered like a lost sheep.
Look for your servant, because I have not forgotten your commands.

## Proverbs 28:14

14 Those who are always respectful will be happy,
but those who are stubborn will get into trouble.

## Hebrews 3:1–19

### *Jesus Is Greater than Moses*

3 So all of you holy brothers and sisters, who were called by God, think about Jesus, who was sent to us and is the high priest of our faith. 2 Jesus was faithful to God as Moses was in God's family. 3 Jesus has more honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4 Every house is built by someone, but the builder of everything is God himself. 5 Moses was faithful in God's family as a servant, and he

told what God would say in the future. [6]But Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house. And we are God's house if we confidently maintain our hope.

## *We Must Continue to Follow God*

[7]So it is as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today listen to what he says.

[8]Do not be stubborn as in the past
when you turned against God,

when you tested God in the desert.

[9]There your ancestors tried me and tested me
and saw the things I did for forty years.

[10]I was angry with them.
I said, 'They are not loyal to me
and have not understood my ways.'

[11]I was angry and made a promise,
'They will never enter my rest.'"[n]

Psalm 95:7–11

[12]So brothers and sisters, be careful that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart that will turn you away from the living God. [13]But encourage each other every day while it is "today."[n] Help each other so none of you will become hardened because sin has tricked you. [14]We all share in Christ if we keep till the end the sure faith we had in the beginning. [15]This is what the Scripture says:

"Today listen to what he says.
Do not be stubborn as in the past
when you turned against God."

Psalm 95:7–8

[16]Who heard God's voice and was against him? It was all those

people Moses led out of Egypt. [17]And with whom was God angry for forty years? He was angry with those who sinned, who died in the desert. [18]And to whom was God talking when he promised that they would never enter his rest? He was talking to those who did not obey him. [19]So we see they were not allowed to enter and have God's rest, because they did not believe.

# November 8

## A Treasure Map

*God's word is alive and working.*

Hebrews 4:12

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

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

The purpose of the Bible is to proclaim God's plan and passion to save his children. That is the reason this book has endured through the centuries … It is the treasure map that leads us to God's highest treasure, eternal life.

from *The Inspirational Study Bible*

### Ezekiel 7:1—8:18

### *Ezekiel Tells of the End*

7 Again the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, the
Lord God says this to the land of Israel: An end! The end has
come on the four corners of the land. 3Now the end has come
for you, and I will send my anger against you. I will judge you
for the way you have lived, and I will make you pay for all your
actions that I hate. 4I will have no pity on you; I will not hold
back punishment from you. Instead, I will make you pay for the
way you have lived and for your actions that I hate. Then you

will know that I am the LORD.

5“This is what the Lord God says: Disaster on top of disaster is
coming. 6The end has come! The end has come! It has stirred
itself up against you! Look! It has come! 7Disaster has come for
you who live in the land! The time has come; the day of
confusion is near. There will be no happy shouting on the
mountains. 8Soon I will pour out my anger against you; I will
carry out my anger against you. I will judge you for the way you
have lived and will make you pay for everything you have done
that I hate. 9I will show no pity, and I will not hold back
punishment. I will pay you back for the way you have lived and
the things you have done that I hate. Then you will know that I
am the LORD who punishes.

10“Look, the day is here. It has come. Disaster has come,
violence has grown, and there is more pride than ever.
11Violence has grown into a weapon for punishing wickedness.
None of the people will be left—none of that crowd, none of
their wealth, and nothing of value. 12The time has come; the day
has arrived. Don’t let the buyer be happy or the seller be sad,
because my burning anger is against the whole crowd. 13Sellers
will not return to the land they have sold as long as they live,
because the vision against all that crowd will not be changed.
Because of their sins, they will not save their lives. 14They have
blown the trumpet, and everything is ready. But no one is going
to the battle, because my anger is against all that crowd.

15“The sword is outside, and disease and hunger are inside.
Whoever is in the field will die by the sword. Hunger and
disease will destroy those in the city. 16Those who are left alive
and who escape will be on the mountains, moaning like doves of
the valleys about their own sin. 17All hands will hang weakly
with fear, and all knees will become weak as water. 18They will
put on rough cloth to show how sad they are. They will tremble
all over with fear. Their faces will show their shame, and all
their heads will be shaved. 19The people will throw their silver
into the streets, and their gold will be like trash. Their silver
and gold will not save them from the LORD’s anger. It will not
satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs, because it caused
them to fall into sin. 20They were proud of their beautiful
jewelry and used it to make their idols and their evil statues,
which I hate. So I will turn their wealth into trash. 21I will give
it to foreigners as loot from war and to the most evil people in
the world as treasure, and they will dishonor it. 22I will also turn
away from the people of Israel, and they will dishonor my
treasured place. Then robbers will enter and dishonor it.

23“Make chains for captives, because the land is full of
bloody crimes and the city is full of violence. 24So I will bring
the worst of the nations to take over the people’s houses. I will
also end the pride of the strong, and their holy places will be

dishonored. 25When the people are suffering greatly, they will look for peace, but there will be none. 26Disaster will come on top of disaster, and rumor will be added to rumor. Then they will try to get a vision from a prophet; the teachings of God from the priest and the advice from the elders will be lost. 27The king will cry greatly, the prince will give up hope, and the hands of the people who own land will shake with fear. I will punish them for the way they have lived. The way they have judged others is the way I will judge them. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

## *Ezekiel's Vision of Jerusalem*

8 It was the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month of our captivity. I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah in front of me. There I felt the power of the Lord God. 2I looked and saw something that looked like a human. From the waist down it looked like fire, and from the waist up it looked like bright glowing metal. 3It stretched out the shape of a hand and caught me by the hair on my head. The Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the sky. He took me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance to the north gate of the inner courtyard of the Temple. In the courtyard was the idol that caused God to be jealous. 4I saw the glory of the God of Israel there, as I had seen on the plain.

5Then he said to me, "Human, now look toward the north." So I looked up toward the north, and in the entrance north of the gate of the altar was the idol that caused God to be jealous.

6He said to me, "Human, do you see what they are doing? Do you see how many hateful things the people of Israel are doing here that drive me far away from my Temple? But you will see things more hateful than these."

7Then he brought me to the entry of the courtyard. When I looked, I saw a hole in the wall. 8He said to me, "Human, dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall and saw an entrance.

9Then he said to me, "Go in and see the hateful, evil things they are doing here." 10So I entered and looked, and I saw every kind of crawling thing and hateful beast and all the idols of the people of Israel, carved on the wall all around. 11Standing in front of these carvings and idols were seventy of the elders of Israel and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan. Each man had his pan for burning incense in his hand, and a sweet-smelling cloud of incense was rising.

12Then he said to me, "Human, have you seen what the elders of Israel are doing in the dark? Have you seen each man in the room of his own idol? They say, 'The LORD doesn't see us. The LORD has left the land.'" 13He also said to me, "You will see even more hateful things that they are doing."

14 Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of
the Temple of the LORD, where I saw women sitting and crying
for Tammuz.[n] 15 He said to me, “Do you see, human? You will see
things even more hateful than these.”
16 Then he brought me into the inner courtyard of the
Temple. There I saw about twenty-five men at the entrance to
the Temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar. With
their backs turned to the Temple of the LORD, they faced east
and were worshiping the sun in the east.
17 He said to me, “Do you see, human? Is it unimportant that
the people of Judah are doing the hateful things they have done
here? They have filled the land with violence and made me
continually angry. Look, they are insulting me every way they
can. 18 So I will act in anger. I will have no pity, nor will I show
mercy. Even if they shout in my ears, I won’t listen to them.”

## Psalm 120:1–7

### *A Prayer of Someone Far from Home*

**A psalm for going up to worship.**

120 When I was in trouble, I called to the LORD, and he
answered me.

2 LORD, save me from liars
and from those who plan evil.

3 You who plan evil, what will God do to you?
How will he punish you?

4 He will punish you with the sharp arrows of a warrior
and with burning coals of wood.

5 How terrible it is for me to live in the land of Meshech,
to live among the people of Kedar.

6 I have lived too long
with people who hate peace.

7 When I talk peace,
they want war.

## Proverbs 28:15

15 A wicked ruler is as dangerous to poor people
as a roaring lion or a charging bear.

## Hebrews 4:1–13

4 Now, since God has left us the promise that we may enter his
rest, let us be very careful so none of you will fail to enter. 2 The
Good News was preached to us just as it was to them. But the
teaching they heard did not help them, because they heard it
but did not accept it with faith.[n] 3 We who have believed are able
to enter and have God's rest. As God has said,

"I was angry and made a promise,
'They will never enter my rest.'"

Psalm 95:11

But God's work was finished from the time he made the world.
4 In the Scriptures he talked about the seventh day of the week:
"And on the seventh day God rested from all his works."[n] 5 And
again in the Scripture God said, "They will never enter my
rest."
6 It is still true that some people will enter God's rest, but
those who first heard the way to be saved did not enter, because
they did not obey. 7 So God planned another day, called "today."
He spoke about that day through David a long time later in the
same Scripture used before:

"Today listen to what he says.
Do not be stubborn."

Psalm 95:7–8

[8]We know that Joshua[n] did not lead the people into that rest,
because God spoke later about another day. [9]This shows that
the rest[n] for God's people is still coming. [10]Anyone who enters
God's rest will rest from his work as God did. [11]Let us try as
hard as we can to enter God's rest so that no one will fail by
following the example of those who refused to obey.

[12]God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a
double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul
and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones.
And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. [13]Nothing
in all the world can be hidden from God. Everything is clear and
lies open before him, and to him we must explain the way we
have lived.

# November 9

## Boldness Before the Throne

*Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace.*

Hebrews 4:16

Jesus tells us ... , "When you pray, you should pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name always be kept holy. May your kingdom come'" (Matthew 6:9–10). When you say, "May your kingdom come," you are inviting the Messiah himself to walk into your world. "Come, my King! Take your throne in our land. Be present in my heart. Be present in my office. Come into my marriage. Be Lord of my family, my fears, and my doubts." This is no feeble request; it's a bold appeal for God to occupy every corner of your life.

[And] who are you to ask such a thing? Who are you to ask God to take control of your world? You are his child, for heaven's sake! And so you ask boldly.

from *The Great House of God*

### Ezekiel 9:1—10:22

### *Vision of the Angels*

9 Then he shouted with a loud voice in my ears, "You who are
chosen to punish this city, come near with your weapon in your
hand." 2Then six men came from the direction of the upper
gate, which faces north, each with his powerful weapon in his
hand. Among them was a man dressed in linen with a writing
case at his side. The men went in and stood by the bronze altar.
3Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the
creatures with wings, where it had been, to the place in the
Temple where the door opened. He called to the man dressed in
linen who had the writing case at his side. 4He said to the man,
"Go through Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of the

people who groan and cry about all the hateful things being done among them."

5As I listened, he said to the other men, "Go through the city behind the man dressed in linen and kill. Don't pity anyone, and don't show mercy. 6Kill and destroy old men, young men and women, little children, and older women, but don't touch any who have the mark on them. Start at my Temple." So they started with the elders who were in front of the Temple.

7Then he said to the men, "Make the Temple unclean, and fill the courtyards with those who have been killed. Go out!" So the men went out and killed the people in the city. 8While the men were killing the people, I was left alone. I bowed facedown on the ground and I cried out, "Oh, Lord God! Will you destroy everyone left alive in Israel when you turn loose your anger on Jerusalem?"

9Then he said to me, "The sin of the people of Israel and Judah is very great. The land is filled with people who murder, and the city is full of people who are not fair. The people say, 'The LORD has left the land, and the LORD does not see.' 10But I will have no pity, nor will I show mercy. I will bring their evil back on their heads."

11Then the man dressed in linen with the writing case at his side reported, "I have done just as you commanded me."

## *The Coals of Fire*

10 Then I looked and saw in the dome above the heads of the living creatures something like a sapphire gem which looked like a throne. 2The LORD said to the man dressed in linen, "Go in between the wheels under the living creatures, fill your hands with coals of fire from between the living creatures, and scatter the coals over the city."

As I watched, the man with linen clothes went in. 3Now the living creatures were standing on the south side of the Temple when the man went in. And a cloud filled the inner courtyard. 4Then the glory of the LORD went up from the living creatures and stood over the door of the Temple. The Temple was filled with the cloud, and the courtyard was full of the brightness from the glory of the LORD. 5The sound of the wings of the living creatures was heard all the way to the outer courtyard. It was like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

6When the LORD commanded the man dressed in linen, "Take fire from between the wheels, from between the living creatures," the man went in and stood by a wheel. 7One living creature put out his hand to the fire that was among them, took some of the fire, and put it in the hands of the man dressed in linen. Then the man took the fire and went out.

### *The Wheels and the Creatures*

[8]Something that looked like a human hand could be seen
under the wings of the living creatures. [9]I saw the four wheels
by the living creatures, one wheel by each living creature. The
wheels looked like shining chrysolite. [10]All four wheels looked
alike: Each looked like a wheel crossways inside another wheel.
[11]When the wheels moved, they went in any of the directions
that the four living creatures faced. The wheels did not turn
about, and the living creatures did not turn their bodies as they
went. [12]All their bodies, their backs, their hands, their wings,
and the wheels were full of eyes all over. Each of the four living
creatures had a wheel. [13]I heard the wheels being called
“whirling wheels.” [14]Each living creature had four faces. The
first face was the face of a creature with wings. The second face
was a human face, the third was the face of a lion, and the
fourth was the face of an eagle.

[15]Then the living creatures flew up. They were the same
living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River. [16]When the
living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them. When
the living creatures lifted their wings to fly up from the ground,
the wheels did not leave their place beside them. [17]When the
living creatures stopped, the wheels stopped. When the
creatures went up, the wheels went up also, because the spirit
of the living creatures was in the wheels.

[18]Then the glory of the LORD left the door of the Temple and
stood over the living creatures. [19]As I watched, the living
creatures spread their wings and flew up from the ground, with
the wheels beside them. They stood where the east gate of the
Temple of the LORD opened, and the glory of the God of Israel
was over them.

[20]These were the living creatures I had seen under the God
of Israel by the Kebar River. I knew they were called cherubim.
[21]Each one had four faces and four wings, and under their
wings were things that looked like human hands. [22]Their faces
looked the same as the ones I had seen by the Kebar River. They
each went straight ahead.

## Psalm 121:1–8

### *The Lord Guards His People*

**A song for going up to worship.**

121 I look up to the hills, but where does my help come from?

2 My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not let you be defeated.
He who guards you never sleeps.

4 He who guards Israel
never rests or sleeps.

5 The LORD guards you.
The LORD is the shade that protects you from the sun.

6 The sun cannot hurt you during the day,
and the moon cannot hurt you at night.

7 The LORD will protect you from all dangers;
he will guard your life.

8 The LORD will guard you as you come and go,
both now and forever.

## Proverbs 28:16

16 A ruler without wisdom will be cruel,
but the one who refuses to take dishonest money will rule a long time.

## Hebrews 4:14—5:10

### *Jesus Is Our High Priest*

14 Since we have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God,
who has gone into heaven, let us hold on to the faith we have.
15 For our high priest is able to understand our weaknesses. He
was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin. 16 Let
us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne
where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to
help us when we need it.
5 Every high priest is chosen from among other people. He is
given the work of going before God for them to offer gifts and
sacrifices for sins. 2 Since he himself is weak, he is able to be
gentle with those who do not understand and who are doing
wrong things. 3 Because he is weak, the high priest must offer
sacrifices for his own sins and also for the sins of the people.
4 To be a high priest is an honor, but no one chooses himself
for this work. He must be called by God as Aaron[n] was. 5 So also
Christ did not choose himself to have the honor of being a high
priest, but God chose him. God said to him,

"You are my Son.
Today I have become your Father."

Psalm 2:7

6 And in another Scripture God says,

"You are a priest forever,
a priest like Melchizedek."[n]

Psalm 110:4

7 While Jesus lived on earth, he prayed to God and asked God
for help. He prayed with loud cries and tears to the One who
could save him from death, and his prayer was heard because
he trusted God. 8 Even though Jesus was the Son of God, he
learned obedience by what he suffered. 9 And because his
obedience was perfect, he was able to give eternal salvation to
all who obey him. 10 In this way God made Jesus a high priest, a
priest like Melchizedek.

# November 10

# Good Habits

*So let us go on to grown-up teaching. Let us not go back over the beginning lessons we learned about Christ.*

Hebrews 6:1

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

Pick a time in the not-too-distant past. A year or two ago. Now ask yourself a few questions. How does your prayer life today compare with then? How about your giving? Have both the amount and the joy increased? What about your church loyalty? Can you tell you've grown? And Bible study? Are you learning to learn? …

Don't make the mistake of the little boy. Don't stay too close to where you got in. It's risky resting on the edge.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## Ezekiel 11:1—12:28

### *Prophecies Against Evil Leaders*

11 The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the front gate of
the Temple of the LORD, which faces east. I saw twenty-five men
where the gate opens, among them Jaazaniah son of Azzur and
Pelatiah son of Benaiah, who were leaders of the people. 2Then
the LORD said to me, "Human, these are the men who plan evil
and give wicked advice in this city of Jerusalem. 3They say, 'It is
almost time for us to build houses. This city is like a cooking
pot, and we are like the best meat.' 4So prophesy against them,
prophesy, human."

5Then the Spirit of the LORD entered me and told me to say:

“This is what the LORD says: You have said these things, people
of Israel, and I know what you are thinking. 6You have killed
many people in this city, filling its streets with their bodies.
7“So this is what the Lord God says: Those people you have
killed and left in the middle of the city are like the best meat,
and this city is like the cooking pot. But I will force you out of
the city. 8You have feared the sword, but I will bring a sword
against you, says the Lord God. 9I will force you out of the city
and hand you over to strangers and punish you. 10You will die
by the sword. I will punish you at the border of Israel so you will
know that I am the LORD. 11This city will not be your cooking
pot, and you will not be the best meat in the middle of it. I will
punish you at the border of Israel. 12Then you will know that I
am the LORD. You did not live by my rules or obey my laws.
Instead, you did the same things as the nations around you.”
13As I prophesied, Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I
bowed facedown on the ground and shouted with a loud voice,
“Oh no, Lord God! Will you completely destroy the Israelites who
are left alive?”

## *Promise to Those Remaining*

14The LORD spoke his word to me, saying, 15“Human, the
people still in Jerusalem have spoken about your own relatives
and all the people of Israel who are captives with you, saying,
‘They are far from the LORD. This land has been given to us as
our property.’
16“So say, ‘This is what the Lord God says: I sent the people
far away among the nations and scattered them among the
countries. But for a little while I have become a Temple to them
in the countries where they have gone.’
17“So say: ‘This is what the Lord God says: I will gather you
from the nations and bring you together from the countries
where you have been scattered. Then I will give you back the
land of Israel.’
18“When they come to this land, they will remove all the evil
idols and all the hateful images. 19I will give them a desire to
respect me completely, and I will put inside them a new way of
thinking. I will take out the stubborn heart of stone from their
bodies, and I will give them an obedient heart of flesh. 20Then
they will live by my rules and obey my laws and keep them.
They will be my people, and I will be their God. 21But those who
want to serve their evil statues and hateful idols, I will pay back
for their evil ways, says the Lord God.”

## *Ezekiel’s Vision Ends*

22Then the living creatures lifted their wings with the wheels

beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.
23 The glory of the LORD went up from inside Jerusalem and
stopped on the mountain on the east side of the city. 24 The
Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the captives who had
been taken from Judah to Babylonia. This happened in a vision
given by the Spirit of God, and then the vision I had seen ended.
25 And I told the captives from Judah all the things the LORD had
shown me.

## *Ezekiel Moves Out*

12 Again the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2 "Human, you
are living among a people who refuse to obey. They have eyes to
see, but they do not see, and they have ears to hear, but they do
not hear, because they are a people who refuse to obey.

3 "So, human, pack your things as if you will be taken away
captive, and walk away like a captive in the daytime with the
people watching. Move from your place to another with the
people watching. Maybe they will understand, even though they
are a people who refuse to obey. 4 During the day when the
people are watching, bring out the things you would pack as
captive. At evening, with the people watching, leave your place
like those who are taken away as captives from their country.
5 Dig a hole through the wall while they watch, and bring your
things out through it. 6 Lift them onto your shoulders with the
people watching, and carry them out in the dark. Cover your
face so you cannot see the ground, because I have made you a
sign to the people of Israel."

7 I did these things as I was commanded. In the daytime I
brought what I had packed as if I were being taken away
captive. Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my
hands. I brought my things out in the dark and carried them on
my shoulders as the people watched.

8 Then in the morning the LORD spoke his word to me, saying:
9 "Human, didn't Israel, who refuses to obey, ask you, 'What are
you doing?'

10 "Say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says: This message
is about the king in Jerusalem and all the people of Israel who
live there.' 11 Say, 'I am a sign to you.'

"The same things I have done will be done to the people in
Jerusalem. They will be taken away from their country as
captives. 12 The king among them will put his things on his
shoulder in the dark and will leave. The people will dig a hole
through the wall to bring him out. He will cover his face so he
cannot see the ground. 13 But I will spread my net over him, and
he will be caught in my trap. Then I will bring him to Babylon in
the land of the Babylonians. He will not see that land, but he
will die there. 14 All who are around the king—his helpers and all

his army—I will scatter in every direction, and I will chase them with a sword.

15“They will know that I am the LORD when I scatter them among the nations and spread them among the countries. 16But I will save a few of them from the sword and from hunger and disease. Then they can tell about their hateful actions among the nations where they go. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

### *The Lesson of Ezekiel’s Shaking*

17The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 18“Human, tremble as you eat your food, and shake with fear as you drink your water. 19Then say to the people of the land: ‘This is what the Lord God says about the people who live in Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They will eat their food with fear and drink their water in shock, because their land will be stripped bare because of the violence of the people who live in it. 20The cities where people live will become ruins, and the land will become empty. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”

### *The Visions Will Come True*

21The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 22“Human, what is this saying you have in the land of Israel: ‘The days go by and every vision comes to nothing’? 23So say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says: I will make them stop saying this, and nobody in Israel will use this saying anymore.’ But tell them, ‘The time is near when every vision will come true. 24There will be no more false visions or pleasing prophecies inside the nation of Israel, 25but I, the LORD, will speak. What I say will be done, and it will not be delayed. You refuse to obey, but in your time I will say the word and do it, says the Lord God.’”

26The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 27“Human, the people of Israel are saying, ‘The vision that Ezekiel sees is for a time many years from now. He is prophesying about times far away.’

28“So say to them: ‘The Lord God says this: None of my words will be delayed anymore. What I have said will be done, says the Lord God.’”

## Psalm 122:1–5

### *Happy People in Jerusalem*

**A song for going up to worship. Of David.**

122 I was happy when they said to me, “Let’s go to the
Temple of the LORD.”

2Jerusalem, we are standing
at your gates.

3Jerusalem is built as a city
with the buildings close together.

4The tribes go up there,
the tribes who belong to the LORD.

It is the rule in Israel
to praise the LORD at Jerusalem.

5There the descendants of David
set their thrones to judge the people.

## Proverbs 28:17–18

17Don’t help those who are guilty of murder;
let them run until they die.

18Innocent people will be kept safe,
but those who are dishonest will suddenly be ruined.

## Hebrews 5:11—6:20

### *Warning Against Falling Away*

11We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain
because you are so slow to understand. 12By now you should be
teachers, but you need someone to teach you again the first
lessons of God's message. You still need the teaching that is like
milk. You are not ready for solid food. 13Anyone who lives on
milk is still a baby and knows nothing about right teaching.
14But solid food is for those who are grown up. They are mature
enough to know the difference between good and evil.
6 So let us go on to grown-up teaching. Let us not go back over
the beginning lessons we learned about Christ. We should not
again start teaching about faith in God and about turning away
from those acts that lead to death. 2We should not return to the
teaching about baptisms,[n] about laying on of hands,[n] about the
raising of the dead and eternal judgment. 3And we will go on to
grown-up teaching if God allows.
4Some people cannot be brought back again to a changed
life. They were once in God's light, and enjoyed heaven's gift,
and shared in the Holy Spirit. 5They found out how good God's
word is, and they received the powers of his new world. 6But
they fell away from Christ. It is impossible to bring them back
to a changed life again, because they are nailing the Son of God
to a cross again and are shaming him in front of others.
7Some people are like land that gets plenty of rain. The land
produces a good crop for those who work it, and it receives
God's blessings. 8Other people are like land that grows thorns
and weeds and is worthless. It is about to be cursed by God and
will be destroyed by fire.
9Dear friends, we are saying this to you, but we really expect
better things from you that will lead to your salvation. 10God is
fair; he will not forget the work you did and the love you
showed for him by helping his people. And he will remember
that you are still helping them. 11We want each of you to go on
with the same hard work all your lives so you will surely get
what you hope for. 12We do not want you to become lazy. Be like
those who through faith and patience will receive what God has
promised.
13God made a promise to Abraham. And as there is no one
greater than God, he used himself when he swore to Abraham,
14saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many
descendants."[n] 15Abraham waited patiently for this to happen,
and he received what God promised.
16People always use the name of someone greater than
themselves when they swear. The oath proves that what they
say is true, and this ends all arguing. 17God wanted to prove
that his promise was true to those who would get what he
promised. And he wanted them to understand clearly that his
purposes never change, so he made an oath. 18These two things

cannot change: God cannot lie when he makes a promise, and he cannot lie when he makes an oath. These things encourage us who came to God for safety. They give us strength to hold on to the hope we have been given. [19]We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and strong. It enters behind the curtain in the Most Holy Place in heaven, [20]where Jesus has gone ahead of us and for us. He has become the high priest forever, a priest like Melchizedek.[n]

# November 11

## Receive God's Hope

*But now a better hope has been given to us, and with this hope we can come near to God.*

Hebrews 7:19

Your toughest challenge is nothing more than bobby pins and rubber bands to God. *Bobby pins and rubber bands?* My older sister used to give them to me when I was a child. I would ride my tricycle up and down the sidewalk, pretending that the bobby pins were keys and my trike was a truck. But one day I lost the "keys." Crisis! What was I going to do? My search yielded nothing but tears and fear. But when I confessed my mistake to my sister, she just smiled. Being a decade older, she had a better perspective.

God has a better perspective as well. With all due respect, our severest struggles are, in his view, nothing worse than lost bobby pins and rubber bands. He is not confounded, confused, or discouraged.

Receive his hope, won't you? Receive it because you need it. Receive it so you can share it.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### Ezekiel 13:1—14:23

#### *Ezekiel Speaks Against False Prophets*

13 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, prophesy
against the prophets of Israel. Say to those who make up their
own prophecies: 'Listen to the word of the LORD. 3This is what
the Lord God says: How terrible it will be for the foolish prophets
who follow their own ideas and have not seen a vision from me!
4People of Israel, your prophets have been like wild dogs
hunting to kill and eat among ruins. 5Israel is like a house in
ruins, but you have not gone up into the broken places or

repaired the wall. So how can Israel hold back the enemy in the battle on the LORD's day of judging? 6Your prophets see false visions and prophesy lies. They say, "This is the message of the LORD," when the LORD has not sent them. But they still hope their words will come true. 7You said, "This is the message of the LORD," but that is a false vision. Your prophecies are lies, because I have not spoken.

8"'So this is what the Lord God says: Because you prophets spoke things that are false and saw visions that do not come true, I am against you, says the Lord God. 9I will punish the prophets who see false visions and prophesy lies. They will have no place among my people. Their names will not be written on the list of the people of Israel, and they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord God.

10"'It is because they lead my people the wrong way by saying, "Peace!" when there is no peace. When the people build a weak wall, the prophets cover it with whitewash to make it look strong. 11So tell those who cover a weak wall with whitewash that it will fall down. Rain will pour down, hailstones will fall, and a stormy wind will break the wall down. 12When the wall has fallen, people will ask you, "Where is the whitewash you used on the wall?"

13"'So this is what the Lord God says: I will break the wall with a stormy wind. In my anger rain will pour down, and hailstones will destroy the wall. 14I will tear down the wall on which you put whitewash. I will level it to the ground so that people will see the wall's foundation. And when the wall falls, you will be destroyed under it. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 15So I will carry out my anger on the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. Then I will tell you, "The wall is gone, and those who covered it with whitewash are gone. 16The prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem and who see visions of peace for the city, when there is no peace, will be gone, says the Lord God."'

## *False Women Prophets*

17"Now, human, look toward the women among your people who make up their own prophecies. Prophesy against them. 18Say, 'This is what the Lord God says: How terrible it will be for women who sew magic charms on their wrists and make veils of every length to trap people! You ruin the lives of my people but try to save your own lives. 19For handfuls of barley and pieces of bread, you have dishonored me among my people. By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have killed people who should not die, and you have kept alive those who should not live.

20"'So this is what the Lord God says: I am against your magic charms, by which you trap people as if they were birds. I will

tear those charms off your arms, and I will free those people you have trapped like birds. 21I will also tear off your veils and save my people from your hands. They will no longer be trapped by your power. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 22By your lies you have caused those who did right to be sad, when I did not make them sad. And you have encouraged the wicked not to stop being wicked, which would have saved their lives. 23So you will not see false visions or prophesy anymore, and I will save my people from your power so you will know that I am the LORD.'"

## *Stop Worshiping Idols*

14 Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me. 2Then the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 3"Human, these people want to worship idols. They put up evil things that cause people to sin. Should I allow them to ask me for help? 4So speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Lord God says: When any of the people of Israel want to worship idols and put up evil things that cause people to sin and then come to the prophet, I, the LORD, will answer them myself for worshiping idols. 5Then I will win back my people Israel, who have left me because of all their idols.'

6"So say to the people of Israel, 'This is what the Lord God says: Change your hearts and lives, and stop worshiping idols. Stop doing all the things I hate. 7Any of the Israelites or foreigners in Israel can separate themselves from me by wanting to worship idols or by putting up the things that cause people to sin. Then if they come to the prophet to ask me questions, I, the LORD, will answer them myself. 8I will reject them. I will make them a sign and an example, and I will separate them from my people. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

9"'But if the prophet is tricked into giving a prophecy, it is because I, the LORD, have tricked that prophet to speak. Then I will use my power against him and destroy him from among my people Israel. 10The prophet will be as guilty as the one who asks him for help; both will be responsible for their guilt. 11Then the nation of Israel will not leave me anymore or make themselves unclean anymore with all their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God, says the Lord God.'"

## *Jerusalem Will Not Be Spared*

12The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 13"Human, if the people of a country sin against me by not being loyal, I will use my power against them. I will cut off their supply of food and send a time of hunger, destroying both people and animals.

14 Even if three great men like Noah, Daniel, and Job were in
that country, their goodness could save only themselves, says
the Lord God.
15 "Or I might send wild animals into that land, leaving the
land empty and without children. Then no one would pass
through it because of the animals. 16 As surely as I live, says the
Lord God, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the land, they
could not save their own sons or daughters. They could save
only themselves, but that country would become empty.
17 "Or I might bring a war against that country. I might say,
'Let a war be fought in that land,' in this way destroying its
people and its animals. 18 As surely as I live, says the Lord God,
even if those three men were in the land, they could not save
their sons or daughters. They could save only themselves.
19 "Or I might cause a disease to spread in that country. I
might pour out my anger against it, destroying and killing
people and animals. 20 As surely as I live, says the Lord God, even
if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the land, they could not save
their son or daughter. They could save only themselves because
they did what was right.
21 "This is what the Lord God says: My plans for Jerusalem are
much worse! I will send my four terrible punishments against it
—war, hunger, wild animals, and disease—to destroy its people
and animals. 22 But some people will escape; some sons and
daughters will be led out. They will come out to you, and you
will see what happens to people who live as they did. Then you
will be comforted after the disasters I have brought against
Jerusalem, after all the things I have brought against it. 23 You
will be comforted when you see what happens to them for living
as they did, because you will know there was a good reason for
what I did to Jerusalem, says the Lord God."

## Psalm 122:6–9

6 Pray for peace in Jerusalem:
"May those who love her be safe.

7 May there be peace within her walls
and safety within her strong towers."

8 To help my relatives and friends,
I say, "Let Jerusalem have peace."

9For the sake of the Temple of the LORD our God,
I wish good for her.

## Proverbs 28:19

19Those who work their land will have plenty of food,
but the ones who chase empty dreams instead will end up poor.

## Hebrews 7:1–28

### *The Priest Melchizedek*

7 Melchizedek[n] was the king of Salem and a priest for God Most
High. He met Abraham when Abraham was coming back after
defeating the kings. When they met, Melchizedek blessed
Abraham, 2and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything he had
brought back from the battle. First, Melchizedek's name means
"king of goodness," and he is king of Salem, which means "king
of peace." 3No one knows who Melchizedek's father or mother
was,[n] where he came from, when he was born, or when he died.
Melchizedek is like the Son of God; he continues being a priest
forever.

4You can see how great Melchizedek was. Abraham, the
great father, gave him a tenth of everything that he won in
battle. 5Now the law says that those in the tribe of Levi who
become priests must collect a tenth from the people—their own
people—even though the priests and the people are from the
family of Abraham. 6Melchizedek was not from the tribe of Levi,
but he collected a tenth from Abraham. And he blessed
Abraham, the man who had God's promises. 7Now everyone
knows that the more important person blesses the less
important person. 8Priests receive a tenth, even though they are
only men who live and then die. But Melchizedek, who received
a tenth from Abraham, continues living, as the Scripture says.
9We might even say that Levi, who receives a tenth, also paid it
when Abraham paid Melchizedek a tenth. 10Levi was not yet
born, but he was in the body of his ancestor when Melchizedek
met Abraham.

11The people were given the law[n] concerning the system of

priests from the tribe of Levi, but they could not be made perfect through that system. So there was a need for another priest to come, a priest like Melchizedek, not Aaron. 12And when a different kind of priest comes, the law must be changed, too. 13We are saying these things about Christ, who belonged to a different tribe. No one from that tribe ever served as a priest at the altar. 14It is clear that our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses said nothing about priests belonging to that tribe.

## *Jesus Is like Melchizedek*

15And this becomes even more clear when we see that another priest comes who is like Melchizedek.[n] 16He was not made a priest by human rules and laws but through the power of his life, which continues forever. 17It is said about him,

"You are a priest forever,
a priest like Melchizedek."

Psalm 110:4

18The old rule is now set aside, because it was weak and useless. 19The law of Moses could not make anything perfect. But now a better hope has been given to us, and with this hope we can come near to God. 20It is important that God did this with an oath. Others became priests without an oath, 21but Christ became a priest with God's oath. God said:

"The Lord has made a promise
and will not change his mind.

'You are a priest forever.'"

Psalm 110:4

22This means that Jesus is the guarantee of a better agreement[n] from God to his people.

23When one of the other priests died, he could not continue being a priest. So there were many priests. 24But because Jesus lives forever, he will never stop serving as priest. 25So he is able always to save those who come to God through him because he always lives, asking God to help them.

26Jesus is the kind of high priest we need. He is holy, sinless, pure, not influenced by sinners, and he is raised above the heavens. 27He is not like the other priests who had to offer sacrifices every day, first for their own sins, and then for the

sins of the people. Christ offered his sacrifice only once and for all time when he offered himself. [28]The law chooses high priests who are people with weaknesses, but the word of God's oath came later than the law. It made God's Son to be the high priest, and that Son has been made perfect forever.

# November 12

## He Doesn’t Remember

*“I will forgive them for the wicked things they did, and I will not remember their sins anymore.”*

Hebrews 8:12

I was thanking the Father today for his mercy. I began listing the sins he’d forgiven. One by one I thanked God for forgiving my stumbles and tumbles. My motives were pure and my heart was thankful, but my understanding of God was wrong. It was when I used the word *remember* that it hit me.

“Remember the time I …” I was about to thank God for another act of mercy. But I stopped. Something was wrong. The word *remember* seemed displaced … “Does he remember?”

Then *I* remembered. I remembered his words. “And I will remember their sins no more.”

Wow! Now, *that* is a remarkable promise.

God doesn’t just forgive, he forgets … For all the things he does do, this is one thing he refuses to do. He refuses to keep a list of my wrongs.

from *God Came Near*

### Ezekiel 15:1—16:63

### *Story of the Vine*

15 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2“Human, is the wood
of the vine better than the wood of any tree in the forest? 3Can
wood be taken from the vine to make anything? Can you use it
to make a peg on which to hang something? 4If the vine is
thrown into the fire for fuel, and the fire burns up both ends
and starts to burn the middle, is it useful for anything? 5When
the vine was whole, it couldn’t be made into anything. When the
fire has burned it completely, it certainly cannot be made into
anything.”

6So this is what the Lord God says: “Out of all the trees in the
forest, I have given the wood of the vine as fuel for fire. In the
same way I have given up the people who live in Jerusalem 7and
will turn against them. Although they came through one fire,
fire will still destroy them. When I turn against them, you will
know that I am the LORD. 8So I will make the land empty,
because the people have not been loyal, says the Lord God.”

## *The Lord’s Kindness to Jerusalem*

16 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2“Human, tell
Jerusalem about her hateful actions. 3Say, ‘This is what the Lord
God says to Jerusalem: Your beginnings and your ancestors were
in the land of the Canaanites. Your father was an Amorite, and
your mother was a Hittite. 4On the day you were born, your
cord[n] was not cut. You were not washed with water to clean
you. You were not rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. 5No
one felt sorry enough for you to do any of these things for you.
No, you were thrown out into the open field, because you were
hated on the day you were born.

6“‘When I passed by and saw you kicking about in your
blood, I said to you, “Live!” 7I made you grow like a plant in the
field. You grew up and became tall and became like a beautiful
jewel. Your breasts formed, and your hair grew, but you were
naked and without clothes.

8“‘Later when I passed by you and looked at you, I saw that
you were old enough for love. So I spread my robe over you and
covered your nakedness. I also made a promise to you and
entered into an agreement with you so that you became mine,
says the Lord God.

9“‘Then I bathed you with water, washed all the blood off of
you, and put oil on you. 10I put beautiful clothes made with
needlework on you and put sandals of fine leather on your feet.
I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. 11I put
jewelry on you: bracelets on your arms, a necklace around your
neck, 12a ring in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a
beautiful crown on your head. 13So you wore gold and silver.
Your clothes were made of fine linen, silk, and beautiful
needlework. You ate fine flour, honey, and olive oil. You were
very beautiful and became a queen. 14Then you became famous
among the nations, because you were so beautiful. Your beauty
was perfect, because of the glory I gave you, says the Lord God.

## *Jerusalem Becomes a Prostitute*

15“‘But you trusted in your beauty. You became a prostitute,
because you were so famous. You had sexual relations with

anyone who passed by. 16You took some of your clothes and made your places of worship colorful. There you carried on your prostitution. These things should not happen; they should never occur. 17You also took your beautiful jewelry, made from my gold and silver I had given you, and you made for yourselves male idols so you could be a prostitute with them. 18Then you took your clothes with beautiful needlework and covered the idols. You gave my oil and incense as an offering to them. 19Also, you took the bread I gave you, the fine flour, oil, and honey I gave you to eat, and you offered them before the gods as a pleasing smell. This is what happened, says the Lord God.

20"'But your sexual sins were not enough for you. You also took your sons and daughters who were my children, and you sacrificed them to the idols as food. 21You killed my children and offered them up in fire to the idols. 22While you did all your hateful acts and sexual sins, you did not remember when you were young, when you were naked and had no clothes and were left in your blood.

23"'How terrible! How terrible it will be for you, says the Lord God. After you did all these evil things, 24you built yourself a place to worship gods. You made for yourself a place of worship in every city square. 25You built a place of worship at the beginning of every street. You made your beauty hateful, offering your body for sex to anyone who passed by, so your sexual sins became worse and worse. 26You also had sexual relations with the Egyptians, who were your neighbors and partners in sexual sin. Your sexual sins became even worse, and they caused me to be angry. 27So then, I used my power against you and took away some of your land. I let you be defeated by those who hate you, the Philistine women, who were ashamed of your evil ways. 28Also, you had sexual relations with the Assyrians, because you could not be satisfied. Even though you had sexual relations with them, you still were not satisfied. 29You did many more sexual sins in Babylonia, the land of traders, but even this did not satisfy you.

30"'Truly your will is weak, says the Lord God. You do all the things a stubborn prostitute does. 31You built your place to worship gods at the beginning of every street, and you made places of worship in every city square. But you were not like a prostitute when you refused to accept payment.

32"'You are a wife who is guilty of adultery. You desire strangers instead of your husband. 33Men pay prostitutes, but you pay all your lovers to come to you. And they come from all around for sexual relations. 34So you are different from other prostitutes. No man asks you to be a prostitute, and you pay money instead of having money paid to you. Yes, you are different.

## *The Prostitute Is Judged*

35 “‘So, prostitute, hear the word of the LORD. 36 This is what
the Lord God says: You showed your nakedness to other
countries. You uncovered your body in your sexual sins with
them as your lovers and with all your hateful idols. You killed
your children and offered their blood to your idols. 37 So I will
gather all your lovers with whom you found pleasure. Yes, I will
gather all those you loved and those you hated. I will gather
them against you from all around, and I will strip you naked in
front of them so they can see your nakedness. 38 I will punish
you as women guilty of adultery or as murderers are punished. I
will put you to death because I am angry and jealous. 39 I will
also hand you over to your lovers. They will tear down your
places of worship and destroy other places where you worship
gods. They will tear off your clothes and take away your jewelry,
leaving you naked and bare. 40 They will bring a crowd against
you to throw stones at you and to cut you into pieces with their
swords. 41 They will burn down your houses and will punish you
in front of many women. I will put an end to your sexual sins,
and you will no longer pay your lovers. 42 Then I will rest from
my anger against you, and I will stop being jealous. I will be
quiet and not angry anymore.

43 “‘Because you didn’t remember when you were young, but
have made me angry in all these ways, I will repay you for what
you have done, says the Lord God. Didn’t you add sexual sins to
all your other acts which I hate?

44 “‘Everyone who uses wise sayings will say this about you:
“The daughter is like her mother.” 45 You are like your mother,
who hated her husband and children. You are also like your
sisters, who hated their husbands and children. Your mother
was a Hittite, and your father was an Amorite. 46 Your older
sister is Samaria, who lived north of you with her daughters;
your younger sister is Sodom, who lived south of you with her
daughters. 47 You not only followed their ways and did the
hateful things they did, but you were soon worse than they were
in all your ways. 48 As surely as I live, says the Lord God, this is
true. Your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you
and your daughters have done.

49 “‘This was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her
daughters were proud and had plenty of food and lived in great
comfort, but she did not help the poor and needy. 50 So Sodom
and her daughters were proud and did things I hate in front of
me. So I got rid of them when I saw what they did. 51 Also,
Samaria did not do half the sins you do; you have done more
hateful things than they did. So you make your sisters look good
because of all the hateful things you have done. 52 You will suffer
disgrace, because you have provided an excuse for your sisters.

They are better than you are. Your sins were even more terrible than theirs. Feel ashamed and suffer disgrace, because you made your sisters look good.

53"'But I will give back to Sodom and her daughters the good things they once had. I will give back to Samaria and her daughters the good things they once had. And with them I will also give back the good things you once had 54so you may suffer disgrace and feel ashamed for all the things you have done. You even gave comfort to your sisters in their sins. 55Your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to what they were before. You and your daughters will also return to what you were before. 56You humiliated your sister Sodom when you were proud, 57before your evil was uncovered. And now the Edomite women and their neighbors humiliate you. Even the Philistine women humiliate you. Those around you hate you. 58This is your punishment for your terrible sins and for actions that I hate, says the LORD.

### *God Keeps His Promises*

59"'This is what the Lord God says: I will do to you what you have done. You hated and broke the agreement you promised to keep. 60But I will remember my agreement I made with you when you were young, and I will make an agreement that will continue forever with you. 61Then you will remember what you have done and feel ashamed when you receive your sisters—both your older and your younger sisters. I will give them to you like daughters, but not because they share in my agreement with you. 62I will set up my agreement with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. 63You will remember what you did and feel ashamed. You will not open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you for all the things you have done, says the Lord God.'"

## Psalm 123:1–4

### *A Prayer for Mercy*

**A song for going up to worship.**

123 LORD, I look upward to you,you who live in heaven.

[2]Slaves depend on their masters,
and a female servant depends on her mistress.

In the same way, we depend on the LORD our God;
we wait for him to show us mercy.

[3]Have mercy on us, LORD. Have mercy on us,
because we have been insulted.

[4]We have suffered many insults from lazy people
and much cruelty from the proud.

## Proverbs 28:20

[20]A truthful person will have many blessings,
but those eager to get rich will be punished.

## Hebrews 8:1–13

### *Jesus Is Our High Priest*

[8] Here is the point of what we are saying: We have a high priest who sits on the right side of God's throne in heaven. [2]Our high priest serves in the Most Holy Place, the true place of worship that was made by God, not by humans.

[3]Every high priest has the work of offering gifts and sacrifices to God. So our high priest must also offer something to God. [4]If our high priest were now living on earth, he would not be a priest, because there are already priests here who follow the law by offering gifts to God. [5]The work they do as priests is only a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven. This is why God warned Moses when he was ready to build the Holy Tent: "Be very careful to make everything by the plan I showed you on the mountain."[n] [6]But the priestly work that has been given to Jesus is much greater than the work that was given to the other priests. In the same way, the new agreement that Jesus brought from God to his people is much greater than the

old one. And the new agreement is based on promises of better things.

7If there had been nothing wrong with the first agreement,[n] there would have been no need for a second agreement. 8But God found something wrong with his people. He says:[n]

“Look, the time is coming, says the Lord,
when I will make a new agreement

with the people of Israel
and the people of Judah.

9It will not be like the agreement
I made with their ancestors

when I took them by the hand
to bring them out of Egypt.

But they broke that agreement,
and I turned away from them, says the Lord.

10This is the agreement I will make
with the people of Israel at that time, says the Lord.

I will put my teachings in their minds
and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

11People will no longer have to teach their neighbors and relatives
to know the Lord,

because all people will know me,
from the least to the most important.

[12]I will forgive them for the wicked things they did,
and I will not remember their sins anymore.”

Jeremiah 31:31–34

[13]God called this a new agreement, so he has made the first agreement old. And anything that is old and worn out is ready to disappear.

# November 13

## No More Sacrifice

*Christ came as the high priest of the good things we now have.*

Hebrews 9:11

Even a casual student of Scripture notes the connection between blood and mercy. As far back as the son of Adam, worshipers knew "sins cannot be forgiven without blood" (Hebrews 9:22).

With a field as his temple and the ground as his altar, Abel became the first to do what millions would imitate. He offered a blood sacrifice for sins.

Those who followed suit form a long line: Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Saul, David … They knew the shedding of blood was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Jacob knew it too; hence, the stones were stacked for the altar …

But the line ended at the Cross. What Abel sought to accomplish in the field, God achieved with his Son. What Abel began, Christ completed. After Christ's sacrifice there would be no more need to shed blood.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### Ezekiel 17:1—18:32

### *The Eagle and the Vine*

17 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, give a
riddle and tell a story to the people of Israel. 3Say, 'This is what
the Lord God says: A giant eagle with big wings and long
feathers of many different colors came to Lebanon and took
hold of the top of a cedar tree. 4He pulled off the top branch
and brought it to a land of traders, where he planted it in a city
of traders.

5"'The eagle took some seed from the land and planted it in a
good field near plenty of water. He planted it to grow like a

willow tree. [6]It sprouted and became a low vine that spread
over the ground. The branches turned toward the eagle, but the
roots were under the eagle. So the seed became a vine, and its
branches grew, sending out leaves.

[7]"'But there was another giant eagle with big wings and
many feathers. The vine then bent its roots toward this eagle. It
sent out its branches from the area where it was planted toward
the eagle so he could water it. [8]It had been planted in a good
field by plenty of water so it could grow branches and give fruit.
It could have become a fine vine.'

[9]"Say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says: The vine will
not continue to grow. The first eagle will pull up the vine's roots
and strip off its fruit. Then the vine and all its new leaves will
dry up and die. It will not take a strong arm or many people to
pull the vine up by its roots. [10]Even if it is planted again, it will
not continue to grow. It will completely dry up and die when the
east wind hits it in the area where it grew.'"

## *Zedekiah Against Nebuchadnezzar*

[11]Then the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: [12]"Say now to
the people who refuse to obey: 'Do you know what these things
mean?' Say: 'The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and took
the king and important men of Jerusalem and brought them to
Babylon. [13]Then he took a member of the family of the king of
Judah and made an agreement with him, forcing him to take an
oath. The king also took away the leaders of Judah [14]to make
the kingdom weak so it would not be strong again. Then the
kingdom of Judah could continue only by keeping its agreement
with the king of Babylon. [15]But the king of Judah turned against
the king of Babylon by sending his messengers to Egypt and
asking them for horses and many soldiers. Will the king of
Judah succeed? Will the one who does such things escape? He
cannot break the agreement and escape.

[16]"'As surely as I live, says the Lord God, he will die in
Babylon, in the land of the king who made him king of Judah.
The king of Judah hated his promise to the king of Babylon and
broke his agreement with him. [17]The king of Egypt with his
mighty army and many people will not help the king of Judah in
the war. The Babylonians will build devices to attack the cities
and to kill many people. [18]The king of Judah showed that he
hated the promise by breaking the agreement. He promised to
support Babylon, but he did all these things. So he will not
escape.

[19]"'So this is what the Lord God says: As surely as I live, this
is true: I will pay back the king of Judah for hating my promise
and breaking my agreement. [20]I will spread my net over him,
and he will be caught in my trap. Then I will bring him to

Babylon, where I will punish him for the unfaithful acts he did against me. 21All the best of his soldiers who escape will die by the sword, and those who live will be scattered to every wind. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken.

22"'This is what the Lord God says: I myself will also take a young branch from the top of a cedar tree, and I will plant it. I will cut off a small twig from the top of the tree's young branches, and I will plant it on a very high mountain. 23I will plant it on the high mountain of Israel. Then it will grow branches and give fruit and become a great cedar tree. Birds of every kind will build nests in it and live in the shelter of the tree's branches. 24Then all the trees in the countryside will know that I am the LORD. I bring down the high tree and make the low tree tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree grow. I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I will do it.'"

## *God Is Fair*

18 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"What do you mean by using this saying about the land of Israel:

'The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and that caused the children to grind their teeth from the sour taste'?

3"As surely as I live, says the Lord God, this is true: You will not use this saying in Israel anymore. 4Every living thing belongs to me. The life of the parent is mine, and the life of the child is mine. The person who sins is the one who will die.

5"Suppose a person is good and does what is fair and right. 6He does not eat at the mountain places of worship. He does not look to the idols of Israel for help. He does not have sexual relations with his neighbor's wife or with a woman during her time of monthly bleeding. 7He does not mistreat anyone but returns what was given as a promise for a loan. He does not rob other people. He gives bread to the hungry and clothes to those who have none. 8He does not lend money to get too much interest or profit. He keeps his hand from doing wrong. He judges fairly between one person and another. 9He lives by my rules and obeys my laws faithfully. Whoever does these things is good and will surely live, says the Lord God.

10"But suppose this person has a wild son who murders people and who does any of these other things. 11(But the father himself has not done any of these things.) This son eats at the mountain places of worship. He has sexual relations with his neighbor's wife. 12He mistreats the poor and needy. He steals and refuses to return what was promised for a loan. He looks to

idols for help. He does things which I hate. [13]He lends money
for too much interest and profit. Will this son live? No, he will
not live! He has done all these hateful things, so he will surely
be put to death. He will be responsible for his own death.
[14]"Now suppose this son has a son who has seen all his
father's sins, but after seeing them does not do those things.
[15]He does not eat at the mountain places of worship. He does
not look to the idols of Israel for help. He does not have sexual
relations with his neighbor's wife. [16]He does not mistreat
anyone or keep something promised for a loan or steal. He gives
bread to the hungry and clothes to those who have none. [17]He
keeps his hand from doing wrong. He does not take too much
interest or profit when he lends money. He obeys my laws and
lives by my rules. He will not die for his father's sin; he will
surely live. [18]But his father took other people's money unfairly
and robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his
people. So he will die for his own sin.
[19]"But you ask, 'Why is the son not punished for the father's
sin?' The son has done what is fair and right. He obeys all my
rules, so he will surely live. [20]The person who sins is the one
who will die. A child will not be punished for a parent's sin, and
a parent will not be punished for a child's sin. Those who do
right will enjoy the results of their own goodness; evil people
will suffer the results of their own evil.
[21]"But suppose the wicked stop doing all the sins they have
done and obey all my rules and do what is fair and right. Then
they will surely live; they will not die. [22]Their sins will be
forgotten. Because they have done what is right, they will live.
[23]I do not really want the wicked to die, says the Lord God. I
want them to stop their bad ways and live.
[24]"But suppose good people stop doing good and do wrong
and do the same hateful things the wicked do. Will they live? All
their good acts will be forgotten, because they became
unfaithful. They have sinned, so they will die because of their
sins.
[25]"But you say, 'What the Lord does isn't fair.' Listen, people
of Israel. I am fair. It is what you do that is not fair! [26]When
good people stop doing good and do wrong, they will die
because of it. They will die, because they did wrong. [27]When the
wicked stop being wicked and do what is fair and right, they
will save their lives. [28]Because they thought about it and
stopped doing all the sins they had done, they will surely live;
they will not die. [29]But the people of Israel still say, 'What the
Lord does isn't fair.' People of Israel, I am fair. It is what you do
that is not fair.
[30]"So I will judge you, people of Israel; I will judge each of
you by what you do, says the Lord God. Change your hearts and
stop all your sinning so sin will not bring your ruin. [31]Get rid of

all the sins you have done, and get for yourselves a new heart
and a new way of thinking. Why do you want to die, people of
Israel? 32I do not want anyone to die, says the Lord God, so
change your hearts and lives so you may live.

## Psalm 124:1–8

### *The Lord Saves His People*

**A song for going up to worship. Of David.**

124 What if the LORD had not been on our side?
(Let Israel repeat this.)

2What if the LORD had not been on our side
when we were attacked?

3When they were angry with us,
they would have swallowed us alive.

4They would have been like a flood drowning us;
they would have poured over us like a river.
5 They would have swept us away like a mighty stream.

6Praise the LORD,
who did not let them chew us up.

7We escaped like a bird
from the hunter's trap.

The trap broke,
and we escaped.

8Our help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

## Proverbs 28:21

21 It is not good for a judge to take sides,
but some will sin for only a piece of bread.

## Hebrews 9:1–22

### *The Old Agreement*

9 The first agreement[n] had rules for worship and a place on
earth for worship. 2 The Holy Tent was set up for this. The first
area in the Tent was called the Holy Place. In it were the lamp
and the table with the bread that was made holy for God.
3 Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy
Place. 4 In it was a golden altar for burning incense and the Ark
covered with gold that held the old agreement. Inside this Ark
was a golden jar of manna, Aaron's rod that once grew leaves,
and the stone tablets of the old agreement. 5 Above the Ark were
the creatures that showed God's glory, whose wings reached
over the lid. But we cannot tell everything about these things
now.

6 When everything in the Tent was made ready in this way,
the priests went into the first room every day to worship. 7 But
only the high priest could go into the second room, and he did
that only once a year. He could never enter the inner room
without taking blood with him, which he offered to God for
himself and for sins the people did without knowing they did
them. 8 The Holy Spirit uses this to show that the way into the
Most Holy Place was not open while the system of the old Holy
Tent was still being used. 9 This is an example for the present
time. It shows that the gifts and sacrifices offered cannot make
the conscience of the worshiper perfect. 10 These gifts and
sacrifices were only about food and drink and special washings.
They were rules for the body, to be followed until the time of
God's new way.

### *The New Agreement*

11 But when Christ came as the high priest of the good things
we now have,[n] he entered the greater and more perfect tent. It
is not made by humans and does not belong to this world.

12 Christ entered the Most Holy Place only once—and for all
time. He did not take with him the blood of goats and calves.
His sacrifice was his own blood, and by it he set us free from sin
forever. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a cow
are sprinkled on the people who are unclean, and this makes
their bodies clean again. 14 How much more is done by the blood
of Christ. He offered himself through the eternal Spirit[n] as a
perfect sacrifice to God. His blood will make our consciences
pure from useless acts so we may serve the living God.

15 For this reason Christ brings a new agreement from God to
his people. Those who are called by God can now receive the
blessings he has promised, blessings that will last forever. They
can have those things because Christ died so that the people
who lived under the first agreement could be set free from sin.

16 When there is a will,[n] it must be proven that the one who
wrote that will is dead. 17 A will means nothing while the person
is alive; it can be used only after the person dies. 18 This is why
even the first agreement could not begin without blood to show
death. 19 First, Moses told all the people every command in the
law. Next he took the blood of calves and mixed it with water.
Then he used red wool and a branch of the hyssop plant to
sprinkle it on the book of the law and on all the people. 20 He
said, “This is the blood that begins the Agreement that God
commanded you to obey.”[n] 21 In the same way, Moses sprinkled
the blood on the Holy Tent and over all the things used in
worship. 22 The law says that almost everything must be made
clean by blood, and sins cannot be forgiven without blood to
show death.

# November 14

## The Reason for the Cross

*We are made holy through the sacrifice Christ made in his body once and for all time.*

Hebrews 10:10

man by himself cannot deal with his own guilt. He must have help from the outside. In order to forgive himself, he must have forgiveness from the one he has offended. Yet man is unworthy to ask God for forgiveness.

That, then, is the whole reason for the Cross.

The Cross did what sacrificed lambs could not do. It erased our sins, not for a year, but for eternity. The Cross did what man could not do. It granted us the right to talk with, love, and even live with God.

You can't do that by yourself. I don't care how many worship services you attend or good deeds you do, your goodness is insufficient. You can't be good enough to deserve forgiveness. No one bats a thousand. No one bowls three hundred. No one. Not you, not me, not anyone.

That's why we need a savior.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Ezekiel 19:1—20:49

### *A Sad Song for Israel*

19 "Sing a funeral song for the leaders of Israel. 2Say:

'Your mother was like a female lion.

She lay down among the young lions.
She had many cubs.

[3]When she brought up one of her cubs,
he became a strong lion.

He learned to tear the animals he hunted,
and he ate people.

[4]The nations heard about him.
He was trapped in their pit,

and they brought him with hooks
to the land of Egypt.

[5]“‘The mother lion waited and saw
that there was no hope for her cub.

So she took another one of her cubs
and made him a strong lion.

[6]This cub roamed among the lions.
He was now a strong lion.

He learned to tear the animals he hunted,
and he ate people.

[7]He tore down their strong places
and destroyed their cities.

The land and everything in it
were terrified by the sound of his roar.

[8]Then the nations came against him
from areas all around,

and they spread their net over him.
He was trapped in their pit.

9 Then they put him into a cage with chains
and brought him to the king of Babylon.

They put him into prison
so his roar could not be heard again
on the mountains of Israel.

10 “‘Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard,
planted beside the water.

The vine had many branches and gave much fruit,
because there was plenty of water.

11 The vine had strong branches,
good enough for a king’s scepter.

The vine became tall
among the thick branches.

And it was seen, because it was tall
with many branches.

12 But it was pulled up by its roots in anger
and thrown down to the ground.

The east wind dried it up.
Its fruit was torn off.

Its strong branches were broken off
and burned up.

13 Now the vine is planted in the desert,
in a dry and thirsty land.

14 Fire spread from the vine’s main branch,
destroying its fruit.

There is not a strong branch left on it
that could become a scepter for a king.'

This is a funeral song; it is to be used as a funeral song."

## *Israel Has Refused God*

20 It was the seventh year of our captivity, in the fifth month, on
the tenth day of the month. Some of the elders of Israel came to
ask about the LORD and sat down in front of me.
2The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 3"Human, speak to
the elders of Israel and say to them: 'This is what the Lord God
says: Did you come to ask me questions? As surely as I live, I
will not let you ask me questions.'
4"Will you judge them? Will you judge them, human? Let
them know the hateful things their ancestors did. 5Say to them:
'This is what the Lord God says: When I chose Israel, I made a
promise to the descendants of Jacob. I made myself known to
them in Egypt, and I promised them, "I am the LORD your God."
6At that time I promised them I would bring them out of Egypt
into a land I had found for them, a fertile land, the best land in
the world. 7I said to them, "Each one of you must throw away
the hateful idols you have seen and liked. Don't make
yourselves unclean with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your
God."
8"'But they turned against me and refused to listen to me.
They did not throw away the hateful idols which they saw and
liked; they did not give up the idols of Egypt. Then I decided to
pour out my anger against them while they were still in Egypt.
9But I acted for the sake of my name so it would not be
dishonored in full view of the nations where the Israelites lived.
I made myself known to the Israelites with a promise to bring
them out of Egypt while the nations were watching. 10So I took
them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. 11I gave
them my rules and told them about my laws, by which people
will live if they obey them. 12I also gave them my Sabbaths to be
a sign between us so they would know that I am the LORD who
made them holy.
13"'But in the desert Israel turned against me. They did not
follow my rules, and they rejected my laws, by which people will
live if they obey them. They dishonored my Sabbaths. Then I
decided to pour out my anger against them and destroy them in
the desert. 14But I acted for the sake of my name so it would not
be dishonored in full view of the nations who watched as I had
brought the Israelites out of Egypt. 15And in the desert I swore
to the Israelites that I would not bring them into the land I had
given them. It is a fertile land, the best land in the world. 16This
was because they rejected my laws and did not follow my rules.
They dishonored my Sabbaths and wanted to worship their

idols. [17]But I had pity on them. I did not destroy them or put an
end to them in the desert. [18]I said to their children in the
desert, “Don’t live by the rules of your parents, or obey their
laws. Don’t make yourselves unclean with their idols. [19]I am the
LORD your God. Live by my rules, obey my laws, and follow
them. [20]Keep my Sabbaths holy, and they will be a sign between
me and you. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.”
[21]“‘But the children turned against me. They did not live by
my rules, nor were they careful to obey my laws, by which
people will live if they obey them. They dishonored my
Sabbaths. So I decided to pour out my anger against them in
the desert. [22]But I held back my anger. I acted for the sake of
my name so it would not be dishonored in full view of the
nations who watched as I brought the Israelites out. [23]And in
the desert I swore to the Israelites that I would scatter them
among the nations and spread them among the countries,
[24]because they had not obeyed my laws. They had rejected my
rules and dishonored my Sabbaths and worshiped the idols of
their parents. [25]I also allowed them to follow rules that were
not good and laws by which they could not live. [26]I let the
Israelites make themselves unclean by the gifts they brought to
their gods when they sacrificed their first children in the fire. I
wanted to terrify them so they would know that I am the LORD.’
[27]“So, human, speak to the people of Israel. Say to them,
‘This is what the Lord God says: Your ancestors spoke against me
by being unfaithful to me in another way. [28]When I had brought
them into the land I promised to give them, they saw every high
hill and every leafy tree. There they offered their sacrifices to
gods. They brought offerings that made me angry and burned
their incense and poured out their drink offerings. [29]Then I said
to them: What is this high place where you go to worship?’” (It
is still called High Place today.)
[30]“So say to the people of Israel: ‘This is what the Lord God
says: Are you going to make yourselves unclean as your
ancestors did? Are you going to be unfaithful and desire their
hateful idols? [31]When you offer your children as gifts and
sacrifice them in the fire, you are making yourselves unclean
with all your idols even today. So, people of Israel, should I let
you ask me questions? As surely as I live, says the Lord God, I
will not accept questions from you.
[32]“‘What you want will not come true. You say, “We want to
be like the other nations, like the people in other lands. We
want to worship idols made of wood and stone.” [33]As surely as I
live, says the Lord God, I will use my great power and strength
and anger to rule over you. [34]I will bring you out from the
foreign nations. With my great power and strength and anger I
will gather you from the lands where you are scattered. [35]I will
bring you among the nations as I brought your ancestors into

the desert with Moses. There I will judge you face to face. 36I will judge you the same way I judged your ancestors in the desert of the land of Egypt, says the Lord God. 37I will count you like sheep and will bring you into line with my agreement. 38I will get rid of those who refuse to obey me and who turn against me. I will bring them out of the land where they are now living, but they will never enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

39"'This is what the Lord God says: People of Israel, go serve your idols for now. But later you will listen to me; you will not continue to dishonor my holy name with your gifts and gods. 40On my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel, all Israel will serve me in the land, says the Lord God. There I will accept you. There I will expect your offerings, the first harvest of your offerings, and all your holy gifts. 41I will accept you like the pleasing smell of sacrifices when I bring you out from the foreign nations and gather you from the lands where you are scattered. Then through you I will show how holy I am so the nations will see. 42When I bring you into the land of Israel, the land I promised your ancestors, you will know that I am the LORD. 43There you will remember everything you did that made you unclean, and then you will hate yourselves for all the evil things you have done. 44I will deal with you for the sake of my name, not because of your evil ways or unclean actions. Then you will know I am the LORD, people of Israel, says the Lord God.'"

### *Babylon, the Lord's Sword*

45Now the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 46"Human, look toward the south. Prophesy against the south and against the forest of the southern area. 47Say to that forest: 'Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the Lord God says: I am ready to start a fire in you that will destroy all your green trees and all your dry trees. The flames that burn will not be put out. Every face from south to north will feel their heat. 48Then all the people will see that I, the LORD, have started the fire. It will not be put out.'"

49Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! The people are saying about me, 'He is only telling stories.'"

## Psalm 125:1–5

### *God Protects Those Who Trust Him*

**A song for going up to worship.**

125 Those who trust the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which sits unmoved forever.

2As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
the LORD surrounds his people
now and forever.

3The wicked will not rule
over those who do right.

If they did, the people who do right
might use their power to do evil.

4LORD, be good to those who are good,
whose hearts are honest.

5But, LORD, when you remove those who do evil,
also remove those who stop following you.

Let there be peace in Israel.

## Proverbs 28:22

22Selfish people are in a hurry to get rich
and do not realize they soon will be poor.

## Hebrews 9:23—10:18

### *Christ's Death Takes Away Sins*

23 So the copies of the real things in heaven had to be made
clean by animal sacrifices. But the real things in heaven need
much better sacrifices. 24Christ did not go into the Most Holy
Place made by humans, which is only a copy of the real one. He
went into heaven itself and is there now before God to help us.
25The high priest enters the Most Holy Place once every year
with blood that is not his own. But Christ did not offer himself
many times. 26Then he would have had to suffer many times
since the world was made. But Christ came only once and for all
time at just the right time to take away all sin by sacrificing
himself. 27Just as everyone must die once and then be judged,
28so Christ was offered as a sacrifice one time to take away the
sins of many people. And he will come a second time, not to
offer himself for sin, but to bring salvation to those who are
waiting for him.
10 The law is only an unclear picture of the good things coming
in the future; it is not the real thing. The people under the law
offer the same sacrifices every year, but these sacrifices can
never make perfect those who come near to worship God. 2If
the law could make them perfect, the sacrifices would have
already stopped. The worshipers would be made clean, and they
would no longer have a sense of sin. 3But these sacrifices
remind them of their sins every year, 4because it is impossible
for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
5So when Christ came into the world, he said:

"You do not want sacrifices and offerings,
but you have prepared a body for me.

6You do not ask for burnt offerings
and offerings to take away sins.

7Then I said, 'Look, I have come.
It is written about me in the book.
God, I have come to do what you want.'"

Psalm 40:6–8

8In this Scripture he first said, "You do not want sacrifices and
offerings. You do not ask for burnt offerings and offerings to
take away sins." (These are all sacrifices that the law
commands.) 9Then he said, "Look, I have come to do what you
want." God ends the first system of sacrifices so he can set up
the new system. 10And because of this, we are made holy
through the sacrifice Christ made in his body once and for all
time.

[11]Every day the priests stand and do their religious service,
often offering the same sacrifices. Those sacrifices can never
take away sins. [12]But after Christ offered one sacrifice for sins,
forever, he sat down at the right side of God. [13]And now Christ
waits there for his enemies to be put under his power. [14]With
one sacrifice he made perfect forever those who are being made
holy.
[15]The Holy Spirit also tells us about this. First he says:

[16]"This is the agreement[n] I will make
with them at that time, says the Lord.

I will put my teachings in their hearts
and write them on their minds."

Jeremiah 31:33

[17]Then he says:

"Their sins and the evil things they do—
I will not remember anymore."

Jeremiah 31:34

[18]Now when these have been forgiven, there is no more need
for a sacrifice for sins.

# November 15

## A Good Choice

*Let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith.*

Hebrews 10:22

It would have been nice if God had let us order life like we order a meal. I'll take good health and a high IQ. I'll pass on the music skills, but give me a fast metabolism … Would've been nice. But it didn't happen. When it came to your life on earth, you weren't given a voice or a vote.

But when it comes to life after death, you were. In my book that seems like a good deal. Wouldn't you agree? …

Have we been given any greater privilege than that of choice? Not only does this privilege offset any injustice, the gift of free will can offset any mistakes.

You've made some bad choices in life, haven't you? You've chosen the wrong friends, maybe the wrong career, even the wrong spouse. You look back over your life and say, "If only … if only I could make up for those bad choices." You can. One good choice for eternity offsets a thousand bad ones on earth.

The choice is yours.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### Ezekiel 21:1—22:31

21 Then the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, look
toward Jerusalem and speak against the holy place. Prophesy
against the land of Israel. 3Say to Israel: 'This is what the LORD
says: I am against you. I will pull my sword out of its holder, and
I will cut off from you both the wicked and those who do right.
4Because I am going to cut off the wicked and those who do
right, my sword will come out from its holder and attack all
people from south to north. 5Then all people will know that I,
the LORD, have pulled my sword out from its holder. My sword
will not go back in again.'

6"So, human, groan with breaking heart and great sadness.

Groan in front of the people. [7]When they ask you, ‘Why are you groaning?’ you will say, ‘Because of what I have heard is going to happen. When it happens, every heart will melt with fear, and all hands will become weak. Everyone will be afraid; all knees will become weak as water. Look, it is coming, and it will happen, says the Lord God.’”

[8]The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: [9]“Human, prophesy and say, ‘This is what the LORD says:

A sword, a sword,
made sharp and polished.

[10]It is made sharp for the killing.
It is polished to flash like lightning.

“‘You are not happy about this horrible punishment by the sword. But my son Judah, you did not change when you were only beaten with a rod.

[11]The sword should be polished.
It is meant to be held in the hand.

It is made sharp and polished,
ready for the hand of a killer.

[12]Shout and yell, human,
because the sword is meant for my people,
for all the rulers of Israel.

They will be killed by the sword,
along with my people.
So beat your chest in sadness.

[13]“‘The test will come. And Judah, who is hated by the armies of Babylon, will not last, says the Lord God.’

[14]“So, human, prophesy
and clap your hands.

Let the sword strike

two or three times.

It is a sword meant for killing,
a sword meant for much killing.
This sword surrounds the people to be killed.

15 Their hearts will melt with fear,
and many people will die.

I have placed the killing sword
at all their city gates.

Oh! The sword is made to flash like lightning.
It is held, ready for killing.

16 Sword, cut on the right side;
then cut on the left side.
Cut anywhere your blade is turned.

17 I will also clap my hands
and use up my anger.

I, the LORD, have spoken."

## *Jerusalem to Be Destroyed*

18 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 19 "Human, mark two roads that the king of Babylon and his sword can follow. Both of these roads will start from the same country. And make signs where the road divides and one way goes toward the city. 20 Mark one sign to show the road he can take with his sword to Rabbah in the land of the Ammonites. Mark the other sign to show the road to Judah and Jerusalem, which is protected with strong walls. 21 The king of Babylon has come to where the road divides, and he is using magic. He throws lots with arrows and asks questions of his family idols. He looks at the liver of a sacrificed animal to learn where he should go. 22 The lot in his right hand tells him to go to Jerusalem. It tells him to use logs to break down the city gates, to shout the battle cry and give the order to kill, and to build a dirt road to the top of the walls and devices to attack the walls. 23 The people of Jerusalem have

made agreements with other nations to help them fight Babylon. So they will think this prediction is wrong, but it is really proof of their sin, and they will be captured.

24"So this is what the Lord God says: 'You have shown how sinful you are by turning against the LORD. Your sins are seen in all the things you do. Because of this proof against you, you will be taken captive by the enemy.

25"'You unclean and evil leader of Israel, you will be killed! The time of your final punishment has come. 26This is what the Lord God says: Take off the royal turban, and remove the crown. Things will change. Those who are important now will be made unimportant, and those who are unimportant now will be made important. 27A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! This place will not be rebuilt until the one comes who has a right to be king. Then I will give him that right.'

## *The Punishment of Ammon*

28"And you, human, prophesy and say: 'This is what the Lord God says about the people of Ammon and their insults:

A sword, a sword
    is pulled out of its holder.

It is polished to kill and destroy,
    to flash like lightning!

29Prophets see false visions about you
    and prophesy lies about you.

The sword will be put on the necks
    of these unclean and evil people.

Their day of judging has come;
    the time of final punishment has come.

30Put the sword back in its holder.
    I will judge you

in the place where you were created,
    in the land where you were born.

31 I will pour out my anger against you
and blast you with the fire of my anger.

I will hand you over to cruel men,
experts in destruction.

32 You will be like fuel for the fire;
you will die in the land.

You will not be remembered,
because I, the LORD, have spoken.'"

## *The Sins of Jerusalem*

22 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2 "And you, human, will you judge? Will you judge the city of murderers? Then tell her about all her hateful acts. 3 You are to say: 'This is what the Lord God says: You are a city that kills those who come to live there. You make yourself unclean by making idols. 4 You have become guilty of murder and have become unclean by your idols which you have made. So you have brought your time of punishment near; you have come to the end of your years. That is why I have made you a shame to the nations and why all lands laugh at you. 5 Those near and those far away laugh at you with your bad name, you city full of confusion.

6 "'Jerusalem, see how each ruler of Israel in you has been trying to kill people. 7 The people in you hate their fathers and mothers. They mistreat the foreigners in you and wrong the orphans and widows in you. 8 You hate my holy things and dishonor my Sabbaths. 9 The men in you tell lies to cause the death of others. The people in you eat food offered to idols at the mountain places of worship, and they take part in sexual sins. 10 The men in you have sexual relations with their fathers' wives and with women who are unclean, during their time of monthly bleeding. 11 One man in you does a hateful act with his neighbor's wife, while another has shamefully made his daughter-in-law unclean sexually. And another forces his half sister to have sexual relations with him. 12 The people in you take money to kill others. You take unfair interest and profits and make profits by mistreating your neighbor. And you have forgotten me, says the Lord God.

13 "'So, Jerusalem, I will shake my fist at you for stealing money and for murdering people. 14 Will you still be brave and strong when I punish you? I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will act. 15 I will scatter you among the nations and spread you

through the countries. That is how I will get rid of your uncleanness. 16But you, yourself, will be dishonored in the sight of the nations. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

## *Israel Is Worthless*

17The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 18"Human, the people of Israel have become useless like scum to me. They are like the copper, tin, iron, and lead left in the furnace when silver is purified. 19So this is what the Lord God says: 'Because you have become useless like scum, I am going to put you together inside Jerusalem. 20People put silver, copper, iron, lead, and tin together inside a furnace to melt them down in a blazing fire. In the same way I will gather you in my hot anger and put you together in Jerusalem and melt you down. 21I will put you together and make you feel the heat of my anger. You will be melted down inside Jerusalem. 22As silver is melted in a furnace, you will be melted inside the city. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out my anger on you.'"

## *Sins of the People*

23The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 24"Human, say to the land, 'You are a land that has not had rain or showers when God is angry.' 25Like a roaring lion that tears the animal it has caught, Israel's rulers make evil plans. They have destroyed lives and have taken treasure and valuable things. They have caused many women to become widows. 26Israel's priests do cruel things to my teachings and do not honor my holy things. They make no difference between holy and unholy things, and they teach there is no difference between clean and unclean things. They do not remember my Sabbaths, so I am dishonored by them. 27Like wolves tearing a dead animal, Jerusalem's leaders have killed people for profit. 28And the prophets try to cover this up by false visions and by lying messages. They say, 'This is what the Lord God says' when the LORD has not spoken. 29The people cheat others and steal. They hurt people who are poor and needy. They cheat foreigners and do not treat them fairly.

30"I looked for someone to build up the walls and to stand before me where the walls are broken to defend these people so I would not have to destroy them. But I could not find anyone. 31So I let them see my anger. I destroyed them with an anger that was like fire because of all the things they have done, says the Lord God."

# Psalm 126:1–6

## *Lord, Bring Your People Back*

**A song for going up to worship.**

126 When the LORD brought the prisoners back to Jerusalem,
it seemed as if we were dreaming.

2Then we were filled with laughter,
and we sang happy songs.

Then the other nations said,
"The LORD has done great things for them."

3The LORD has done great things for us,
and we are very glad.

4LORD, return our prisoners again,
as you bring streams to the desert.

5Those who cry as they plant crops
will sing at harvest time.

6Those who cry
as they carry out the seeds

will return singing
and carrying bundles of grain.

## Proverbs 28:23

23Those who correct others will later be liked

more than those who give false praise.

## Hebrews 10:19–39

### *Continue to Trust God*

19 So, brothers and sisters, we are completely free to enter
the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus'
death. 20 We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus
opened for us. It leads through the curtain—Christ's body.
21 And since we have a great priest over God's house, 22 let us
come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because
we have been made free from a guilty conscience, and our
bodies have been washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold firmly
to the hope that we have confessed, because we can trust God
to do what he promised.

24 Let us think about each other and help each other to show
love and do good deeds. 25 You should not stay away from the
church meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet
together and encourage each other. Do this even more as you
see the day[n] coming.

26 If we decide to go on sinning after we have learned the
truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins. 27 There is
nothing but fear in waiting for the judgment and the terrible
fire that will destroy all those who live against God. 28 Anyone
who refused to obey the law of Moses was found guilty from the
proof given by two or three witnesses. He was put to death
without mercy. 29 So what do you think should be done to those
who do not respect the Son of God, who look at the blood of the
agreement that made them holy as no different from others'
blood, who insult the Spirit of God's grace? Surely they should
have a much worse punishment. 30 We know that God said, "I
will punish those who do wrong; I will repay them."[n] And he
also said, "The Lord will judge his people."[n] 31 It is a terrible
thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 Remember those days in the past when you first learned
the truth. You had a hard struggle with many sufferings, but you
continued strong. 33 Sometimes you were hurt and attacked
before crowds of people, and sometimes you shared with those
who were being treated that way. 34 You helped the prisoners.
You even had joy when all that you owned was taken from you,
because you knew you had something better and more lasting.

35 So do not lose the courage you had in the past, which has a
great reward. 36 You must hold on, so you can do what God

wants and receive what he has promised. [37]For in a very short time,

> “The One who is coming will come
> and will not be delayed.
>
> [38]Those who are right with me
> will live by faith.
>
> But if they turn back with fear,
> I will not be pleased with them.”
>
> Habakkuk 2:3–4

[39]But we are not those who turn back and are lost. We are people who have faith and are saved.

# November 16

## More than Meets the Eye

*Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it.*

Hebrews 11:1

Faith is trusting what the eye can't see. Eyes see the prowling lion. Faith sees Daniel's angel. Eyes see storms. Faith sees Noah's rainbow.

Eyes see giants. Faith sees Canaan.

Your eyes see your faults. Your faith sees your Savior.

Your eyes see your guilt. Your faith sees his blood.

Your eyes look in the mirror and see a sinner, a failure, a promise-breaker. But by faith you look in the mirror and see a robed prodigal bearing the ring of grace on your finger and the kiss of your Father on your face.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

### Ezekiel 23:1—24:27

#### *Samaria and Jerusalem*

23 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, a woman had two daughters. 3While they were young, they went to Egypt and became prostitutes. They let men touch and hold their breasts. 4The older girl was named Oholah, and her sister was named Oholibah. They became my wives and had sons and daughters. Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.[n]

5"While still my wife, Samaria had sexual relations with other men. She had great sexual desire for her lovers, men from Assyria. The Assyrians were warriors and 6wore blue uniforms. They were all handsome young captains and lieutenants riding on horseback. 7Samaria became a prostitute for all the important men in Assyria and made herself unclean with all the idols of everyone she desired. 8She continued the prostitution

she began in Egypt. When she was young, she had slept with men, and they touched her breasts and had sexual relations with her.

9"So I handed her over to her lovers, the Assyrians, that she wanted so badly. 10They stripped her naked and took away her sons and daughters. Then they killed her with a sword. Women everywhere began talking about how she had been punished.

11"Her sister Jerusalem saw what happened, but she became worse than her sister in her sexual desire and prostitution. 12She also desired the Assyrians, who were all soldiers in beautiful uniforms—handsome young captains and lieutenants riding horses. 13I saw that both girls were alike; both were prostitutes.

14"But Jerusalem went even further. She saw carvings of Babylonian men on a wall. They wore red 15and had belts around their waists and turbans on their heads. They all looked like chariot officers born in Babylonia. 16When she saw them, she wanted to have sexual relations with them and sent messengers to them in Babylonia. 17So these Babylonian men came and had sexual relations with her and made her unclean. After that, she became sick of them. 18But she continued her prostitution so openly that everyone knew about it. And I finally became sick of her, as I had her sister. 19But she remembered how she was a young prostitute in Egypt, so she took part in even more prostitution. 20She wanted men who behaved like animals in their sexual desire. 21In the same way you desired to do the sinful things you had done in Egypt. There men touched and held your young breasts.

## *God's Judgment on Jerusalem*

22"So, Jerusalem, this is what the Lord God says: You are tired of your lovers. So now I will make them angry with you and have them attack you from all sides. 23Men from Babylon and all Babylonia and men from Pekod, Shoa, and Koa will attack you. All the Assyrians will attack you: handsome young captains and lieutenants, all of them important men and all riding horses. 24Those men will attack with great armies and with their weapons, chariots, and wagons. They will surround you with large and small shields and with helmets. And I will give them the right to punish you, and they will give you their own kind of punishment. 25Then you will see how strong my anger can be when they punish you in their anger. They will cut off your noses and ears. They will take away your sons and daughters, and those who are left will be burned. 26They will take off your clothes and steal your jewelry. 27I will put a stop to the sinful life you began when you were in Egypt so that you will not desire it or remember Egypt anymore.

28 “This is what the LORD God says: You became tired of your
lovers, but I am going to hand you over to those men you now
hate. 29 They will treat you with hate and take away everything
you worked for, leaving you empty and naked. Everyone will
know about the sinful things you did. Your sexual sins 30 have
brought this on you. You have had sexual relations with the
nations and made yourselves unclean by worshiping their idols.
31 You did the same things your sister did, so you will get the
same punishment, like a bitter cup to drink.
32 “This is what the Lord God says:

You will drink the same cup your sister did,
and that cup is deep and wide.

Everyone will make fun of you,
because the cup is full.

33 It will make you miserable and drunk.
It is the cup of fear and ruin.
It is the cup of your sister Samaria.

34 You will drink everything in it,
and then you will smash it
and tear at your breasts.

I have spoken, says the Lord God.
35 “So this is what the Lord God says: You have forgotten me
and turned your back on me. So you will be punished for your
sexual sins.”

## *Judgment on Samaria and Jerusalem*

36 The LORD said to me: “Human, will you judge Samaria and
Jerusalem, showing them their hateful acts? 37 They are guilty of
adultery and murder. They have taken part in adultery with
their idols. They even offered our children as sacrifices in the
fire to be food for these idols. 38 They have also done this to me:
They made my Temple unclean at the same time they
dishonored my Sabbaths. 39 They sacrificed their children to
their idols. Then they entered my Temple at that very time to
dishonor it. That is what they did inside my Temple!
40 “They even sent for men from far away, who came after a
messenger was sent to them. The two sisters bathed themselves
for them, painted their eyes, and put on jewelry. 41 They sat on a

fine bed with a table set before it, on which they put my incense and my oil.

42"There was the noise of a reckless crowd in the city. Common people gathered, and drunkards were brought from the desert. They put bracelets on the wrists of the two sisters and beautiful crowns on their heads. 43Then I said about the one who was worn out by her acts of adultery, 'Let them continue their sexual sins with her. She is nothing but a prostitute.' 44They kept going to her as they would go to a prostitute. So they continued to go to Samaria and Jerusalem, these shameful women. 45But men who do right will punish them as they punish women who take part in adultery and who murder people, because they are guilty of adultery and murder.

46"This is what the Lord God says: Bring together a mob against Samaria and Jerusalem, and hand them over to be frightened and robbed. 47Let the mob kill them by throwing stones at them, and let them cut them down with their swords. Let them kill their sons and daughters and burn their houses down.

48"So I will put an end to sexual sins in the land. Then all women will be warned, and they will not do the sexual sins you have done. 49You will be punished for your sexual sins and the sin of worshiping idols. Then you will know that I am the Lord God."

## *The Pot and the Meat*

24 The LORD spoke his word to me in the ninth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month. He said: 2"Human, write down today's date, this very date. The king of Babylon has surrounded Jerusalem this very day. 3And tell a story to the people who refuse to obey me. Say to them: 'This is what the Lord God says:

Put on the pot; put it on
and pour water in it.

4Put in the pieces of meat,
the best pieces—the legs and the shoulders.

Fill it with the best bones.
5 Take the best of the flock,

and pile wood under the pot.

Boil the pieces of meat
until even the bones are cooked.

6"'This is what the Lord God says:

How terrible it will be for the city of murderers!
How terrible it will be for the rusty pot
whose rust will not come off!

Take the meat out of it, piece by piece.
Don't choose any special piece.

7"'The blood from her killings is still in the city.
She poured the blood on the bare rock.

She did not pour it on the ground
where dust would cover it.

8To stir up my anger and revenge,
I put the blood she spilled on the bare rock
so it will not be covered.

9"'So this is what the Lord God says:

How terrible it will be for the city of murderers!
I myself will pile the wood high for burning.

10Pile up the wood
and light the fire.

Finish cooking the meat.
Mix in the spices,
and let the bones burn.

11Then set the empty pot on the coals
so it may become hot and its copper sides glow.

The dirty scum stuck inside it may then melt

and its rust burn away.

12But efforts to clean the pot have failed.
Its heavy rust cannot be removed,
even in the fire.

13"'By your sinful action you have become unclean. I wanted to cleanse you, but you are still unclean. You will never be cleansed from your sin until my anger against you is carried out.
14"'I, the LORD, have spoken. The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back punishment or feel pity or change my mind. I will judge you by your ways and actions, says the Lord God.'"

## *The Death of Ezekiel's Wife*

15Then the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 16"Human, I am going to take your wife from you, the woman you look at with love. She will die suddenly, but you must not be sad or cry loudly for her or shed any tears. 17Groan silently; do not cry loudly for the dead. Tie on your turban, and put your sandals on your feet. Do not cover your face, and do not eat the food people eat when they are sad about a death."
18So I spoke to the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening. The next morning I did as I had been commanded.
19Then the people asked me, "Tell us, what do the things you are doing mean for us?"
20Then I said to them, "The LORD spoke his word to me. He said, 21'Say to the people of Israel, This is what the Lord God says: I am going to dishonor my Temple. You think it gives you strength. You are proud of it, and you look at it with love and tenderness. But your sons and daughters that you left behind in Jerusalem will fall dead by the sword. 22When that happens, you are to act as I have: you are not to cover your face, and you are not to eat the food people eat when they are sad about a death. 23Your turbans must stay on your heads, and your sandals on your feet. You must not cry loudly, but you must rot away in your sins and groan to each other. 24So Ezekiel is to be an example for you. You must do all the same things he did. When all this happens, you will know that I am the Lord God.'
25"And as for you, human, this is how it will be. I will take away the Temple that gives them strength and joy, that makes them proud. They look at it with love, and it makes them happy. And I will take away their sons and daughters also. 26At that time a person who escapes will come to you with information

for you to hear. [27]At that very time your mouth will be opened.
You will speak and be silent no more. So you will be a sign for
them, and they will know that I am the LORD."

## Psalm 127:1–5

### *All Good Things Come from God*

**A song for going up to worship. Of Solomon.**

127 If the LORD doesn't build the house, the builders are
working for nothing.

If the LORD doesn't guard the city,
the guards are watching for nothing.

[2]It is no use for you to get up early
and stay up late,

working for a living.
The LORD gives sleep to those he loves.

[3]Children are a gift from the LORD;
babies are a reward.

[4]Children who are born to a young man
are like arrows in the hand of a warrior.

[5]Happy is the man
who has his bag full of arrows.

They will not be defeated
when they fight their enemies at the city gate.

## Proverbs 28:24

24 Whoever robs father or mother
and says, “It’s not wrong,”
is just like someone who destroys things.

## Hebrews 11:1–16

### *What Is Faith?*

11 Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and
knowing that something is real even if we do not see it. 2 Faith is
the reason we remember great people who lived in the past.
3 It is by faith we understand that the whole world was made
by God’s command so what we see was made by something that
cannot be seen.
4 It was by faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than
Cain did. God said he was pleased with the gifts Abel offered
and called Abel a good man because of his faith. Abel died, but
through his faith he is still speaking.
5 It was by faith that Enoch was taken to heaven so he would
not die. He could not be found, because God had taken him
away. Before he was taken, the Scripture says that he was a
man who truly pleased God. 6 Without faith no one can please
God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that he is real and
that he rewards those who truly want to find him.
7 It was by faith that Noah heard God’s warnings about things
he could not yet see. He obeyed God and built a large boat to
save his family. By his faith, Noah showed that the world was
wrong, and he became one of those who are made right with
God through faith.
8 It was by faith Abraham obeyed God’s call to go to another
place God promised to give him. He left his own country, not
knowing where he was to go. 9 It was by faith that he lived like a
foreigner in the country God promised to give him. He lived in
tents with Isaac and Jacob, who had received that same promise
from God. 10 Abraham was waiting for the city[n] that has real
foundations—the city planned and built by God.
11 He was too old to have children, and Sarah could not have
children. It was by faith that Abraham was made able to become
a father, because he trusted God to do what he had promised.[n]
12 This man was so old he was almost dead, but from him came

as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. Like the sand on the seashore, they could not be counted.

13All these great people died in faith. They did not get the things that God promised his people, but they saw them coming far in the future and were glad. They said they were like visitors and strangers on earth. 14When people say such things, they show they are looking for a country that will be their own. 15If they had been thinking about the country they had left, they could have gone back. 16But they were waiting for a better country—a heavenly country. So God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he has prepared a city for them.

# November 17

## Beyond Imagination

*The world was not good enough for them!*

Hebrews 11:38

Rest on this earth is a false rest. Beware of those who urge you to find happiness here; you won't find it. Guard against the false physicians who promise that joy is only a diet away, a marriage away, a job away, or a transfer away …

Try this. Imagine a perfect world. Whatever that means to you, imagine it. Does that mean peace? Then envision absolute tranquility. Does a perfect world imply joy? Then create your highest happiness. Will a perfect world have love? If so, ponder a place where love has no bounds. Whatever heaven means to you, imagine it. Get it firmly fixed in your mind …

And then smile as the Father reminds you, *No one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him …*

When it comes to describing heaven, we are all happy failures.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

### Ezekiel 25:1—26:21

#### *Prophecy Against Ammon*

25 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, look
toward the people of Ammon and prophesy against them. 3Say
to them, 'Hear the word of the Lord God. This is what the Lord
God says: You were glad when my Temple was dishonored, when
the land of Israel was ruined, and when the people of Judah
were taken away as captives. 4So I am going to give you to the
people of the East to be theirs. They will set up their camps
among you and make their homes among you. They will eat your
fruit and drink your milk. 5I will make the city of Rabbah a
pasture for camels and the land of Ammon a resting place for

sheep. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 6This is what the Lord God says: You have clapped your hands and stamped your feet; you have laughed about all the insults you made against the land of Israel. 7So I will use my power against you. I will give you to the nations as if you were treasures taken in war. I will wipe you out of the lands so you will no longer be a nation, and I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'

## *Prophecy Against Moab and Edom*

8"This is what the Lord God says: 'Moab and Edom say, "The people of Judah are like all the other nations." 9So I am going to take away the cities that protect Moab's borders, the best cities in that land: Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kiriathaim. 10Then I will give Moab, along with the Ammonites, to the people of the East as their possession. Then, along with the Ammonites, Moab will not be a nation anymore. 11So I will punish the people of Moab, and they will know that I am the LORD.'

## *Prophecy Against Edom*

12"This is what the Lord God says: 'Edom took revenge on the people of Judah, and the Edomites became guilty because of it. 13So this is what the Lord God says: I will use my power against Edom, killing every human and animal in it. And I will destroy Edom all the way from Teman to Dedan as they die in battle. 14I will use my people Israel to take revenge on Edom. So the Israelites will do to Edom what my hot anger demands. Then the Edomites will know what my revenge feels like, says the Lord God.'

## *Prophecy Against Philistia*

15"This is what the Lord God says: 'The Philistines have taken revenge with hateful hearts. Because of their strong hatred, they have tried to destroy Judah. 16So this is what the Lord God says: I will use my power against the Philistines. I will kill the Kerethites, and I will destroy those people still alive on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. 17I will punish them in my anger and do great acts of revenge to them. They will know that I am the LORD when I take revenge on them.'"

## *Prophecy Against Tyre*

26 It was the eleventh year of our captivity, on the first day of the month. The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, the city of Tyre has spoken against Jerusalem: 'The city that

traded with the nations is destroyed. Now we can be the trading center. Since the city of Jerusalem is ruined, we can make money.’ 3So this is what the Lord God says: I am against you, Tyre. I will bring many nations against you, like the sea beating its waves on your island shores. 4They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers. I will also scrape away her ruins and make her a bare rock. 5Tyre will be an island where fishermen dry their nets. I have spoken, says the Lord God. The nations will steal treasures from Tyre. 6Also, her villages on the shore across from the island will be destroyed by war. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

## *Nebuchadnezzar to Attack Tyre*

7“This is what the Lord God says: I will bring a king from the north against Tyre. He is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the greatest king, with his horses, chariots, horsemen, and a great army. 8He will fight a battle and destroy your villages on the shore across from the island. He will set up devices to attack you. He will build a road of earth to the top of the walls. He will raise his shields against you. 9He will bring logs to pound through your city walls, and he will break down your towers with his iron bars. 10His horses will be so many that they will cover you with their dust. Your walls will shake at the noise of horsemen, wagons, and chariots. The king of Babylon will enter your city gates as men enter a city where the walls are broken through. 11The hoofs of his horses will run over your streets. He will kill your army with the sword, and your strong pillars will fall down to the ground. 12Also, his men will take away your riches and will steal the things you sell. They will break down your walls and destroy your nice houses. They will throw your stones, wood, and trash into the sea. 13So I will stop your songs; the music of your harps will not be heard anymore. 14I will make you a bare rock, and you will be a place for drying fishing nets. You will not be built again, because I, the LORD, have spoken, says the Lord God.

15“This is what the Lord God says to Tyre: The people who live along the seacoast will shake with fear when they hear about your defeat. Those of you who are injured and dying will groan. 16Then all the leaders of the seacoast will get down from their thrones, take off their beautiful needlework clothes, and show how afraid they are. They will sit on the ground and tremble all the time. When they see you, they will be shocked. 17They will begin singing a funeral song about you and will say to you:

‘Tyre, you famous city, you have been destroyed!

You have lost your sea power!

You and your people
had great power on the seas.

You made everyone around you
afraid of you.

18 Now the people who live by the coast tremble,
now that you have fallen.

The islands of the sea
are afraid because you have been defeated.'

19 "This is what the Lord God says: I will make you an empty city, like cities that have no people living in them. I will bring the deep ocean waters over you, and the Mediterranean Sea will cover you. 20 At that time I will send you down to the place of the dead to join those who died long ago. I will make you live with the dead below the earth in places that are like old ruins. You will not come back from there or have any place in the world of the living again. 21 Other people will be afraid of what happened to you, and it will be the end of you. People will look for you, but they will never find you again, says the Lord God."

## Psalm 128:1–6

### *The Happy Home*

**A song for going up to worship.**

128 Happy are those who respect the LORD and obey him.

2 You will enjoy what you work for,
and you will be blessed with good things.

3 Your wife will give you many children,

like a vine that produces much fruit.

Your children will bring you much good,
like olive branches that produce many olives.

4This is how the man who respects the LORD
will be blessed.

5May the LORD bless you from Mount Zion;
may you enjoy the good things of Jerusalem all your life.

6May you see your grandchildren.

Let there be peace in Israel.

## Proverbs 28:25

25A greedy person causes trouble,
but the one who trusts the LORD will succeed.

## Hebrews 11:17–40

17It was by faith that Abraham, when God tested him, offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. God made the promises to Abraham, but Abraham was ready to offer his own son as a sacrifice. 18God had said, "The descendants I promised you will be from Isaac."[n] 19Abraham believed that God could raise the dead, and really, it was as if Abraham got Isaac back from death.

20It was by faith that Isaac blessed the future of Jacob and Esau. 21It was by faith that Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each one of Joseph's sons. Then he worshiped as he leaned on the top of his walking stick.

22It was by faith that Joseph, while he was dying, spoke about the Israelites leaving Egypt and gave instructions about what to do with his body.

23It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three

months after he was born. They saw that Moses was a beautiful baby, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's order.

[24]It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of the king of Egypt's daughter. [25]He chose to suffer with God's people instead of enjoying sin for a short time. [26]He thought it was better to suffer for the Christ than to have all the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking for God's reward. [27]It was by faith that Moses left Egypt and was not afraid of the king's anger. Moses continued strong as if he could see the God that no one can see. [28]It was by faith that Moses prepared the Passover and spread the blood on the doors so the one who brings death would not kill the firstborn sons of Israel.

[29]It was by faith that the people crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land. But when the Egyptians tried it, they were drowned.

[30]It was by faith that the walls of Jericho fell after the people had marched around them for seven days.

[31]It was by faith that Rahab, the prostitute, welcomed the spies and was not killed with those who refused to obey God.

[32]Do I need to give more examples? I do not have time to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. [33]Through their faith they defeated kingdoms. They did what was right, received God's promises, and shut the mouths of lions. [34]They stopped great fires and were saved from being killed with swords. They were weak, and yet were made strong. They were powerful in battle and defeated other armies. [35]Women received their dead relatives raised back to life. Others were tortured and refused to accept their freedom so they could be raised from the dead to a better life. [36]Some were laughed at and beaten. Others were put in chains and thrown into prison. [37]They were stoned to death, they were cut in half,[n] and they were killed with swords. Some wore the skins of sheep and goats. They were poor, abused, and treated badly. [38]The world was not good enough for them! They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the earth.

[39]All these people are known for their faith, but none of them received what God had promised. [40]God planned to give us something better so that they would be made perfect, but only together with us.

# November 18

## Look at the Son

*So let us run the race that is before us and never give up … Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect.*

Hebrews 12:1–2

More mornings than not I drag myself out of bed and onto the street … I run because I don't like cardiologists. Since heart disease runs in our family, I run in our neighborhood. As the sun is rising, I am running. And as I am running, my body is groaning. It doesn't want to cooperate. My knee hurts. My hip is stiff. My ankles complain …

Things hurt. And as things hurt, I've learned that I have three options. Go home. (Denalyn would laugh at me.) Meditate on my hurts until I start imagining I'm having chest pains. (Pleasant thought.) Or I can keep running and watch the sun come up … If I watch God's world go from dark to golden, guess what? The same happens to my attitude. The pain passes and the joints loosen … Everything improves as I fix my eyes on the sun.

Wasn't that the counsel found in Hebrews—"look only to Jesus"?

from *Traveling Light*

### Ezekiel 27:1—28:26

### *A Funeral Song for Tyre*

27 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, sing a
funeral song for the city of Tyre. 3Speak to Tyre, which has
ports for the Mediterranean Sea and is a place for trade for the
people of many lands along the seacoast. 'This is what the Lord
God says:

Tyre, you have said,
“I am like a beautiful ship.”

4You were at home on the high seas.
Your builders made your beauty perfect.

5They made all your boards
of fir trees from Mount Hermon.

They took a cedar tree from Lebanon
to make a ship’s mast for you.

6They made your oars
from oak trees from Bashan.

They made your deck
from cypress trees from the coast of Cyprus
and set ivory into it.

7Your sail of linen with designs sewed on it came from Egypt
and became like a flag for you.

Your cloth shades over the deck were blue and purple
and came from the island of Cyprus.

8Men from Sidon and Arvad used oars to row you.
Tyre, your skilled men were the sailors on your deck.

9Workers of Byblos were with you,
putting caulk[n] in your ship’s seams.

All the ships of the sea and their sailors
came alongside to trade with you.

10“‘Men of Persia, Lydia, and Put
were warriors in your navy

and hung their shields and helmets on your sides.
They made you look beautiful.

11 Men of Arvad and Cilicia
guarded your city walls all around.

Men of Gammad
were in your watchtowers

and hung their shields around your walls.
They made your beauty perfect.

12 "'People of Tarshish became traders for you because of your great wealth. They traded your goods for silver, iron, tin, and lead.
13 "'People of Greece, Tubal, and Meshech became merchants for you. They traded your goods for slaves and items of bronze.
14 "'People of Beth Togarmah traded your goods for work horses, war horses, and mules.
15 "'People of Rhodes became merchants for you, selling your goods on many coastlands. They brought back ivory tusks and valuable black wood as your payment.
16 "'People of Aram became traders for you, because you had so many good things to sell. They traded your goods for turquoise, purple cloth, cloth with designs sewed on, fine linen, coral, and rubies.
17 "'People of Judah and Israel became merchants for you. They traded your goods for wheat from Minnith, and for honey, olive oil, and balm.
18–19 "'People of Damascus became traders for you because you have many good things and great wealth. They traded your goods for wine from Helbon, wool from Zahar, and barrels of wine from Izal. They received wrought iron, cassia, and sugar cane in payment for your good things.
20 "'People of Dedan became merchants for you, trading saddle blankets for riding.
21 "'People of Arabia and all the rulers of Kedar became traders for you. They received lambs, male sheep, and goats in payment for you.
22 "'The merchants of Sheba and Raamah became merchants for you. They traded your goods for all the best spices, valuable gems, and gold.
23 "'People of Haran, Canneh, Eden, and the traders of Sheba, Asshur, and Kilmad became merchants for you. 24 They were paid with the best clothes, blue cloth, cloth with designs sewed

on, carpets of many colors, and tightly wound ropes.

25 “‘Trading ships
carried the things you sold.

You were like a ship full of heavy cargo
in the middle of the sea.

26 The men who rowed you
brought you out into the high seas,

but the east wind broke you to pieces
in the middle of the sea.

27 Your wealth, your trade, your goods,
your seamen, your sailors, your workers,

your traders, your warriors,
and everyone else on board

sank into the sea
on the day your ship was wrecked.

28 The people on the shore shake with fear
when your sailors cry out.

29 All the men who row
leave their ships;

the seamen and the sailors of other ships
stand on the shore.

30 They cry loudly about you;
they cry very much.

They throw dust on their heads
and roll in ashes to show they are sad.

31 They shave their heads for you,
and they put on rough cloth to show they are upset.

They cry and sob for you;
they cry loudly.

32 And in their loud crying
they sing a funeral song for you:

“No one was ever destroyed like Tyre,
surrounded by the sea.”

33 When the goods you traded went out over the seas,
you met the needs of many nations.

With your great wealth and goods,
you made kings of the earth rich.

34 But now you are broken by the sea
and have sunk to the bottom.

Your goods and all the people on board
have gone down with you.

35 All those who live along the shore
are shocked by what happened to you.

Their kings are terribly afraid,
and their faces show their fear.

36 The traders among the nations hiss at you.
You have come to a terrible end,
and you are gone forever.’”

## *Prophecy Against the King of Tyre*

28 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2“Human, say to the
ruler of Tyre: ‘This is what the Lord God says:

Because you are proud,
you say, “I am a god.

I sit on the throne of a god
in the middle of the seas.”

You think you are as wise as a god,
but you are a human, not a god.

3You think you are wiser than Daniel.
You think you can find out all secrets.

4Through your wisdom and understanding
you have made yourself rich.

You have gained gold and silver
and have saved it in your storerooms.

5Through your great skill in trading,
you have made your riches grow.

You are too proud
because of your riches.

6“‘So this is what the Lord God says:

You think you are wise
like a god,

7but I will bring foreign people against you,
the cruelest nation.

They will pull out their swords
and destroy all that your wisdom has built,
and they will dishonor your greatness.

8 They will kill you;
you will die a terrible death
like those who are killed at sea.

9 While they are killing you,
you will not be able to say anymore, “I am a god.”

You will be only a human, not a god,
when your murderers kill you.

10 You will die like an unclean person;
foreigners will kill you.

I have spoken, says the Lord God.’”

11 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 12 “Human, sing a funeral song for the king of Tyre. Say to him: ‘This is what the Lord God says:

You were an example of what was perfect,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

13 You had a wonderful life,
as if you were in Eden, the garden of God.

Every valuable gem was on you:
ruby, topaz, and emerald,
yellow quartz, onyx, and jasper,
sapphire, turquoise, and chrysolite.

Your jewelry was made of gold.
It was prepared on the day you were created.

14 I appointed a living creature to guard you.

I put you on the holy mountain of God.
You walked among the gems that shined like fire.

15 Your life was right and good
from the day you were created,
until evil was found in you.

16 Because you traded with countries far away,
you learned to be cruel, and you sinned.

So I threw you down in disgrace from the mountain of God.
And the living creature who guarded you
forced you out from among the gems that shined like fire.

17 You became too proud
because of your beauty.

You ruined your wisdom
because of your greatness.

I threw you down to the ground.
Your example taught a lesson to other kings.

18 You dishonored your places of worship
through your many sins and dishonest trade.

So I set on fire the place where you lived,
and the fire burned you up.

I turned you into ashes on the ground
for all those watching to see.

19 All the nations who knew you
are shocked about you.

Your punishment was so terrible,
and you are gone forever.’”

## *Prophecy Against Sidon*

[20]The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: [21]"Human, look toward the city of Sidon and prophesy against her. [22]Say: 'This is what the Lord God says:

I am against you, Sidon,
and I will show my glory among you.

People will know that I am the LORD
when I have punished Sidon;
I will show my holiness by defeating her.

[23]I will send diseases to Sidon,
and blood will flow in her streets.

Those who are wounded in Sidon will fall dead,
attacked from all sides.

Then they will know that I am the LORD.

## *God Will Help Israel*

[24]"'No more will neighboring nations be like thorny branches or sharp stickers to hurt Israel. Then they will know that I am the Lord God.

[25]"'This is what the Lord God says: I will gather the people of Israel from the nations where they are scattered. I will show my holiness when the nations see what I do for my people. Then they will live in their own land—the land I gave to my servant Jacob. [26]They will live safely in the land and will build houses and plant vineyards. They will live in safety after I have punished all the nations around who hate them. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God.'"

# Psalm 129:1–4

## *A Prayer Against the Enemies*

**A song for going up to worship.**

129 They have treated me badly all my life.(Let Israel repeat this.)

2They have treated me badly all my life,
but they have not defeated me.

3Like farmers plowing, they plowed over my back,
making long wounds.

4But the LORD does what is right;
he has set me free from those wicked people.

## Proverbs 28:26

26Those who trust in themselves are foolish,
but those who live wisely will be kept safe.

## Hebrews 12:1–29

### *Follow Jesus' Example*

12 We are surrounded by a great cloud of people whose lives tell us what faith means. So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back. 2Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God's throne. 3Think about Jesus' example. He held on while wicked people were doing evil things to him. So do not get tired and stop trying.

## *God Is like a Father*

4 You are struggling against sin, but your struggles have not
yet caused you to be killed. 5 You have forgotten the
encouraging words that call you his children:

"My child, don't think the Lord's discipline is worth nothing,
and don't stop trying when he corrects you.

6 The Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes everyone he accepts as his child."

Proverbs 3:11–12

7 So hold on through your sufferings, because they are like a
father's discipline. God is treating you as children. All children
are disciplined by their fathers. 8 If you are never disciplined
(and every child must be disciplined), you are not true children.
9 We have all had fathers here on earth who disciplined us, and
we respected them. So it is even more important that we accept
discipline from the Father of our spirits so we will have life.
10 Our fathers on earth disciplined us for a short time in the way
they thought was best. But God disciplines us to help us, so we
can become holy as he is. 11 We do not enjoy being disciplined. It
is painful at the time, but later, after we have learned from it,
we have peace, because we start living in the right way.

## *Be Careful How You Live*

12 You have become weak, so make yourselves strong again.
13 Keep on the right path, so the weak will not stumble but
rather be strengthened.

14 Try to live in peace with all people, and try to live free from
sin. Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord. 15 Be
careful that no one fails to receive God's grace and begins to
cause trouble among you. A person like that can ruin many of
you. 16 Be careful that no one takes part in sexual sin or is like
Esau and never thinks about God. As the oldest son, Esau would
have received everything from his father, but he sold all that for
a single meal. 17 You remember that after Esau did this, he
wanted to get his father's blessing, but his father refused. Esau
could find no way to change what he had done, even though he
wanted the blessing so much that he cried.

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and
that is burning with fire. You have not come to darkness,
sadness, and storms. 19 You have not come to the noise of a
trumpet or to the sound of a voice like the one the people of

Israel heard and begged not to hear another word. 20They did
not want to hear the command: “If anything, even an animal,
touches the mountain, it must be put to death with stones.”[n]
21What they saw was so terrible that Moses said, “I am shaking
with fear.”[n]

22But you have come to Mount Zion,[n] to the city of the living
God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands of
angels gathered together with joy. 23You have come to the
meeting of God’s firstborn[n] children whose names are written in
heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all people, and to
the spirits of good people who have been made perfect. 24You
have come to Jesus, the One who brought the new agreement
from God to his people, and you have come to the sprinkled
blood[n] that has a better message than the blood of Abel.[n]

25So be careful and do not refuse to listen when God speaks.
Others refused to listen to him when he warned them on earth,
and they did not escape. So it will be worse for us if we refuse
to listen to God who warns us from heaven. 26When he spoke
before, his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised,
“Once again I will shake not only the earth but also the
heavens.”[n] 27The words “once again” clearly show us that
everything that was made—things that can be shaken—will be
destroyed. Only the things that cannot be shaken will remain.

28So let us be thankful, because we have a kingdom that
cannot be shaken. We should worship God in a way that pleases
him with respect and fear, 29because our God is like a fire that
burns things up.

# November 19

## The Present-Tense Christ

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Hebrews 13:8

“I am God’s Son” (John 10:36). “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

“I am the true vine” (John 15:1).

The present-tense Christ. He never says, “I was.” We do. We do because “we were.”

We were younger, faster, prettier. Prone to be people of the past tense, we reminisce. Not God. Unwavering in strength, he need never say, “I was.”

From the center of the storm, the unwavering Jesus shouts, “I am.” Tall in the Trade Tower wreckage. Bold against the Galilean waves. ICU, battlefield, boardroom, prison cell, or maternity ward—whatever your storm, “I am.”

from *Next Door Savior*

### Ezekiel 29:1—30:26

#### *Prophecy Against Egypt*

29 It was the tenth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on
the twelfth day of the month. The LORD spoke his word to me,
saying: 2“Human, look toward the king of Egypt, and prophesy
against him and all Egypt. 3Say: ‘This is what the Lord God says:

I am against you, king of Egypt.
You are like a great crocodile that lies in the Nile River.

You say, “The Nile is mine;
I made it for myself.”

4But I will put hooks in your jaws,
and I will make the fish of the Nile stick to your sides.

I will pull you up out of your rivers,
with all the fish sticking to your sides.

5I will leave you in the desert,
you and all the fish from your rivers.

You will fall onto the ground;
you will not be picked up or buried.

I have given you to the wild animals
and to the birds of the sky for food.

6Then all the people who live in Egypt will know that I am the LORD.

“‘Israel tried to lean on you for help, but you were like a crutch made out of a weak stalk of grass. 7When their hands grabbed you, you splintered and tore open their shoulders. When they leaned on you, you broke and made all their backs twist.

8“‘So this is what the Lord God says: I will cause an enemy to attack you and kill your people and animals. 9Egypt will become an empty desert. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

“‘Because you said, “The Nile River is mine, and I have made it,” 10I am against you and your rivers. I will destroy the land of Egypt and make it an empty desert from Migdol in the north to Aswan in the south, all the way to the border of Cush. 11No person or animal will walk through it, and no one will live in Egypt for forty years. 12I will make the land of Egypt the most deserted country of all. Her cities will be the most deserted of all ruined cities for forty years. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, spreading them among the countries.

13“‘This is what the Lord God says: After forty years I will gather Egypt from the nations where they have been scattered. 14I will bring back the Egyptian captives and make them return to southern Egypt, to the land they came from. They will become a weak kingdom there. 15It will be the weakest kingdom, and it will never again rule other nations. I will make

it so weak it will never again rule over the nations. 16The Israelites will never again depend on Egypt. Instead, Egypt's punishment will remind the Israelites of their sin in turning to Egypt for help. Then they will know that I am the Lord God.'"

## *Egypt Is Given to Babylon*

17It was the twenty-seventh year of our captivity, in the first month, on the first day of the month. The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 18"Human, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army fight hard against Tyre. Every soldier's head was rubbed bare, and every shoulder was rubbed raw. But Nebuchadnezzar and his army gained nothing from fighting Tyre. 19So this is what the Lord God says: I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He will take away Egypt's people and its wealth and its treasures as pay for his army. 20I am giving Nebuchadnezzar the land of Egypt as a reward for working hard for me, says the Lord God.

21"At that time I will make Israel grow strong again, and I will let you, Ezekiel, speak to them. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

## *Egypt Will Be Punished*

30 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, prophesy and say, 'This is what the Lord God says:

Cry and say,
"The terrible day is coming."

3The day is near;
the LORD's day of judging is near.

It is a cloudy day
and a time when the nations will be judged.

4An enemy will attack Egypt,
and Cush will tremble with fear.

When the killing begins in Egypt,
her wealth will be taken away,
and her foundations will be torn down.

[5]Cush, Put, Lydia, Arabia, Libya, and some of my people who had made an agreement with Egypt will fall dead in war.

[6]"'This is what the LORD says:

Those who fight on Egypt's side will fall.
The power she is proud of will be lost.

The people in Egypt will fall dead in war
from Migdol in the north to Aswan in the south,
says the Lord God.

[7]They will be the most deserted lands.
Egypt's cities will be the worst of cities that lie in ruins.

[8]Then they will know that I am the LORD
when I set fire to Egypt
and when all those nations on her side are crushed.

[9]"'At that time I will send messengers in ships to frighten Cush, which now feels safe. The people of Cush will tremble with fear when Egypt is punished. And that time is sure to come.

[10]"'This is what the Lord God says:

I will destroy great numbers of people in Egypt
through the power of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

[11]Nebuchadnezzar and his army,
the cruelest army of any nation,
will be brought in to destroy the land.

They will pull out their swords against Egypt
and will fill the land with those they kill.

[12]I will make the streams of the Nile River become dry land,
and then I will sell the land to evil people.

I will destroy the land and everything in it
through the power of foreigners.

I, the LORD, have spoken.

## *Egypt's Idols Are Destroyed*

13 "'This is what the Lord God says:

I will destroy the idols
and take away the statues of gods from the city of Memphis.

There will no longer be a leader in Egypt,
and I will spread fear through the land of Egypt.

14 I will make southern Egypt empty
and start a fire in Zoan
and punish Thebes.

15 And I will pour out my anger against Pelusium,
the strong place of Egypt.
I will destroy great numbers of people in Thebes.

16 I will set fire to Egypt.
Pelusium will be in great pain.

The walls of Thebes will be broken open,
and Memphis will have troubles every day.

17 The young men of Heliopolis and Bubastis
will fall dead in war,
and the people will be taken away as captives.

18 In Tahpanhes the day will be dark
when I break Egypt's power.
Then she will no longer be proud of her power.

A cloud will cover Egypt,
and her villages will be captured and taken away.

[19]So I will punish Egypt,
and they will know I am the LORD.’”

## *Egypt Becomes Weak*

[20]It was in the eleventh year of our captivity, in the first month, on the seventh day of the month. The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: [21]“Human, I have broken the powerful arm of the king of Egypt. It has not been tied up, so it will not get well. It has not been wrapped with a bandage, so it will not be strong enough to hold a sword in war. [22]So this is what the Lord God says: I am against the king of Egypt. I will break his arms, both the strong arm and the broken arm, and I will make the sword fall from his hand. [23]I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, spreading them among the countries. [24]I will make the arms of the king of Babylon strong and put my sword in his hand. But I will break the arms of the king of Egypt. Then when he faces the king of Babylon, he will cry out in pain like a dying person. [25]So I will make the arms of the king of Babylon strong, but the arms of the king of Egypt will fall. Then people will know that I am the LORD when I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he uses it in war against Egypt. [26]Then I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, spreading them among the countries. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

# Psalm 129:5–8

[5]Let those who hate Jerusalem
be turned back in shame.

[6]Let them be like the grass on the roof
that dries up before it has grown.

[7]There is not enough of it to fill a hand
or to make into a bundle to fill one’s arms.

[8]Let those who pass by them not say,
“May the LORD bless you.
We bless you by the power of the LORD.”

## Proverbs 28:27

27 Whoever gives to the poor will have everything he needs,
but the one who ignores the poor will receive many curses.

## Hebrews 13:1–25

13 Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. 2 Remember to welcome strangers, because some who have done this have welcomed angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those who are in prison as if you were in prison with them. Remember those who are suffering as if you were suffering with them.

4 Marriage should be honored by everyone, and husband and wife should keep their marriage pure. God will judge as guilty those who take part in sexual sins. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. God has said,

"I will never leave you;
I will never abandon you."

Deuteronomy 31:6

6 So we can be sure when we say,

"I will not be afraid, because the Lord is my helper.
People can't do anything to me."

Psalm 118:6

7 Remember your leaders who taught God's message to you. Remember how they lived and died, and copy their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

9 Do not let all kinds of strange teachings lead you into the wrong way. Your hearts should be strengthened by God's grace, not by obeying rules about foods, which do not help those who obey them.

10 We have a sacrifice, but the priests who serve in the Holy Tent cannot eat from it. 11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place where he offers this blood for

sins. But the bodies of the animals are burned outside the camp.
12So Jesus also suffered outside the city to make his people holy
with his own blood. 13So let us go to Jesus outside the camp,
holding on as he did when we are abused.

14Here on earth we do not have a city that lasts forever, but
we are looking for the city that we will have in the future. 15So
through Jesus let us always offer to God our sacrifice of praise,
coming from lips that speak his name. 16Do not forget to do
good to others, and share with them, because such sacrifices
please God.

17Obey your leaders and act under their authority. They are
watching over you, because they are responsible for your souls.
Obey them so that they will do this work with joy, not sadness.
It will not help you to make their work hard.

18Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience,
because we always want to do the right thing. 19I especially beg
you to pray so that God will send me back to you soon.

20–21I pray that the God of peace will give you every good
thing you need so you can do what he wants. God raised from
the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep,
because of the blood of his death. His blood began the eternal
agreement that God made with his people. I pray that God will
do in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, and to him be
glory forever and ever. Amen.

22My brothers and sisters, I beg you to listen patiently to this
message I have written to encourage you, because it is not very
long. 23I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been
let out of prison. If he arrives soon, we will both come to see
you.

24Greet all your leaders and all of God’s people. Those from
Italy send greetings to you.

25Grace be with you all.

# November 20

## Think of Home

*When you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience.*

James 1:2–3

God didn't say, "*If* you have many kinds of troubles" ... he said, "*When* you have many kinds of troubles ..." Troubles are part of the package. Betrayals are part of our troubles. Don't be surprised when betrayals come. Don't look for fairness here—look instead where Jesus looked.

While going through hell, Jesus kept his eyes on heaven. While surrounded by enemies he kept his mind on his father. While abandoned on earth, he kept his heart on home. "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, the Powerful One, and coming on clouds in the sky" (Matthew 26:64).

When all of earth turns against you, all of heaven turns toward you. To keep your balance in a crooked world, ... think of home.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Ezekiel 31:1—32:32

### *A Cedar Tree*

31 It was in the eleventh year of our captivity, in the third month, on the first day of the month. The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, say to the king of Egypt and his people:

'No one is like you in your greatness.

[3]Assyria was once like a cedar tree in Lebanon
with beautiful branches that shaded the forest.

It was very tall;
its top was among the clouds.

[4]Much water made the tree grow;
the deep springs made it tall.

Rivers flowed
around the bottom of the tree

and sent their streams
to all other trees in the countryside.

[5]So the tree was taller
than all the other trees in the countryside.

Its limbs became long and big
because of so much water.

[6]All the birds of the sky
made their nests in the tree’s limbs.

And all the wild animals
gave birth under its branches.

All great nations
lived in the tree’s shade.

[7]So the tree was great and beautiful,
with its long branches,
because its roots reached down to much water.

[8]The cedar trees in the garden of God
were not as great as it was.

The pine trees
did not have such great limbs.

The plane trees
did not have such branches.

No tree in the garden of God
was as beautiful as this tree.

9 I made it beautiful
with many branches,

and all the trees of Eden in the garden of God
wanted to be like it.

10 "'So this is what the Lord God says: The tree grew tall. Its
top reached the clouds, and it became proud of its height. 11 So I
handed it over to a mighty ruler of the nations for him to punish
it. Because it was evil, I got rid of it. 12 The cruelest foreign
nation cut it down and left it. The tree's branches fell on the
mountains and in all the valleys, and its broken limbs were in all
the ravines of the land. All the nations of the earth left the
shade of that tree. 13 The birds of the sky live on the fallen tree.
The wild animals live among the tree's fallen branches. 14 So the
trees that grow by the water will not be proud to be tall; they
will not put their tops among the clouds. None of the trees that
are watered well will grow that tall, because they all are meant
to die and go under the ground. They will be with people who
have died and have gone down to the place of the dead.
15 "'This is what the Lord God says: On the day when the tree
went down to the place of the dead, I made the deep springs cry
loudly. I covered them and held back their rivers, and the great
waters stopped flowing. I dressed Lebanon in black to show her
sadness about the great tree, and all the trees in the
countryside were sad about it. 16 I made the nations shake with
fear at the sound of the tree falling when I brought it down to
the place of the dead. It went to join those who have gone down
to the grave. Then all the trees of Eden and the best trees of
Lebanon, all the well-watered trees, were comforted in the
place of the dead below the earth. 17 These trees had also gone
down with the great tree to the place of the dead. They joined
those who were killed in war and those among the nations who
had lived under the great tree's shade.
18 "'So no tree in Eden is equal to you, Egypt, in greatness

and honor, but you will go down to join the trees of Eden in the place below the earth. You will lie among unclean people, with those who were killed in war.

"'This is about the king of Egypt and all his people, says the Lord God.'"

## *A Funeral Song*

32 It was in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month. The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, sing a funeral song about the king of Egypt. Say to him:

'You are like a young lion among the nations.
You are like a crocodile in the seas.

You splash around in your streams
and stir up the water with your feet,
making the rivers muddy.

3"'This is what the Lord God says:

I will spread my net over you,
and I will use a large group of people
to pull you up in my net.

4Then I will throw you on the land
dropping you onto the ground.

I will let the birds of the sky rest on you
and all the animals of the earth eat you until they are full.

5I will scatter your flesh on the mountains
and fill the valleys with what is left of you.

6I will drench the land with your flowing blood
as far as the mountains,
and the ravines will be full of your flesh.

7 When I make you disappear,
I will cover the sky and make the stars dark.

I will cover the sun with a cloud,
and the moon will not shine.

8 I will make all the shining lights in the sky
become dark over you;
I will bring darkness over your land,
says the Lord God.

9 I will cause many people to be afraid
when I bring you as a captive into other nations,
to lands you have not known.

10 I will cause many people to be shocked about you.
Their kings will tremble with fear because of you
when I swing my sword in front of them.

They will shake every moment
on the day you fall;
each king will be afraid for his own life.

11 "'So this is what the Lord God says:

The sword of the king of Babylon
will attack you.

12 I will cause your people to fall
by the swords of mighty soldiers,
the most terrible in the world.

They will destroy the pride of Egypt
and all its people.

13 I will also destroy all Egypt's cattle
which live alongside much water.

The foot of a human will not stir the water,
and the hoofs of cattle will not muddy it anymore.

14 So I will let the Egyptians' water become clear.
I will cause their rivers to run as smoothly as olive oil,
says the Lord God.

15 When I make the land of Egypt empty
and take everything that is in the land,

when I destroy all those who live in Egypt,
then they will know that I am the LORD.'

16 "This is the funeral song people will sing for Egypt. The women of the nations will sing it; they will sing a funeral song for Egypt and all its people, says the Lord God."

## *Egypt to Be Destroyed*

17 It was in the twelfth year of our captivity, on the fifteenth day of the month. The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 18 "Human, cry for the people of Egypt. Bring down Egypt, together with the women of the powerful nations; bring them down to the place of the dead below the earth to join those who go to the place of the dead. 19 Say to them: 'Are you more beautiful than others? Go lie down in death with those who are unclean.' 20 The Egyptians will fall among those killed in war. The sword is ready; the enemy will drag Egypt and all her people away. 21 From the place of the dead the leaders of the mighty ones will speak about the king of Egypt and the nations which help him: 'The unclean, those killed in war, have come down here and lie dead.'

22 "Assyria and all its army lie dead there. The graves of their soldiers are all around. All were killed in war, 23 and their graves were put in the deepest parts of the place of the dead. Assyria's army lies around its grave. When they lived on earth, they frightened people, but now all of them have been killed in war.

24 "The nation of Elam is there with all its army around its grave. All of them were killed in war. They had frightened people on earth and were unclean, so they went down to the lowest parts of the place of the dead. They must carry their shame with those who have gone down to the place of the dead. 25 A bed has been made for Elam with all those killed in war. The graves of her soldiers are all around her. All Elam's people are unclean, killed in war. They frightened people when they lived

on earth, but now they must carry their shame with those who have gone down to the place of the dead. Their graves are with the rest who were killed.

26"Meshech and Tubal are there with the graves of all their soldiers around them. All of them are unclean and have been killed in war. They also frightened people when they lived on earth. 27But they are not buried with the other soldiers who were killed in battle long ago, those who went with their weapons of war to the place of the dead. These soldiers had their swords laid under their heads and their shields on their bodies. These mighty soldiers used to frighten people when they lived on earth.

28"You, king of Egypt, will be broken and lie among those who are unclean, who were killed in war.

29"Edom is there also, with its kings and all its leaders. They were mighty, but now they lie in death with those killed in war, with those who are unclean, with those who have gone down to the place of the dead.

30"All the rulers of the north and all the Sidonians are there. Their strength frightened people, but they have gone down in shame with those who were killed. They are unclean, lying with those killed in war. They carry their shame with those who have gone down to the place of the dead.

31"The king of Egypt and his army will see these who have been killed in war. Then he will be comforted for all his soldiers killed in war, says the Lord God. 32I made people afraid of the king of Egypt while he lived on earth. But he and all his people will lie among those who are unclean, who were killed in war, says the Lord God."

## Psalm 130:1–4

### *A Prayer for Mercy*

**A song for going up to worship.**

130 LORD, I am in great trouble, so I call out to you.

2Lord, hear my voice;
listen to my prayer for help.

3 LORD, if you punished people for all their sins,
no one would be left, Lord.

4 But you forgive us,
so you are respected.

## Proverbs 28:28

28 When the wicked get control, everybody hides,
but when they die, good people do well.

## James 1:1–27

1 From James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.
To all of God's people who are scattered everywhere in the world:
Greetings.

### *Faith and Wisdom*

2 My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, 3 because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience. 4 Let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do. Then you will be perfect and complete and will have everything you need. 5 But if any of you needs wisdom, you should ask God for it. He is generous to everyone and will give you wisdom without criticizing you. 6 But when you ask God, you must believe and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind. 7–8 Such doubters are thinking two different things at the same time, and they cannot decide about anything they do. They should not think they will receive anything from the Lord.

### *True Riches*

9 Believers who are poor should take pride that God has made them spiritually rich. 10 Those who are rich should take pride that God has shown them that they are spiritually poor. The rich will die like a wild flower in the grass. 11 The sun rises with

burning heat and dries up the plants. The flower falls off, and its beauty is gone. In the same way the rich will die while they are still taking care of business.

## *Temptation Is Not from God*

12When people are tempted and still continue strong, they should be happy. After they have proved their faith, God will reward them with life forever. God promised this to all those who love him. 13When people are tempted, they should not say, "God is tempting me." Evil cannot tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone. 14But people are tempted when their own evil desire leads them away and traps them. 15This desire leads to sin, and then the sin grows and brings death.

16My dear brothers and sisters, do not be fooled about this. 17Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, who does not change like their shifting shadows. 18God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things he made.

## *Listening and Obeying*

19My dear brothers and sisters, always be willing to listen and slow to speak. Do not become angry easily, 20because anger will not help you live the right kind of life God wants. 21So put out of your life every evil thing and every kind of wrong. Then in gentleness accept God's teaching that is planted in your hearts, which can save you.

22Do what God's teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing, you are fooling yourselves. 23Those who hear God's teaching and do nothing are like people who look at themselves in a mirror. 24They see their faces and then go away and quickly forget what they looked like. 25But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy.

## *The True Way to Worship God*

26People who think they are religious but say things they should not say are just fooling themselves. Their "religion" is worth nothing. 27Religion that God accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans or widows who need help, and keeping yourself free from the world's evil influence.

# November 21

## Do Something

*Faith that does nothing is dead!*

James 2:26

Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. Faith is the belief that God will do what is right. God is always near and always available. Just waiting for your touch. So let him know. Demonstrate your devotion:

Write a letter.
Ask forgiveness.
Be baptized.
Feed a hungry person.
Pray.
Teach.
Go.

Do something that demonstrates faith. For faith with no effort is no faith at all. *God will respond*. He has never rejected a genuine gesture of faith. Never.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Ezekiel 33:1—34:31

#### *Ezekiel Is Watchman for Israel*

33 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, speak to your people and say to them: 'Suppose I bring a war against a land. The people of the land may choose one of their men and make him their watchman. 3When he sees the enemy coming to attack the land, he will blow the trumpet and warn the people. 4If they hear the sound of the trumpet but do nothing, the enemy will come and kill them. They will be responsible for their own deaths. 5They heard the sound of the trumpet but didn't do anything. So they are to blame for their own deaths. If they had done something, they would have saved their own

lives. [6]But if the watchman sees the enemy coming to attack
and does not blow the trumpet, the people will not be warned.
Then if the enemy comes and kills any of them, they have died
because of their own sin. But I will punish the watchman for
their deaths.'

[7]"You, human, are the one I have made a watchman for
Israel. If you hear a word from my mouth, you must warn them
for me. [8]Suppose I say to the wicked: 'Wicked people, you will
surely die,' but you don't speak to warn the wicked to stop
doing evil. Then they will die because they were sinners, but I
will punish you for their deaths. [9]But if you warn the wicked to
stop doing evil and they do not stop, they will die because they
were sinners. But you have saved your life.

[10]"So you, human, say to Israel: 'You have said: Surely our
law-breaking and sins are hurting us. They will kill us. What can
we do so we will live?' [11]Say to them: 'The Lord God says: As
surely as I live, I do not want any who are wicked to die. I want
them to stop doing evil and live. Stop! Stop your wicked ways!
You don't want to die, do you, people of Israel?'

[12]"Human, say to your people: 'The goodness of those who
do right will not save them when they sin. The evil of wicked
people will not cause them to be punished if they stop doing it.
If good people sin, they will not be able to live by the good they
did earlier.' [13]If I tell good people, 'You will surely live,' they
might think they have done enough good and then do evil. Then
none of the good things they did will be remembered. They will
die because of the evil they have done. [14]Or, if I say to the
wicked people, 'You will surely die,' they may stop sinning and
do what is right and honest. [15]For example, they may return
what somebody gave them as a promise to repay a loan, or pay
back what they stole. If they live by the rules that give life and
do not sin, then they will surely live, and they will not die.
[16]They will not be punished for any of their sins. They now do
what is right and fair, so they will surely live.

[17]"Your people say: 'The way of the LORD is not fair.' But it is
their own ways that are not fair. [18]When the good people stop
doing good and do evil, they will die for their evil. [19]But when
the wicked stop doing evil and do what is right and fair, they
will live. [20]You still say: 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Israel, I
will judge all of you by your own ways."

## *The Fall of Jerusalem Explained*

[21]It was in the twelfth year of our captivity, on the fifth day of
the tenth month. A person who had escaped from Jerusalem
came to me and said, "Jerusalem has been captured." [22]Now I
had felt the power of the LORD on me the evening before. He had
made me able to talk again before this person came to me. I

could speak; I was not without speech anymore.

23Then the LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 24"Human, people who live in the ruins in the land of Israel are saying: 'Abraham was only one person, yet he was given the land as his own. Surely the land has been given to us, who are many, as our very own.' 25So say to them: 'This is what the Lord God says: You eat meat with the blood still in it, you ask your idols for help, and you murder people. Should you then have the land as your very own? 26You depend on your sword and do terrible things which I hate. Each of you has sexual relations with his neighbor's wife. So should you have the land?'

27"Say to them: 'This is what the Lord God says: As surely as I live, those who are among the city ruins in Israel will be killed in war. I will cause those who live in the country to be eaten by wild animals. People hiding in the strongholds and caves will die of disease. 28I will make the land an empty desert. The people's pride in the land's power will end. The mountains of Israel will become empty so that no one will pass through them. 29They will know that I am the LORD when I make the land an empty desert because of the things they have done that I hate.'

30"But as for you, human, your people are talking about you by the walls and in the doorways of houses. They say to each other: 'Come now, and hear the message from the LORD.' 31So they come to you in crowds as if they were really ready to listen. They sit in front of you as if they were my people and hear your words, but they will not obey them. With their mouths they tell me they love me, but their hearts desire their selfish profits. 32To your people you are nothing more than a singer who sings love songs and has a beautiful voice and plays a musical instrument well. They hear your words, but they will not obey them.

33"When this comes true, and it surely will happen, then the people will know that a prophet has been among them."

## *The Leaders Are like Shepherds*

34 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, prophesy against the leaders of Israel, who are like shepherds. Prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Lord God says: How terrible it will be for the shepherds of Israel who feed only themselves! Why don't the shepherds feed the flock? 3You eat the milk curds, and you clothe yourselves with the wool. You kill the fat sheep, but you do not feed the flock. 4You have not made the weak strong. You have not healed the sick or put bandages on those that were hurt. You have not brought back those who strayed away or searched for the lost. But you have ruled the sheep with cruel force. 5The sheep were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for every wild

animal. [6]My flock wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered all over the face of the earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

[7]"'So, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD. This is what the Lord God says: [8]As surely as I live, my flock has been caught and eaten by all the wild animals, because the flock has no shepherd. The shepherds did not search for my flock. No, they fed themselves instead of my flock. [9]So, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD. [10]This is what the Lord God says: I am against the shepherds. I will blame them for what has happened to my sheep and will not let them tend the flock anymore. Then the shepherds will stop feeding themselves, and I will take my flock from their mouths so they will no longer be their food.

[11]"'This is what the Lord God says: I, myself, will search for my sheep and take care of them. [12]As a shepherd takes care of his scattered flock when it is found, I will take care of my sheep. I will save them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. [13]I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries. I will bring them to their own land and pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines, and in all the places where people live in the land. [14]I will feed them in a good pasture, and they will eat grass on the high mountains of Israel. They will lie down on good ground where they eat grass, and they will eat in rich grassland on the mountains of Israel. [15]I will feed my flock and lead them to rest, says the Lord God. [16]I will search for the lost, bring back those that strayed away, put bandages on those that were hurt, and make the weak strong. But I will destroy those sheep that are fat and strong. I will tend the sheep with fairness.

[17]"'This is what the Lord God says: As for you, my flock, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the male sheep and the male goats. [18]Is it not enough for you to eat grass in the good land? Must you crush the rest of the grass with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you make the rest of the water muddy with your feet? [19]Must my flock eat what you crush, and must they drink what you make muddy with your feet?

[20]"'So this is what the Lord God says to them: I, myself, will judge between the fat sheep and the thin sheep. [21]You push with your side and with your shoulder, and you knock down all the weak sheep with your horns until you have forced them away. [22]So I will save my flock; they will not be hurt anymore. I will judge between one sheep and another. [23]Then I will put over them one shepherd, my servant David. He will feed them and tend them and be their shepherd. [24]Then I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David will be a ruler among them. I, the LORD, have spoken.

[25]"'I will make an agreement of peace with my sheep and

will remove harmful animals from the land. Then the sheep will live safely in the desert and sleep in the woods. [26]I will bless them and let them live around my hill. I will cause the rains to come when it is time; there will be showers to bless them. [27]Also the trees in the countryside will give their fruit, and the land will give its harvest. And the sheep will be safe on their land. Then they will know that I am the LORD when I break the bars of their captivity and save them from the power of those who made them slaves. [28]They will not be led captive by the nations again. The wild animals will not eat them, but they will live safely, and no one will make them afraid. [29]I will give them a place famous for its good crops, so they will no longer suffer from hunger in the land. They will not suffer the insults of other nations anymore. [30]Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them. The nation of Israel will know that they are my people, says the Lord God. [31]You, my human sheep, are the sheep I care for, and I am your God, says the Lord God.'"

## Psalm 130:5–8

[5]I wait for the LORD to help me,
and I trust his word.

[6]I wait for the LORD to help me
more than night watchmen wait for the dawn,
more than night watchmen wait for the dawn.

[7]People of Israel, put your hope in the LORD
because he is loving
and able to save.

[8]He will save Israel
from all their sins.

## Proverbs 29:1

29 Whoever is stubborn after being
corrected many times
will suddenly be hurt beyond cure.

# James 2:1–26

## *Love All People*

2 My dear brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord
Jesus Christ, never think some people are more important than
others. 2Suppose someone comes into your church meeting
wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor
person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes. 3You show special
attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, “Please, sit
here in this good seat.” But you say to the poor person, “Stand
over there,” or, “Sit on the floor by my feet.” 4What are you
doing? You are making some people more important than
others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person
is better.

5Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! God chose the poor in
the world to be rich with faith and to receive the kingdom God
promised to those who love him. 6But you show no respect to
the poor. The rich are always trying to control your lives. They
are the ones who take you to court. 7And they are the ones who
speak against Jesus, who owns you.

8This royal law is found in the Scriptures: “Love your
neighbor as you love yourself.”[n] If you obey this law, you are
doing right. 9But if you treat one person as being more
important than another, you are sinning. You are guilty of
breaking God’s law. 10A person who follows all of God’s law but
fails to obey even one command is guilty of breaking all the
commands in that law. 11The same God who said, “You must not
be guilty of adultery,”[n] also said, “You must not murder
anyone.”[n] So if you do not take part in adultery but you murder
someone, you are guilty of breaking all of God’s law. 12In
everything you say and do, remember that you will be judged by
the law that makes people free. 13So you must show mercy to
others, or God will not show mercy to you when he judges you.
But the person who shows mercy can stand without fear at the
judgment.

## *Faith and Good Works*

14My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith, but

do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them? 15A brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. 16 If you say to that person, “God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat,” but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing. 17In the same way, faith by itself—that does nothing—is dead.

18Someone might say, “You have faith, but I have deeds.” Show me your faith without doing anything, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19You believe there is one God. Good! But the demons believe that, too, and they tremble with fear.

20You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing? 21Abraham, our ancestor, was made right with God by what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. 22So you see that Abraham’s faith and the things he did worked together. His faith was made perfect by what he did. 23This shows the full meaning of the Scripture that says: “Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.”[n] And Abraham was called God’s friend.[n] 24So you see that people are made right with God by what they do, not by faith only.

25Another example is Rahab, a prostitute, who was made right with God by something she did. She welcomed the spies into her home and helped them escape by a different road.

26Just as a person’s body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!

# November 22

## A Heart at Peace

*The wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to please.*

James 3:17

The heart of Jesus was pure. The Savior was adored by thousands, yet content to live a simple life. He was cared for by women (Luke 8:2–3), yet never accused of lustful thoughts; scorned by his own creation, but willing to forgive them before they even requested his mercy. Peter, who traveled with Jesus for three and a half years, described him as a "pure and perfect lamb" (1 Peter 1:19).

After spending the same amount of time with Jesus, John concluded, "There is no sin in Christ" (1 John 3:5).

Jesus' heart was peaceful. The disciples fretted over the need to feed the thousands, but not Jesus. He thanked God for the problem. The disciples shouted for fear in the storm, but not Jesus. He slept through it. Peter drew his sword to fight the soldiers, but not Jesus. He lifted his hand to heal. His heart was at peace.

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Ezekiel 35:1—36:38

### *Prophecy Against Edom*

35 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: 2"Human, look
toward Edom and prophesy against it. 3Say to it: 'This is what
the Lord God says: I am against you, Edom. I will stretch out my
hand against you and make you an empty desert. 4I will destroy
your cities, and you will become empty. Then you will know that
I am the LORD.

5"'You have always been an enemy of Israel. You let them be
defeated in war when they were in trouble at the time of their

final punishment. [6]So the Lord God says, as surely as I live, I will
let you be murdered. Murder will chase you. Since you did not
hate murdering people, murder will chase you. [7]I will make
Edom an empty ruin and destroy everyone who goes in or
comes out of it. [8]I will fill its mountains with those who are
killed. Those killed in war will fall on your hills, in your valleys,
and in all your ravines. [9]I will make you a ruin forever; no one
will live in your cities. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

[10]"'You said, "These two nations, Israel and Judah, and these
two lands will be ours. We will take them for our own." But the
LORD was there. [11]So this is what the Lord God says: As surely as
I live, I will treat you just as you treated them. You were angry
and jealous because you hated them. So I will punish you and
show the Israelites who I am. [12]Then you will know that I, the
LORD, have heard all your insults against the mountains of
Israel. You said, "They have been ruined. They have been given
to us to eat." [13]You have not stopped your proud talk against
me. I have heard you. [14]This is what the Lord God says: All the
earth will be happy when I make you an empty ruin. [15]You were
happy when the land of Israel was ruined, but I will do the same
thing to you. Mount Seir and all Edom, you will become an
empty ruin. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'

## *Israel to Come Home*

[36] "Human, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say:
'Mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. [2]This is what
the Lord God says: The enemy has said about you, "Now the old
places to worship gods have become ours."' [3]So prophesy and
say: 'This is what the Lord God says: They have made you an
empty ruin and have crushed you from all around. So you
became a possession of the other nations. People have talked
and whispered against you. [4]So, mountains of Israel, hear the
word of the Lord God. The Lord God speaks to the mountains,
hills, ravines, and valleys, to the empty ruins and abandoned
cities that have been robbed and laughed at by the other
nations. [5]This is what the Lord God says: I speak in hot anger
against the other nations. I speak against the people of Edom,
who took my land for themselves with joy and with hate in their
hearts. They forced out the people and took their pastureland.'
[6]So prophesy about the land of Israel and say to the mountains,
hills, ravines, and valleys: 'This is what the Lord God says: I
speak in my jealous anger, because you have suffered the
insults of the nations. [7]So this is what the Lord God says: I
promise that the nations around you will also have to suffer
insults.

[8]"'But you, mountains of Israel, will grow branches and fruit
for my people, who will soon come home. [9]I am concerned

about you; I am on your side. You will be plowed, and seed will be planted in you. [10]I will increase the number of people who live on you, all the people of Israel. The cities will have people living in them, and the ruins will be rebuilt. [11]I will increase the number of people and animals living on you. They will grow and have many young. You will have people living on you as you did before, and I will make you better off than at the beginning. Then you will know that I am the LORD. [12]I will cause my people Israel to walk on you and own you, and you will belong to them. You will never again take their children away from them.

[13]"'This is what the Lord God says: People say about you, "You eat people and take children from your nation." [14]But you will not eat people anymore or take away the children, says the Lord God. [15]I will not make you listen to insults from the nations anymore; you will not suffer shame from them anymore. You will not cause your nation to fall anymore, says the Lord God.'"

## *The Lord Acts for Himself*

[16]The LORD spoke his word to me again, saying: [17]"Human, when the nation of Israel was living in their own land, they made it unclean by their ways and the things they did. Their ways were like a woman's uncleanness in her time of monthly bleeding. [18]So I poured out my anger against them, because they murdered in the land and because they made the land unclean with their idols. [19]I scattered them among the nations, and they were spread through the countries. I punished them for how they lived and what they did. [20]They dishonored my holy name in the nations where they went. The nations said about them, 'These are the people of the LORD, but they had to leave the land which he gave them.' [21]But I had concern for my holy name, which the nation of Israel had dishonored among the nations where they went.

[22]"So say to the people of Israel, 'This is what the Lord God says: Israel, I am going to act, but not for your sake. I will do something to help my holy name, which you have dishonored among the nations where you went. [23]I will prove the holiness of my great name, which has been dishonored among the nations. You have dishonored it among these nations, but the nations will know that I am the LORD when I prove myself holy before their eyes, says the Lord God.

[24]"'I will take you from the nations and gather you out of all the lands and bring you back into your own land. [25]Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and your idols. [26]Also, I will teach you to respect me completely, and I will put a new way of thinking inside you. I will take out the stubborn hearts of stone from your bodies, and I will give you obedient hearts of flesh.

27 I will put my Spirit inside you and help you live by my rules
and carefully obey my laws. 28 You will live in the land I gave to
your ancestors, and you will be my people, and I will be your
God. 29 So I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will
command the grain to come and grow; I will not allow a time of
hunger to hurt you. 30 I will increase the harvest of the field so
you will never again suffer shame among the nations because of
hunger. 31 Then you will remember your evil ways and actions
that were not good, and you will hate yourselves because of
your sins and your terrible acts that I hate. 32 I want you to
know that I am not going to do this for your sake, says the Lord
God. Be ashamed and embarrassed about your ways, Israel.

33 "'This is what the Lord God says: This is what will happen
on the day I cleanse you from all your sins: I will cause the
cities to have people living in them again, and the destroyed
places will be rebuilt. 34 The empty land will be plowed so it will
no longer be a ruin for everyone who passes by to see. 35 They
will say, "This land was ruined, but now it has become like the
garden of Eden. The cities were destroyed, empty, and ruined,
but now they are protected and have people living in them."
36 Then those nations still around you will know that I, the LORD,
have rebuilt what was destroyed and have planted what was
empty. I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it.'

37 "This is what the Lord God says: I will let myself be asked
by the people of Israel to do this for them again: I will make
their people grow in number like a flock. 38 They will be as many
as the flocks brought to Jerusalem during her holy feasts. Her
ruined cities will be filled with flocks of people. Then they will
know that I am the LORD."

## Psalm 131:1–3

### *Childlike Trust in the Lord*

**A song for going up to worship. Of David.**

131 LORD, my heart is not proud; I don't look down on others.

I don't do great things,
and I can't do miracles.

2 But I am calm and quiet,
like a baby with its mother.
I am at peace, like a baby with its mother.

3 People of Israel, put your hope in the LORD
now and forever.

## Proverbs 29:2–3

2 When good people do well, everyone is happy,
but when evil people rule, everyone groans.

3 Those who love wisdom make their parents happy,
but friends of prostitutes waste their money.

## James 3:1–18

### *Controlling the Things We Say*

3 My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become
teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged
more strictly. 2 We all make many mistakes. If people never said
anything wrong, they would be perfect and able to control their
entire selves, too. 3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses
to make them obey us, we can control their whole bodies. 4 Also
a ship is very big, and it is pushed by strong winds. But a very
small rudder controls that big ship, making it go wherever the
pilot wants. 5 It is the same with the tongue. It is a small part of
the body, but it brags about great things.

A big forest fire can be started with only a little flame. 6 And
the tongue is like a fire. It is a whole world of evil among the
parts of our bodies. The tongue spreads its evil through the
whole body. The tongue is set on fire by hell, and it starts a fire
that influences all of life. 7 People can tame every kind of wild
animal, bird, reptile, and fish, and they have tamed them, 8 but
no one can tame the tongue. It is wild and evil and full of deadly
poison. 9 We use our tongues to praise our Lord and Father, but
then we curse people, whom God made like himself. 10 Praises

and curses come from the same mouth! My brothers and sisters, this should not happen. [11]Do good and bad water flow from the same spring? [12]My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree make olives, or can a grapevine make figs? No! And a well full of salty water cannot give good water.

## *True Wisdom*

[13]Are there those among you who are truly wise and understanding? Then they should show it by living right and doing good things with a gentleness that comes from wisdom. [14]But if you are selfish and have bitter jealousy in your hearts, do not brag. Your bragging is a lie that hides the truth. [15]That kind of “wisdom” does not come from God but from the world. It is not spiritual; it is from the devil. [16]Where jealousy and selfishness are, there will be confusion and every kind of evil. [17]But the wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to please. This wisdom is always ready to help those who are troubled and to do good for others. It is always fair and honest. [18]People who work for peace in a peaceful way plant a good crop of right-living.

# November 23

## Secondhand Spirituality

*Come near to God, and God will come near to you.*

James 4:8

some of us have tried to have a daily quiet time and have not been successful. Others of us have a hard time concentrating. And all of us are busy. So rather than spend time with God, listening for his voice, we'll let others spend time with him and then benefit from their experience. Let them tell us what God is saying. After all, isn't that why we pay preachers? …

If that is your approach, if your spiritual experiences are secondhand and not firsthand, I'd like to challenge you with this thought: Do you do that with other parts of your life? …

You don't do that with vacations … You don't do that with romance … You don't let someone eat on your behalf, do you? [There are] certain things no one can do for you.

And one of those is spending time with God.

from *Just Like Jesus*

### Ezekiel 37:1—38:23

#### *The Vision of Dry Bones*

37 I felt the power of the LORD on me, and he brought me out by
the Spirit of the LORD and put me down in the middle of a valley.
It was full of bones. 2He led me around among the bones, and I
saw that there were many bones in the valley and that they
were very dry. 3Then he asked me, "Human, can these bones
live?"

I answered, "Lord God, only you know."

4He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them,
'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5This is what the Lord
God says to the bones: I will cause breath to enter you so you
will come to life. 6I will put muscles on you and flesh on you and

cover you with skin. Then I will put breath in you so you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

7So I prophesied as I was commanded. While I prophesied, there was a noise and a rattling. The bones came together, bone to bone. 8I looked and saw muscles come on the bones, and flesh grew, and skin covered the bones. But there was no breath in them.

9Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the wind.[n] Prophesy, human, and say to the wind, 'This is what the Lord God says: Wind, come from the four winds, and breathe on these people who were killed so they can come back to life.'" 10So I prophesied as the LORD commanded me. And the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, a very large army.

11Then he said to me, "Human, these bones are like all the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has gone. We are destroyed.' 12So, prophesy and say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says: My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves. Then I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13My people, you will know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and cause you to come up from them. 14And I will put my Spirit inside you, and you will come to life. Then I will put you in your own land. And you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it, says the LORD.'"

## *Judah and Israel Back Together*

15The LORD spoke his word to me, saying, 16"Human, take a stick and write on it, 'For Judah and all the Israelites with him.' Then take another stick and write on it, 'The stick of Ephraim, for Joseph and all the Israelites with him.' 17Then join them together into one stick so they will be one in your hand.

18"When your people say to you, 'Explain to us what you mean by this,' 19say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says: I will take the stick for Joseph and the tribes of Israel with him, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and I will put it with the stick of Judah. I will make them into one stick, and they will be one in my hand.' 20Hold the sticks on which you wrote these names in your hand so the people can see them. 21Say to the people, 'This is what the Lord God says: I am going to take the people of Israel from among the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them into their own land. 22I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. One king will rule all of them. They will never again be two nations; they will not be divided into two kingdoms anymore. 23They will not continue to make themselves unclean by their idols, their statues of gods which I hate, or by their

sins. I will save them from all the ways they sin and turn against me, and I will make them clean. Then they will be my people, and I will be their God.

24"'My servant David will be their king, and they will all have one shepherd. They will live by my rules and obey my laws. 25They will live on the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land in which your ancestors lived. They will all live on the land forever: they, their children, and their grandchildren. David my servant will be their king forever. 26I will make an agreement of peace with them, an agreement that continues forever. I will put them in their land and make them grow in number. Then I will put my Temple among them forever. 27The place where I live will be with them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 28When my Temple is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the LORD, make Israel holy.'"

## *Prophecy Against Gog*

38 The LORD spoke his word to me, saying, 2"Human, look toward Gog of the land of Magog, the chief ruler of the nations of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him 3and say, 'The Lord God says this: I am against you, Gog, chief ruler of Meshech and Tubal. 4I will turn you around and put hooks in your jaws. And I will bring you out with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all of whom will be dressed in beautiful uniforms. They will be a large army with large and small shields and all having swords. 5Persia, Cush, and Put will be with them, all of them having shields and helmets. 6There will also be Gomer with all its troops and the nation of Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—many nations with you.

7"'Be prepared. Be prepared, you and all the armies that have come together to make you their commander. 8After a long time you will be called for service. After those years you will come into a land that has been rebuilt from war. The people in the land will have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which were empty for a long time. These people were brought out from the nations, and they will all be living in safety. 9You will come like a storm. You, all your troops, and the many nations with you will be like a cloud covering the land.

10"'This is what the Lord God says: At that time ideas will come into your mind, and you will think up an evil plan. 11You will say, "I will march against a land of towns without walls. I will attack those who are at rest and live in safety. All of them live without city walls or gate bars or gates. 12I will capture treasures and take loot. I will turn my power against the rebuilt ruins that now have people living in them. I will attack these people who have been gathered from the nations, who have

become rich with farm animals and property, who live at the center of the world.” 13Sheba, Dedan, and the traders of Tarshish, with all its villages, will say to you, “Did you come to capture treasure? Did you bring your troops together to take loot? Did you bring them to carry away silver and gold and to take away farm animals and property?”’

14“So prophesy, human, and say to Gog, ‘This is what the Lord God says: Now that my people Israel are living in safety, you will know about it. 15You will come with many people from your place in the far north. You will have a large group with you, a mighty army, all riding on horses. 16You will attack my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land. This will happen in the days to come when I bring you against my land. Gog, then the nations will know me when they see me prove how holy I am in what I do through you.

17“‘This is what the Lord God says: You are the one about whom I spoke in past days. I spoke through my servants, the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for many years that I would bring you against them. 18This is what will happen: On the day Gog attacks the land of Israel, I will become very angry, says the Lord God. 19With jealousy and great anger I tell you that at that time there will surely be a great earthquake in Israel. 20The fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the wild animals, everything that crawls on the ground, and all the people on the earth will shake with fear before me. Also the mountains will be thrown down, the cliffs will fall, and every wall will fall to the ground. 21Then I will call for a war against Gog on all my mountains, says the Lord God. Everyone’s sword will attack the soldier next to him. 22I will punish Gog with disease and death. I will send a heavy rain with hailstones and burning sulfur on Gog, his army, and the many nations with him. 23Then I will show how great I am. I will show my holiness, and I will make myself known to the many nations that watch. Then they will know that I am the LORD.’

## Psalm 132:1–9

### *In Praise of the Temple*

**A song for going up to worship.**

132 LORD, remember David
and all his suffering.

[2]He made an oath to the LORD,
a promise to the Mighty God of Jacob.

[3]He said, “I will not go home to my house,
or lie down on my bed,

[4]or close my eyes,
or let myself sleep

[5]until I find a place for the LORD.
I want to provide a home for the Mighty God of Jacob.”

[6]We heard about the Ark in Bethlehem.
We found it at Kiriath Jearim.

[7]Let’s go to the LORD’s house.
Let’s worship at his footstool.

[8]Rise, LORD, and come to your resting place;
come with the Ark that shows your strength.

[9]May your priests do what is right.
May your people sing for joy.

## Proverbs 29:4

[4]If a king is fair, he makes his country strong,
but if he takes gifts dishonestly, he tears his country down.

## James 4:1–17

## *Give Yourselves to God*

4 Do you know where your fights and arguments come from?
They come from the selfish desires that war within you. 2You
want things, but you do not have them. So you are ready to kill
and are jealous of other people, but you still cannot get what
you want. So you argue and fight. You do not get what you
want, because you do not ask God. 3Or when you ask, you do
not receive because the reason you ask is wrong. You want
things so you can use them for your own pleasures.
4So, you are not loyal to God! You should know that loving
the world is the same as hating God. Anyone who wants to be a
friend of the world becomes God's enemy. 5Do you think the
Scripture means nothing that says, "The Spirit that God made
to live in us wants us for himself alone"?[n] 6But God gives us
even more grace, as the Scripture says,

"God is against the proud,
but he gives grace to the humble."

Proverbs 3:34

7So give yourselves completely to God. Stand against the
devil, and the devil will run from you. 8Come near to God, and
God will come near to you. You sinners, clean sin out of your
lives. You who are trying to follow God and the world at the
same time, make your thinking pure. 9Be sad, cry, and weep!
Change your laughter into crying and your joy into sadness.
10Humble yourself in the Lord's presence, and he will honor
you.

## *You Are Not the Judge*

11Brothers and sisters, do not tell evil lies about each other.
If you speak against your fellow believers or judge them, you
are judging and speaking against the law they follow. And when
you are judging the law, you are no longer a follower of the law.
You have become a judge. 12God is the only Lawmaker and
Judge. He is the only One who can save and destroy. So it is not
right for you to judge your neighbor.

## *Let God Plan Your Life*

13Some of you say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to some
city. We will stay there a year, do business, and make money."
14But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is
like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes
away. 15So you should say, "If the Lord wants, we will live and

do this or that.” [16]But now you are proud and you brag. All of this bragging is wrong. [17]Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning.

# November 24

## Prayer Reminds Us

*When a believing person prays, great things happen.*

James 5:16

Prayer is the recognition that if God had not engaged himself in our problems, we would still be lost in the blackness. It is by his mercy that we have been lifted up. Prayer is that whole process that reminds us of who God is and who we are.

I believe there's great power in prayer. I believe God heals the wounded, and that he can raise the dead. But I don't believe we tell God what to do and when to do it.

God knows that we, with our limited vision, don't even know that for which we should pray. When we entrust our requests to him, we trust him to honor our prayers with holy judgment.

from *Walking with the Savior*

### Ezekiel 39:1—40:49

### *The Death of Gog and His Army*

39 "Human, prophesy against Gog and say, 'This is what the Lord God says: I am against you, Gog, chief ruler of Meshech and
Tubal. 2I will turn you around and lead you. I will bring you
from the far north and send you to attack the mountains of
Israel. 3I will knock your bow out of your left hand and throw
down your arrows from your right hand. 4You, all your troops,
and the nations with you will fall dead on the mountains of
Israel. I will let you be food for every bird that eats meat and for
every wild animal. 5You will lie fallen on the ground, because I
have spoken, says the Lord God. 6I will send fire on Magog and
those who live in safety on the coastlands. Then they will know
that I am the LORD.

7"'I will make myself known among my people Israel, and I will not let myself be dishonored anymore. Then the nations will

know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. 8It is coming! It will happen, says the Lord God. The time I talked about is coming.

9"'Then those who live in the cities of Israel will come out and make fires with the enemy's weapons. They will burn them, both large and small shields, bows and arrows, war clubs, and spears. They will use the weapons to burn in their fires for seven years. 10They will not need to take wood from the field or chop firewood from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons. In this way they will take the treasures of those who took their treasures; they will take the loot of those who took their loot, says the Lord God.

11"'At that time I will give Gog a burial place in Israel, in the Valley of the Travelers, east of the Dead Sea. It will block the road for travelers. Gog and all his army will be buried there, so people will call it The Valley of Gog's Army.

12"'The people of Israel will be burying them for seven months to make the land clean again. 13All the people in the land will bury them, and they will be honored on the day of my victory, says the Lord God.

14"'The people of Israel will choose men to work through the land to make it clean. Along with others, they will bury Gog's soldiers still lying dead on the ground. After the seven months are finished, they will still search. 15As they go through the land, anyone who sees a human bone is to put a marker by it. The sign will stay there until the gravediggers bury the bone in The Valley of Gog's Army. 16A city will be there named Hamonah. So they will make the land clean again.'

17"Human, this is what the Lord God says: Speak to every kind of bird and wild animal: 'Come together, come! Come together from all around to my sacrifice, a great sacrifice which I will prepare for you on the mountains of Israel. Eat flesh and drink blood! 18You are to eat the flesh of the mighty and drink the blood of the rulers of the earth as if they were fat animals from Bashan: male sheep, lambs, goats, and bulls. 19You are to eat and drink from my sacrifice which I have prepared for you, eating fat until you are full and drinking blood until you are drunk. 20At my table you are to eat until you are full of horses and riders, mighty men and all kinds of soldiers,' says the Lord God.

21"I will show my glory among the nations. All the nations will see my power when I punish them. 22From that time onward the people of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God. 23The nations will know Israel was taken away captive because they turned against me. So I turned away from them and handed them over to their enemies until all of them died in war. 24Because of their uncleanness and their sins, I punished them and turned away from them.

25 “So this is what the Lord God says: Now I will bring the
people of Jacob back from captivity, and I will have mercy on
the whole nation of Israel. I will not let them dishonor me. 26 The
people will forget their shame and how they rejected me when
they live again in safety on their own land with no one to make
them afraid. 27 I will bring the people back from other lands and
gather them from the lands of their enemies. So I will use my
people to show many nations that I am holy. 28 Then my people
will know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into
captivity among the nations, but then I brought them back to
their own land, leaving no one behind. 29 I will not turn away
from them anymore, because I will put my Spirit into the people
of Israel, says the Lord God.”

## *The New Temple*

40 It was the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning
of the year, on the tenth day of the month. It was in the
fourteenth year after Jerusalem was captured. On that same day
I felt the power of the LORD, and he brought me to Jerusalem.
2 In the visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel and
put me down on a very high mountain. On the south of the
mountain there were some buildings that looked like a city. 3 He
took me closer to the buildings, and I saw a man who looked as
if he were made of bronze, standing in the gateway. He had a
cord made of linen and a stick in his hand, both for measuring.
4 The man said to me, “Human, look with your eyes and hear
with your ears. Pay attention to all that I will show you, because
that’s why you have been brought here. Tell the people of Israel
all that you see.”

## *The East Gateway*

5 I saw a wall that surrounded the Temple area. The
measuring stick in the man’s hand was ten and one-half feet
long. So the man measured the wall, which was ten and one-half
feet thick and ten and one-half feet high.

6 Then the man went to the east gateway. He went up its
steps and measured the opening of the gateway. It was ten and
one-half feet deep. 7 The rooms for the guards were ten and one-
half feet long and ten and one-half feet wide. The walls that
came out between the guards’ rooms were about nine feet
thick. The opening of the gateway next to the porch that faced
the Temple was ten and one-half feet deep.

8 Then the man measured the porch of the gateway. 9 It was
about fourteen feet deep, and its side walls were three and one-
half feet thick. The porch of the gateway faced the Temple.

10 On each side of the east gateway were three rooms, which

measured the same on each side. The walls between each room were the same thickness. [11]The man measured the width of the entrance to the gateway, which was seventeen and one-half feet wide. The width of the gate was about twenty-three feet. [12]And there was a low wall about twenty-one inches high in front of each room. The rooms were ten and one-half feet on each side. [13]The man measured the gateway from the roof of one room to the roof of the opposite room. It was about forty-four feet from one door to the opposite door. [14]The man also measured the porch, which was about thirty-five feet wide. The courtyard was around the porch. [15]From the front of the outer side of the gateway to the front of the porch of the inner side of the gateway was eighty-seven and one-half feet. [16]The rooms and porch had small windows on both sides. The windows were narrower on the side facing the gateway. Carvings of palm trees were on each side wall of the rooms.

## *The Outer Courtyard*

[17]Then the man brought me into the outer courtyard where I saw rooms and a pavement of stones all around the court. Thirty rooms were along the edge of the paved walkway. [18]The pavement ran alongside the gates and was as deep as the gates were wide. This was the lower pavement. [19]Then the man measured from the outer wall to the inner wall. The outer court between these two walls was one hundred seventy-five feet on the east and on the north.

## *The North Gateway*

[20]The man measured the length and width of the north gateway leading to the outer courtyard. [21]Its three rooms on each side, its inner walls, and its porch measured the same as the first gateway. It was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide. [22]Its windows, porch, and carvings of palm trees measured the same as the east gateway. Seven steps went up to the gateway, and the gateway's porch was at the inner end. [23]The inner courtyard had a gateway across from the northern gateway like the one on the east. The man measured it and found it was one hundred seventy-five feet from inner gateway to outer gateway.

## *The South Gateway*

[24]Then the man led me south where I saw a gateway facing south. He measured its inner walls and its porch, and they measured the same as the other gateways. [25]The gateway and

its porch had windows all around like the other gateways. It was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide. [26]Seven steps went up to this gateway. Its porch was at the inner end, and it had carvings of palm trees on its inner walls. [27]The inner courtyard had a gateway on its south side. The man measured from gate to gate on the south side, which was one hundred seventy-five feet.

## *The Inner Courtyard*

[28]Then the man brought me through the south gateway into the inner courtyard. The inner south gateway measured the same as the gateways in the outer wall. [29]The inner south gateway's rooms, inner walls, and porch measured the same as the gateways in the outer wall. There were windows all around the gateway and its porch. The gateway was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide. [30]Each porch of each inner gateway was about forty-four feet long and about nine feet wide. [31]The inner south gateway's porch faced the outer courtyard. Carvings of palm trees were on its side walls, and its stairway had eight steps.

[32]The man brought me into the inner courtyard on the east side. He measured the inner east gateway, and it was the same as the other gateways. [33]The inner east gateway's rooms, inside walls, and porch measured the same as the other gateways. Windows were all around the gateway and its porch. The inner east gateway was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide. [34]Its porch faced the outer courtyard. Carvings of palm trees were on its inner walls on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.

[35]Then the man brought me to the inner north gateway. He measured it, and it was the same as the other gateways. [36]Its rooms, inner walls, and porch measured the same as the other gateways. There were windows all around the gateway, which was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide. [37]Its porch faced the outer courtyard. Carvings of palm trees were on its inner walls on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.

## *Rooms for Preparing Sacrifices*

[38]There was a room with a door that opened onto the porch of the inner north gateway. In this room the priests washed animals for the burnt offerings. [39]There were two tables on each side of the porch, on which animals for burnt offerings, sin offerings, and penalty offerings were killed. [40]Outside, by each side wall of the porch, at the entrance to the north gateway, were two more tables. [41]So there were four tables inside the

gateway, and four tables outside. In all there were eight tables on which the priests killed animals for sacrifices. 42There were four tables made of cut stone for the burnt offering. These tables were about three feet long, three feet wide, and about two feet high. On these tables the priests put their tools which they used to kill animals for burnt offerings and the other sacrifices. 43Double shelves three inches wide were put up on all the walls. The flesh for the offering was put on the tables.

### *The Priests' Rooms*

44There were two rooms in the inner courtyard. One was beside the north gateway and faced south. The other room was beside the south gateway and faced north. 45The man said to me, "The room which faces south is for the priests who serve in the Temple area, 46while the room that faces north is for the priests who serve at the altar. This second group of priests are descendants of Zadok, the only descendants of Levi who can come near the LORD to serve him."

47The man measured the inner courtyard. It was a square—one hundred seventy-five feet long and one hundred seventy-five feet wide. The altar was in front of the Temple.

### *The Temple Porch*

48The man brought me to the porch of the Temple and measured each side wall of the porch. Each was about nine feet thick. The doorway was twenty-four and one-half feet wide. The side walls of the doorway were each about five feet wide. 49The porch was thirty-five feet long and twenty-one feet wide, with ten steps leading up to it. Pillars were by the side walls, one on each side of the entrance.

## Psalm 132:10–18

10For the sake of your servant David,
do not reject your appointed king.

11The LORD made a promise to David,
a sure promise that he will not take back.

He promised, “I will make one of your descendants
rule as king after you.

12 If your sons keep my agreement
and the rules that I teach them,

then their sons after them will rule
on your throne forever and ever.”

13 The LORD has chosen Jerusalem;
he wants it for his home.

14 He says, “This is my resting place forever.
Here is where I want to stay.

15 I will bless her with plenty;
I will fill her poor with food.

16 I will cover her priests with salvation,
and those who worship me will really sing for joy.

17 “I will make a king come from the family of David.
I will provide my appointed one descendants to rule after him.

18 I will cover his enemies with shame,
but his crown will shine.”

## Proverbs 29:5

5 Those who give false praise to their neighbors
are setting a trap for them.

## James 5:1–20

## *A Warning to the Rich*

5 You rich people, listen! Cry and be very sad because of the
troubles that are coming to you. 2Your riches have rotted, and
your clothes have been eaten by moths. 3Your gold and silver
have rusted, and that rust will be a proof that you were wrong.
It will eat your bodies like fire. You saved your treasure for the
last days. 4The pay you did not give the workers who mowed
your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the workers
have been heard by the Lord All-Powerful. 5Your life on earth
was full of rich living and pleasing yourselves with everything
you wanted. You made yourselves fat, like an animal ready to be
killed. 6You have judged guilty and then murdered innocent
people, who were not against you.

## *Be Patient*

7Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes again.
A farmer patiently waits for his valuable crop to grow from the
earth and for it to receive the autumn and spring rains. 8You,
too, must be patient. Do not give up hope, because the Lord is
coming soon. 9Brothers and sisters, do not complain against
each other or you will be judged guilty. And the Judge is ready
to come! 10Brothers and sisters, follow the example of the
prophets who spoke for the Lord. They suffered many hard
things, but they were patient. 11We say they are happy because
they did not give up. You have heard about Job's patience, and
you know the Lord's purpose for him in the end. You know the
Lord is full of mercy and is kind.

## *Be Careful What You Say*

12My brothers and sisters, above all, do not use an oath
when you make a promise. Don't use the name of heaven, earth,
or anything else to prove what you say. When you mean yes, say
only yes, and when you mean no, say only no so you will not be
judged guilty.

## *The Power of Prayer*

13Anyone who is having troubles should pray. Anyone who is
happy should sing praises. 14Anyone who is sick should call the
church's elders. They should pray for and pour oil on the

person[n] in the name of the LORD. 15And the prayer that is said with faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will heal that person. And if the person has sinned, the sins will be forgiven. 16Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so God can heal you. When a believing person prays, great things happen. 17Elijah was a human being just like us. He prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years! 18Then Elijah prayed again, and the rain came down from the sky, and the land produced crops again.

## *Saving a Soul*

19My brothers and sisters, if one of you wanders away from the truth, and someone helps that person come back, 20remember this: Anyone who brings a sinner back from the wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death and will cause many sins to be forgiven.

# November 25

## Focus on God's Majesty

*You have not seen Christ, but still you love him. You cannot see him now, but you believe in him.*

1 Peter 1:8

some years ago a sociologist accompanied a group of mountain climbers on an expedition. Among other things, he observed a distinct correlation between cloud cover and contentment. When there was no cloud cover and the peak was in view, the climbers were energetic and cooperative. When the gray clouds eclipsed the view of the mountaintop, though, the climbers were sullen and selfish.

The same thing happens to us. As long as our eyes are on God's majesty there is a bounce in our step. But let our eyes focus on the dirt beneath us and we will grumble about every rock and crevice we have to cross. For this reason Paul urged, "Since you were raised from the dead with Christ, aim at what is in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Think only about the things in heaven, not the things on earth." (Colossians 3:1–2).

from *The Great House of God*

### Ezekiel 41:1—42:20

### *The Holy Place of the Temple*

41 The man brought me to the Holy Place and measured its side walls, which were each ten and one-half feet thick. 2The entrance was seventeen and one-half feet wide. The walls alongside the entrance were each about nine feet wide. The man measured the Holy Place, which was seventy feet long and thirty-five feet wide.

3Then the man went inside and measured the side walls of the next doorway. Each was three and one-half feet thick. The

doorway was ten and one-half feet wide, and the walls next to it were each more than twelve feet thick. [4]Then the man measured the room at the end of the Holy Place. It was thirty-five feet long and thirty-five feet wide. The man said to me, “This is the Most Holy Place.”

[5]Then the man measured the wall of the Temple, which was ten and one-half feet thick. There were side rooms seven feet wide all around the Temple. [6]The side rooms were on three different stories, each above the other, with thirty rooms on each story. All around the Temple walls there were ledges for the side rooms. The upper rooms rested on the ledges but were not attached to the Temple walls. [7]The side rooms around the Temple were wider on each higher story, so rooms were wider on the top story. A stairway went up from the lowest story to the highest through the middle story.

[8]I also saw that the Temple had a raised base all around. Its edge was the foundation for the side rooms, and it was ten and one-half feet thick. [9]The outer wall of the side rooms was about nine feet thick. There was an open area between the side rooms of the Temple [10]and some other rooms. It was thirty-five feet wide and went all around the Temple. [11]The side rooms had doors which led to the open area around the outside of the Temple. One door faced north, and the other faced south. The open area was about nine feet wide all around.

[12]The building facing the private area at the west side was one hundred twenty-two and one-half feet wide. The wall around the building was about nine feet thick and one hundred fifty-seven and one-half feet long.

[13]Then the man measured the Temple. It was one hundred seventy-five feet long. The private area, including the building and its walls, was in all one hundred seventy-five feet long. [14]Also the front of the Temple and the private area on its east side were one hundred seventy-five feet wide.

[15]The man measured the length of the building facing the private area on the west side, and it was one hundred seventy-five feet from one wall to the other.

The Holy Place, the Most Holy Place, and the outer porch [16]had wood panels on the walls. By the doorway, the Temple had wood panels on the walls. The wood covered all the walls from the floor up to the windows, [17]up to the part of the wall above the entrance.

All the walls inside the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place, and on the outside, in the porch, [18]had carvings of creatures with wings and palm trees. A palm tree was between each carved creature, and every creature had two faces. [19]One was a human face looking toward the palm tree on one side. The other was a lion’s face looking toward the palm tree on the other side. They were carved all around the Temple walls. [20]From the floor to above the entrance, palm trees and creatures with wings

were carved. The walls of the Holy Place [21]had square doorposts. In front of the Most Holy Place was something that looked like [22]an altar of wood. It was more than five feet high and three feet wide. Its corners, base, and sides were wood. The man said to me, “This is the table that is in the presence of the LORD.” [23]Both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place had double doors. [24]Each of the doors had two pieces that would swing open. [25]Carved on the doors of the Holy Place were palm trees and creatures with wings, like those carved on the walls. And there was a wood roof over the front Temple porch. [26]There were windows and palm trees on both side walls of the porch. The side rooms of the Temple were also covered by a roof over the stairway.

## *The Priests' Rooms*

42 Then the man led me north out into the outer courtyard and to the rooms across from the private area and the building. [2]These rooms on the north side were one hundred seventy-five feet long and eighty-seven and one-half feet wide. [3]There was thirty-five feet of the inner courtyard between them and the Temple. On the other side, they faced the stone pavement of the outer courtyard. The rooms were built in three stories like steps and had balconies. [4]There was a path on the north side of the rooms, which was seventeen and one-half feet wide and one hundred seventy-five feet long. Doors led into the rooms from this path. [5]The top rooms were narrower, because the balconies took more space from them. The rooms on the first and second stories of the building were wider. [6]The rooms were on three stories. They did not have pillars like the pillars of the courtyards. So the top rooms were farther back than those on the first and second stories. [7]There was a wall outside parallel to the rooms and to the outer courtyard. It ran in front of the rooms for eighty-seven and one-half feet. [8]The row of rooms along the outer courtyard was eighty-seven and one-half feet long, and the rooms that faced the Temple were about one hundred seventy-five feet long. [9]The lower rooms had an entrance on the east side so a person could enter them from the outer courtyard, [10]at the start of the wall beside the courtyard.

There were rooms on the south side, which were across from the private area and the building. [11]These rooms had a path in front of them. They were like the rooms on the north with the same length and width and the same doors. [12]The doors of the south rooms were like the doors of the north rooms. There was an entrance at the open end of a path beside the wall, so a person could enter at the east end.

[13]The man said to me, “The north and south rooms across from the private area are holy rooms. There the priests who go

near the LORD will eat the most holy offerings. There they will put the most holy offerings: the grain offerings, sin offerings, and the penalty offerings, because the place is holy. 14The priests who enter the Holy Place must leave their serving clothes there before they go into the outer courtyard, because these clothes are holy. After they put on other clothes, they may go to the part of the Temple area which is for the people."

### *Outside the Temple Area*

15When the man finished measuring inside the Temple area, he brought me out through the east gateway. He measured the area all around. 16The man measured the east side with the measuring stick; it was eight hundred seventy-five feet by the measuring stick. 17He measured the north side; it was eight hundred seventy-five feet by the measuring stick. 18He measured the south side; it was eight hundred seventy-five feet by the measuring stick. 19He went around to the west side; it measured eight hundred seventy-five feet by the measuring stick. 20So he measured the Temple area on all four sides. The Temple area had a wall all around it that was eight hundred seventy-five feet long and eight hundred seventy-five feet wide. It separated what was holy from that which was not holy.

## Psalm 133:1–3

### *The Love of God's People*

**A song for going up to worship. Of David.**

133 It is good and pleasantwhen God's people live together in peace!

2It is like perfumed oil poured on the priest's head
and running down his beard.

It ran down Aaron's beard
and on to the collar of his robes.

3It is like the dew of Mount Hermon

falling on the hills of Jerusalem.

There the LORD gives his blessing
of life forever.

## Proverbs 29:6

6 Evil people are trapped by their own sin,
but good people can sing and be happy.

## 1 Peter 1:1–25

1 From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. To God's chosen people
who are away from their homes and are scattered all around
Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. 2 God planned
long ago to choose you by making you his holy people, which is
the Spirit's work. God wanted you to obey him and to be made
clean by the blood of the death of Jesus Christ.
Grace and peace be yours more and more.

### *We Have a Living Hope*

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In
God's great mercy he has caused us to be born again into a
living hope, because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. 4 Now we
hope for the blessings God has for his children. These blessings,
which cannot be destroyed or be spoiled or lose their beauty,
are kept in heaven for you. 5 God's power protects you through
your faith until salvation is shown to you at the end of time.
6 This makes you very happy, even though now for a short time
different kinds of troubles may make you sad. 7 These troubles
come to prove that your faith is pure. This purity of faith is
worth more than gold, which can be proved to be pure by fire
but will ruin. But the purity of your faith will bring you praise
and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is shown to you. 8 You
have not seen Christ, but still you love him. You cannot see him
now, but you believe in him. So you are filled with a joy that
cannot be explained, a joy full of glory. 9 And you are receiving
the goal of your faith—the salvation of your souls.
10 The prophets searched carefully and tried to learn about

this salvation. They prophesied about the grace that was coming to you. 11The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets, telling in advance about the sufferings of Christ and about the glory that would follow those sufferings. The prophets tried to learn about what the Spirit was showing them, when those things would happen, and what the world would be like at that time. 12It was shown them that their service was not for themselves but for you, when they told about the truths you have now heard. Those who preached the Good News to you told you those things with the help of the Holy Spirit who was sent from heaven—things into which angels desire to look.

## *A Call to Holy Living*

13So prepare your minds for service and have self-control. All your hope should be for the gift of grace that will be yours when Jesus Christ is shown to you. 14Now that you are obedient children of God do not live as you did in the past. You did not understand, so you did the evil things you wanted. 15But be holy in all you do, just as God, the One who called you, is holy. 16It is written in the Scriptures: "You must be holy, because I am holy."[n]

17You pray to God and call him Father, and he judges each person's work equally. So while you are here on earth, you should live with respect for God. 18You know that in the past you were living in a worthless way, a way passed down from the people who lived before you. But you were saved from that useless life. You were bought, not with something that ruins like gold or silver, 19but with the precious blood of Christ, who was like a pure and perfect lamb. 20Christ was chosen before the world was made, but he was shown to the world in these last times for your sake. 21Through Christ you believe in God, who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory. So your faith and your hope are in God.

22Now that your obedience to the truth has purified your souls, you can have true love for your Christian brothers and sisters. So love each other deeply with all your heart.[n] 23You have been born again, and this new life did not come from something that dies, but from something that cannot die. You were born again through God's living message that continues forever. 24The Scripture says,

"All people are like the grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

The grass dies and the flowers fall,

[25] but the word of the Lord will live forever.”

Isaiah 40:6–8

And this is the word that was preached to you.

# November 26

## Wounded by Words

*People insulted Christ, but he did not insult them in return. Christ suffered, but he did not threaten.*

1 Peter 2:23

someone you love or respect slams you to the floor with a slur or slip of the tongue. And there you lie, wounded and bleeding. Perhaps the words were intended to hurt you, perhaps not; but that doesn't matter. The wound is deep. The injuries are internal. Broken heart, wounded pride, bruised feelings.

If you have suffered or are suffering because of someone else's words, you'll be glad to know that there is a balm for this laceration. Meditate on these words from 1 Peter 2:23: "People insulted Christ, but he did not insult them in return … He let God, the One who judges rightly, take care of him."

Did you see what Jesus did? … He left the judging to God. He did not take on the task of seeking revenge. He demanded no apology … He, to the astounding contrary, spoke on their defense. "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Ezekiel 43:1—44:31

#### *The Lord Among His People*

43 Then the man led me to the outer east gateway, 2and I saw
the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. It sounded
like the roar of rushing water, and its brightness made the earth
shine. 3The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when the
LORD came to destroy the city and also like the vision I had seen
by the Kebar River. I bowed facedown on the ground. 4The glory
of the LORD came into the Temple area through the east
gateway.

5 Then the Spirit picked me up and brought me into the inner
courtyard. There I saw the LORD's glory filling the Temple. 6 As
the man stood at my side, I heard someone speaking to me from
inside the Temple. 7 The voice from the Temple said to me,
"Human, this is my throne and the place where my feet rest. I
will live here among the Israelites forever. The people of Israel
will not make my holy name unclean again. Neither the people
nor their kings will make it unclean with their sexual sins or
with the dead bodies of their kings. 8 The kings made my name
unclean by putting their doorway next to my doorway, and their
doorpost next to my doorpost so only a wall separated me from
them. When they did their acts that I hate, they made my holy
name unclean, and so I destroyed them in my anger. 9 Now let
them stop their sexual sins and take the dead bodies of their
kings far away from me. Then I will live among them forever.
10 "Human, tell the people of Israel about the Temple so they
will be ashamed of their sins. Let them think about the plan of
the Temple. 11 If they are ashamed of all they have done, let
them know the design of the Temple and how it is built. Show
them its exits and entrances, all its designs, and also all its
rules and teachings. Write the rules as they watch so they will
obey all the teachings and rules about the Temple. 12 This is the
teaching about the Temple: All the area around the top of the
mountain is most holy. This is the teaching about the Temple.

## *The Altar*

13 "These are the measurements of the altar, using the
measuring stick. The altar's gutter is twenty-one inches high
and twenty-one inches wide, and its rim is about nine inches
around its edge. And the altar is this tall: 14 From the ground up
to the lower ledge, it measures three and one-half feet. It is
twenty-one inches wide. It measures seven feet from the
smaller ledge to the larger ledge and is twenty-one inches wide.
15 The place where the sacrifice is burned on the altar is seven
feet high, with its four corners shaped like horns and reaching
up above it. 16 It is square, twenty-one feet long and twenty-one
feet wide. 17 The upper ledge is also square, twenty-four and
one-half feet long and twenty-four and one-half feet wide. The
rim around the altar is ten and one-half inches wide, and its
gutter is twenty-one inches wide all around. Its steps are on the
east side."
18 Then the man said to me, "Human, this is what the Lord
God says: These are the rules for the altar. When it is built, use
these rules to offer burnt offerings and to sprinkle blood on it.
19 You must give a young bull as a sin offering to the priests, the
Levites who are from the family of Zadok and who come near
me to serve me, says the Lord God. 20 Take some of the bull's

blood and put it on the four corners of the altar, on the four corners of the ledge, and all around the rim. This is how you will make the altar pure and ready for God's service. 21Then take the bull for the sin offering and burn it in the proper place in the Temple area, outside the Temple building.

22"On the second day offer a male goat that has nothing wrong with it for a sin offering. The priests will make the altar pure and ready for God's service as they did with the young bull. 23When you finish making the altar pure and ready, offer a young bull and a male sheep from the flock, which have nothing wrong with them. 24You must offer them in the presence of the LORD, and the priests are to throw salt on them and offer them as a burnt offering to the LORD.

25"You must prepare a goat every day for seven days as a sin offering. Also, the priests must prepare a young bull and male sheep from the flock, which have nothing wrong with them. 26For seven days the priests are to make the altar pure and ready for God's service. Then they will give the altar to God. 27After these seven days, on the eighth day, the priests must offer your burnt offerings and your fellowship offerings on the altar. Then I will accept you, says the Lord God."

## *The Outer East Gate*

44 Then the man brought me back to the outer east gateway of the Temple area, but the gate was shut. 2The LORD said to me, "This gate will stay shut; it will not be opened. No one may enter through it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered through it. So it must stay shut. 3Only the ruler himself may sit in the gateway to eat a meal in the presence of the LORD. He must enter through the porch of the gateway and go out the same way."

4Then the man brought me through the outer north gate to the front of the Temple. As I looked, I saw the glory of the LORD filling the Temple of the LORD, and I bowed facedown on the ground.

5The LORD said to me, "Human, pay attention. Use your eyes to see, and your ears to hear. See and hear everything I tell you about all the rules and teachings of the Temple of the LORD. Pay attention to the entrance to the Temple and to all the exits from the Temple area. 6Then speak to those who refuse to obey. Say to the people of Israel, 'This is what the Lord God says: Stop doing all your acts that I hate, Israel! 7You brought foreigners into my Holy Place who were not circumcised in the flesh and had not given themselves to serving me. You dishonored my Temple when you offered me food, fat, and blood. You broke my agreement by all the things you did that I hate. 8You did not take care of my holy things yourselves but put foreigners in

charge of my Temple. 9This is what the Lord God says:
Foreigners who are not circumcised in flesh and who do not
give themselves to serving me may not enter my Temple. Not
even a foreigner living among the people of Israel may enter.
10"'But the Levites who stopped obeying me when Israel left
me and who followed their idols must be punished for their sin.
11These Levites are to be servants in my Holy Place. They may
guard the gates of the Temple and serve in the Temple area.
They may kill the animals for the burnt offering and the
sacrifices for the people. They may stand before the people to
serve them. 12But these Levites helped the people worship their
idols and caused the people of Israel to fall, so I make this
promise: They will be punished for their sin, says the Lord God.
13They will not come near me to serve as priests, nor will they
come near any of my holy things or the most holy offerings. But
they will be made ashamed of the things they did that I hate. 14I
will put them in charge of taking care of the Temple area, all
the work that must be done in it.
15"'But the priests who are Levites and descendants of Zadok
took care of my Holy Place when Israel left me, so they may
come near to serve me. They may stand in my presence to offer
me the fat and blood of the animals they sacrifice, says the Lord
God. 16They are the only ones who may enter my Holy Place.
Only they may come near my table to serve me and take care of
the things I gave them to do.
17"'When they enter the gates of the inner courtyard, they
must wear linen robes. They must not wear wool to serve at the
gates of the inner courtyard or in the Temple. 18They will wear
linen turbans on their heads and linen underclothes. They will
not wear anything that makes them perspire. 19When they go
out into the outer courtyard to the people, they must take off
their serving clothes before they go. They must leave these
clothes in the holy rooms and put on other clothes. Then they
will not let their holy clothes hurt the people.
20"'They must not shave their heads or let their hair grow
long but must keep the hair of their heads trimmed. 21None of
the priests may drink wine when they enter the inner courtyard.
22The priests must not marry widows or divorced women. They
may marry only virgins from the people of Israel or widows of
priests. 23They must teach my people the difference between
what is holy and what is not holy. They must help my people
know what is unclean and what is clean.
24"'In court they will act as judges. When they judge, they
will follow my teachings. They must obey my laws and my rules
at all my special feasts and keep my Sabbaths holy.
25"'They must not go near a dead person, making themselves
unclean. But they are allowed to make themselves unclean if
the dead person is their father, mother, son, daughter, brother,

or a sister who has not married. 26After a priest has been made clean again, he must wait seven days. 27Then he may go into the inner courtyard to serve in the Temple, but he must offer a sin offering for himself, says the Lord God.

28"'These are the rules about the priests and their property: They will have me instead of property. You will not give them any land to own in Israel; I am what they will own. 29They will eat the grain offerings, sin offerings, and penalty offerings. Everything Israel gives to me will be theirs. 30The best fruits of all the first harvests and all the special gifts offered to me will belong to the priests. You will also give to the priests the first part of your grain that you grind and so bring a blessing on your family. 31The priests must not eat any bird or animal that died a natural death or one that has been torn by wild animals.

## Psalm 134:1–3

### *Temple Guards, Praise the Lord*

**A song for going up to worship.**

134 Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,
you who serve at night in the Temple of the LORD.

2Raise your hands in the Temple
and praise the LORD.

3May the LORD bless you from Mount Zion,
he who made heaven and earth.

## Proverbs 29:7

7Good people care about justice for the poor,
but the wicked are not concerned.

## 1 Peter 2:1–25

## *Jesus Is the Living Stone*

2 So then, rid yourselves of all evil, all lying, hypocrisy, jealousy,
and evil speech. 2As newborn babies want milk, you should
want the pure and simple teaching. By it you can mature in your
salvation, 3because you have already examined and seen how
good the Lord is.

4Come to the Lord Jesus, the "stone"[n] that lives. The people
of the world did not want this stone, but he was the stone God
chose, and he was precious. 5You also are like living stones, so
let yourselves be used to build a spiritual temple—to be holy
priests who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. He will accept
those sacrifices through Jesus Christ. 6The Scripture says:

"I will put a stone in the ground in Jerusalem.
Everything will be built on this important and precious
rock.

Anyone who trusts in him
will never be disappointed."

Isaiah 28:16

7This stone is worth much to you who believe. But to the people
who do not believe,

"the stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone."

Psalm 118:22

8Also, he is

"a stone that causes people to stumble,
a rock that makes them fall."

Isaiah 8:14

They stumble because they do not obey what God says, which is
what God planned to happen to them.

9But you are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a
people for God's own possession. You were chosen to tell about

the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10At one time you were not a people, but now you are God's people. In the past you had never received mercy, but now you have received God's mercy.

## *Live for God*

11Dear friends, you are like foreigners and strangers in this world. I beg you to avoid the evil things your bodies want to do that fight against your soul. 12People who do not believe are living all around you and might say that you are doing wrong. Live such good lives that they will see the good things you do and will give glory to God on the day when Christ comes again.

## *Yield to Every Human Authority*

13For the Lord's sake, yield to the people who have authority in this world: the king, who is the highest authority, 14and the leaders who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15It is God's desire that by doing good you should stop foolish people from saying stupid things about you. 16Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Live as servants of God. 17Show respect for all people: Love the brothers and sisters of God's family, respect God, honor the king.

## *Follow Christ's Example*

18Slaves, yield to the authority of your masters with all respect, not only those who are good and kind, but also those who are dishonest. 19A person might have to suffer even when it is unfair, but if he thinks of God and can stand the pain, God is pleased. 20If you are beaten for doing wrong, there is no reason to praise you for being patient in your punishment. But if you suffer for doing good, and you are patient, then God is pleased. 21This is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and gave you an example to follow. So you should do as he did.

22"He had never sinned,
and he had never lied."

Isaiah 53:9

23People insulted Christ, but he did not insult them in return. Christ suffered, but he did not threaten. He let God, the One who judges rightly, take care of him. 24Christ carried our sins in

his body on the cross so we would stop living for sin and start living for what is right. And you are healed because of his wounds. [25]You were like sheep that wandered away, but now you have come back to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

# November 27

## A Clear Vision of the Cross

*Christ himself suffered for sins once. He was not guilty, but he suffered for those who are guilty to bring you to God.*

1 Peter 3:18

One of the reference points of London is the Charing Cross. It is near the geographical center of the city and serves as a navigational tool for those confused by the streets.

A little girl was lost in the great city. A policeman found her. Between sobs and tears, she explained she didn't know her way home. He asked her if she knew her address. She didn't. He asked her phone number; she didn't know that either. But when he asked her what she knew, suddenly her face lit up.

"I know the Cross," she said. "Show me the Cross and I can find my way home from there."

So can you. Keep a clear vision of the Cross on your horizon and you can find your way home.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

## Ezekiel 45:1—46:24

### *The Land Is Divided*

45 "'When you divide the land for the Israelite tribes by
throwing lots, you must give a part of the land to belong to the
LORD. It will be about seven miles long and about six miles wide;
all of this land will be holy. 2From this land, an area eight
hundred seventy-five feet square will be for the Temple. There
will be an open space around the Temple that is eighty-seven
and one-half feet wide. 3In the holy area you will measure a part
about seven miles long and three miles wide, and in it will be
the Most Holy Place. 4This holy part of the land will be for the
priests who serve in the Temple, who come near to the LORD to
serve him. It will be a place for the priests' houses and for the

Temple. 5Another area about seven miles long and more than three miles wide will be for the Levites, who serve in the Temple area. It will belong to them so they will have cities in which to live.

6"'You must give the city an area that is about one and one-half miles wide and about seven miles long, along the side of the holy area. It will belong to all the people of Israel.

7"'The ruler will have land on both sides of the holy area and the city. On the west of the holy area, his land will reach to the Mediterranean Sea. On the east of the holy area, his land will reach to the eastern border. It will be as long as the land given to each tribe. 8Only this land will be the ruler's property in Israel. So my rulers will not be cruel to my people anymore, but they will let each tribe in the nation of Israel have its share of the land.

9"'This is what the Lord God says: You have gone far enough, you rulers of Israel! Stop being cruel and hurting people, and do what is right and fair. Stop forcing my people out of their homes, says the Lord God. 10You must have honest scales, an honest dry measurement and an honest liquid measurement. 11The dry measure and the liquid measure will be the same: The liquid measure will always be a tenth of a homer,[n] and the ephah will always be a tenth of a homer. The measurement they follow will be the homer. 12The shekel[n] will be worth twenty gerahs, and a mina will be worth sixty shekels.

## *Offerings and Holy Days*

13"'This is the gift you should offer: a sixth of an ephah from every homer of wheat, and a sixth of an ephah from every homer of barley. 14The amount of oil you are to offer is a tenth of a bath from each cor. (Ten baths make a homer and also make a cor.) 15You should give one sheep from each flock of two hundred from the watering places of Israel. All these are to be offered for the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and fellowship offerings to remove sins so you will belong to God, says the Lord God. 16All people in the land will give this special offering to the ruler of Israel. 17It will be the ruler's responsibility to supply the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings. These offerings will be given at the feasts, at the New Moons, on the Sabbaths, and at all the other feasts of Israel. The ruler will supply the sin offerings, grain offerings, and fellowship offerings to pay for the sins of Israel.

18"'This is what the Lord God says: On the first day of the first month take a young bull that has nothing wrong with it. Use it to make the Temple pure and ready for God's service. 19The priest will take some of the blood from this sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the Temple, on the four corners of the

ledge of the altar, and on the posts of the gate to the inner courtyard. 20You will do the same thing on the seventh day of the month for anyone who has sinned by accident or without knowing it. This is how you make the Temple pure and ready for God's service.

## *Passover Feast Offerings*

21"'On the fourteenth day of the first month you will celebrate the Feast of Passover. It will be a feast of seven days when you eat bread made without yeast. 22On that day the ruler must offer a bull for himself and for all the people of the land as a sin offering. 23During the seven days of the feast he must offer seven bulls and seven male sheep that have nothing wrong with them. They will be burnt offerings to the LORD, which the ruler will offer every day of the seven days of the feast. He must also offer a male goat every day as a sin offering. 24The ruler must give as a grain offering one-half bushel for each bull and one-half bushel for each sheep. He must give a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel.

25"'Beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you celebrate the Feast of Shelters, the ruler will supply the same things for seven days: the sin offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the olive oil.

## *Rules for Worship*

46 "'This is what the Lord God says: The east gate of the inner courtyard will stay shut on the six working days, but it will be opened on the Sabbath day and on the day of the New Moon. 2The ruler will enter from outside through the porch of the gateway and stand by the gatepost, while the priests offer the ruler's burnt offering and fellowship offering. The ruler will worship at the entrance of the gateway, and then he will go out. But the gate will not be shut until evening. 3The people of the land will worship at the entrance of that gateway in the presence of the LORD on the Sabbaths and New Moons. 4This is the burnt offering the ruler will offer to the LORD on the Sabbath day: six male lambs that have nothing wrong with them and a male sheep that has nothing wrong with it. 5He must give a half-bushel grain offering with the male sheep, but he may give as much grain offering with the lambs as he pleases. He must also give a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of grain. 6On the day of the New Moon he must offer a young bull that has nothing wrong with it. He must also offer six lambs and a male sheep that have nothing wrong with them. 7The ruler must give a half-bushel grain offering with the bull and one-half bushel with the male sheep. With the lambs, he may give as much

grain as he pleases. But he must give a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of grain. 8When the ruler enters, he must go in through the porch of the gateway, and he must go out the same way.

9"'When the people of the land come into the LORD's presence at the special feasts, those who enter through the north gate to worship must go out through the south gate. Those who enter through the south gate must go out through the north gate. They must not return the same way they entered; everyone must go out the opposite way. 10The ruler will go in with the people when they go in and go out with them when they go out.

11"'At the feasts and regular times of worship one-half bushel of grain must be offered with a young bull, and one-half bushel of grain must be offered with a male sheep. But with an offering of lambs, the ruler may give as much grain as he pleases. He should give a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of grain. 12The ruler may give an offering as a special gift to the LORD; it may be a burnt offering or fellowship offering. When he gives it to the LORD, the inner east gate is to be opened for him. He must offer his burnt offering or his fellowship offering as he does on the Sabbath day. Then he will go out, and the gate will be shut after he has left.

13"'Every day you will give a year-old lamb that has nothing wrong with it for a burnt offering to the LORD. Do it every morning. 14Also, you must offer a grain offering with the lamb every morning. For this you will give three and one-third quarts of grain and one and one-third quarts of olive oil, to make the fine flour moist, as a grain offering to the LORD. This is a rule that must be kept from now on. 15So you must always give the lamb, together with the grain offering and the olive oil, every morning as a burnt offering.

## *Rules for the Ruler*

16"'This is what the Lord God says: If the ruler gives a gift from his land to any of his sons, that land will belong to the son and then to the son's children. It is their property passed down from their family. 17But if the ruler gives a gift from his land to any of his servants, that land will belong to the servant only until the year of freedom. Then the land will go back to the ruler. Only the ruler's sons may keep a gift of land from the ruler. 18The ruler must not take any of the people's land, forcing them out of their land. He must give his sons some of his own land so my people will not be scattered out of their own land.'"

## *The Special Kitchens*

19The man led me through the entrance at the side of the

gateway to the priests' holy rooms that face north. There I saw a place at the west end. 20The man said to me, "This is where the priests will boil the meat of the penalty offering and sin offering and bake the grain offering. Then they will not need to bring these holy offerings into the outer courtyard, because that would hurt the people."

21Then the man brought me out into the outer courtyard and led me to its four corners. In each corner of the courtyard was a smaller courtyard. 22Small courtyards were in the four corners of the courtyard. Each small courtyard was the same size, seventy feet long and fifty-two and one-half feet wide. 23A stone wall was around each of the four small courtyards, and places for cooking were built in each of the stone walls. 24The man said to me, "These are the kitchens where those who work in the Temple will boil the sacrifices offered by the people."

## Psalm 135:1–7

### *The Lord Saves, Idols Do Not*

135 Praise the Lord!

Praise the name of the LORD;
praise him, you servants of the LORD,

2you who stand in the LORD's Temple
and in the Temple courtyards.

3Praise the LORD, because he is good;
sing praises to him, because it is pleasant.

4The LORD has chosen the people of Jacob for himself;
he has chosen the people of Israel for his very own.

5I know that the LORD is great.
Our LORD is greater than all the gods.

6 The LORD does what he pleases,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and the deep oceans.

7 He brings the clouds from the ends of the earth.
He sends the lightning with the rain.
He brings out the wind from his storehouses.

## Proverbs 29:8

8 People who make fun of wisdom cause trouble in a city,
but wise people calm anger down.

## 1 Peter 3:1–22

### *Wives and Husbands*

3 In the same way, you wives should yield to your husbands. Then, if some husbands do not obey God's teaching, they will be persuaded to believe without anyone's saying a word to them. They will be persuaded by the way their wives live. 2 Your husbands will see the pure lives you live with your respect for God. 3 It is not fancy hair, gold jewelry, or fine clothes that should make you beautiful. 4 No, your beauty should come from within you—the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit that will never be destroyed and is very precious to God. 5 In this same way the holy women who lived long ago and followed God made themselves beautiful, yielding to their own husbands. 6 Sarah obeyed Abraham, her husband, and called him her master. And you women are true children of Sarah if you always do what is right and are not afraid.

7 In the same way, you husbands should live with your wives in an understanding way, since they are weaker than you. But show them respect, because God gives them the same blessing he gives you—the grace that gives true life. Do this so that nothing will stop your prayers.

### *Suffering for Doing Right*

[8]Finally, all of you should be in agreement, understanding each other, loving each other as family, being kind and humble. [9]Do not do wrong to repay a wrong, and do not insult to repay an insult. But repay with a blessing, because you yourselves were called to do this so that you might receive a blessing. [10]The Scripture says,

"A person must do these things
to enjoy life and have many happy days.

He must not say evil things,
and he must not tell lies.

[11]He must stop doing evil and do good.
He must look for peace and work for it.

[12]The Lord sees the good people
and listens to their prayers.

But the Lord is against
those who do evil."

Psalm 34:12–16

[13]If you are trying hard to do good, no one can really hurt you. [14]But even if you suffer for doing right, you are blessed.

"Don't be afraid of what they fear;
do not dread those things."

Isaiah 8:12–13

[15]But respect Christ as the holy Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have, [16]but answer in a gentle way and with respect. Keep a clear conscience so that those who speak evil of your good life in Christ will be made ashamed. [17]It is better to suffer for doing good than for doing wrong if that is what God wants. [18]Christ himself suffered for sins once. He was not guilty, but he suffered for those who are guilty to bring you to God. His body was killed, but he was made alive in the spirit. [19]And in the spirit he went and preached to the spirits in prison [20]who refused to obey God long ago in the time of Noah. God was waiting patiently for them while Noah was building the boat.

Only a few people—eight in all—were saved by water. [21]And that water is like baptism that now saves you—not the washing of dirt from the body, but the promise made to God from a good conscience. And this is because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. [22]Now Jesus has gone into heaven and is at God's right side ruling over angels, authorities, and powers.

# November 28

## Designed by God

*Anyone who serves should serve with the strength God gives.*

1 Peter 4:11

God shaped you according to your purpose. How else can you explain yourself? Your ability to diagnose an engine problem by the noise it makes, to bake a cake without a recipe. You knew the Civil War better than your American history teacher. You know the name of every kid in the orphanage. How do you explain such quirks of skill?

God. He knew young Israel would need a code, so he gave Moses a love for the law. He knew the doctrine of grace would need a fiery advocate, so he set Paul ablaze. And in your case, he knew what your generation would need and gave it. He designed you. And *his design defines your destiny.* Remember Peter's admonition? "Any who serves should serve with the strength God gives."

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Ezekiel 47:1—48:35

#### *The River from the Temple*

47 The man led me back to the door of the Temple, and I saw water coming out from under the doorway and flowing east. (The Temple faced east.) The water flowed down from the south side wall of the Temple and then south of the altar. 2The man brought me out through the outer north gate and led me around outside to the outer east gate. I found the water coming out on the south side of the gate.

3The man went toward the east with a line in his hand and measured about one-third of a mile. Then he led me through water that came up to my ankles. 4The man measured about one-third of a mile again and led me through water that came

up to my knees. Then he measured about one-third of a mile again and led me through water up to my waist. [5]The man measured about one-third of a mile again, but it was now a river that I could not cross. The water had risen too high; it was deep enough for swimming; it was a river that no one could cross. [6]The man asked me, “Human, do you see this?”

Then the man led me back to the bank of the river. [7]As I went back, I saw many trees on both sides of the river. [8]The man said to me, “This water will flow toward the eastern areas and go down into the Jordan Valley. When it enters the Dead Sea, it will become fresh. [9]Everywhere the river goes, there will be many fish. Wherever this water goes the Dead Sea will become fresh, and so where the river goes there will be many living things. [10]Fishermen will stand by the Dead Sea. From En Gedi all the way to En Eglaim there will be places to spread fishing nets. There will be many kinds of fish in the Dead Sea, as many as in the Mediterranean Sea. [11]But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. [12]All kinds of fruit trees will grow on both banks of the river, and their leaves will not dry and die. The trees will have fruit every month, because the water for them comes from the Temple. The fruit from the trees will be used for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

## *Borders of the Land*

[13]This is what the Lord God says: “These are the borders of the land to be divided among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph will have two parts of land. [14]You will divide the land equally. I promised to give it to your ancestors, so this land will belong to you as family property.

[15]“This will be the border line of the land: “On the north side it will start at the Mediterranean Sea. It will go through Hethlon, toward Lebo Hamath and on to the towns of Zedad, [16]Berothah, and Sibraim on the border between Damascus and Hamath. Then it will go on to the town of Hazer Hatticon on the border of the country of Hauran. [17]So the border line will go from the Mediterranean Sea east to the town of Hazar Enan, where the land belonging to Damascus and Hamath lies on the north side. This will be the north side of the land.

[18]“On the east side the border runs south from a point between Hauran and Damascus. It will go along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel and will continue to the town of Tamar on the Dead Sea. This will be the east side of the land.

[19]“On the south side the border line will go west from Tamar all the way to the waters of Meribah Kadesh. Then it will run along the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea. This will be the south side of the land.

20 “On the west side the Mediterranean Sea will be the
border line up to a place across from Lebo Hamath. This will be
the west side of your land.
21 “You will divide this land among the tribes of Israel. 22 You
will divide it as family property for yourselves and for the
foreigners who live and have children among you. You are to
treat these foreigners the same as people born in Israel; they
are to share the land with the tribes of Israel. 23 In whatever
tribe the foreigner lives, you will give him some land,” says the
Lord God.

## *Dividing the Land*

48 “These are the areas of the tribes named here: Dan will have
one share at the northern border. It will go from the sea
through Hethlon to Lebo Hamath, all the way to Hazar Enan,
where Damascus lies to the north. It will stop there next to
Hamath. This will be Dan’s northern border from the east side
to the Mediterranean Sea on the west side.
2 “South of Dan’s border, Asher will have one share. It will go
from the east side to the west side.
3 “South of Asher’s border, Naphtali will have one share. It
will go from the east side to the west side.
4 “South of Naphtali’s border, Manasseh will have one share.
It will go from the east side to the west side.
5 “South of Manasseh’s border, Ephraim will have one share.
It will go from the east side to the west side.
6 “South of Ephraim’s border, Reuben will have one share. It
will go from the east side to the west side.
7 “South of Reuben’s border, Judah will have one share. It will
go from the east side to the west side.
8 “South of Judah’s border will be the holy area which you are
to give. It will be about seven miles wide and as long and wide
as one of the tribes’ shares. It will run from the east side to the
west side. The Temple will be in the middle of this area.
9 “The share which you will give the LORD will be about seven
miles long and three miles wide. 10 The holy area will be divided
among these people. The priests will have land about seven
miles long on the north and south sides, and three miles wide
on the west and east sides. The Temple of the LORD will be in the
middle of it. 11 This land is for the priests who are given the holy
duty of serving the LORD. They are the descendants of Zadok
who did my work and did not leave me when Israel and the
Levites left me. 12 They will have as their share a very holy part
of the holy portion of the land. It will be next to the land of the
Levites.
13 “Alongside the land for the priests, the Levites will have a
share about seven miles long and three miles wide; its full

length will be about seven miles and its full width about three miles. 14The Levites are not to sell or trade any of this land. They are not to let anyone else own any of this best part of the land, because it belongs to the LORD.

## *City Property*

15"The rest of the area will be about one and one-half miles wide and seven miles long. It will not be holy but will belong to the city and be used for homes and pastures. The city will be in the middle of it. 16These are the city's measurements: the north side will be about one mile, the south side about one mile, the east side about one mile, and the west side about one mile. 17The city's land for pastures will be about four hundred thirty-seven feet on the north, four hundred thirty-seven feet on the south, four hundred thirty-seven feet on the east, and four hundred thirty-seven feet on the west. 18Along the long side of the holy area there will be left three miles on the east and three miles on the west. It will be used to grow food for the city workers. 19The city workers from all the tribes of Israel will farm this land. 20This whole area will be square, seven miles by seven miles. You shall give to the LORD the holy share along with the city property.

21"Land that is left over on both sides of the holy area and city property will belong to the ruler. That land will extend east of the holy area to the eastern border and west of it to the Mediterranean Sea. Both of these areas run the length of the lands of the tribes, and they belong to the ruler. The holy area with the Holy Place of the Temple will be in the middle. 22The Levites' land and the city property will be in the middle of the lands belonging to the ruler. Those lands will be between Judah's border and Benjamin's border.

## *The Other Tribes' Land*

23"Here is what the rest of the tribes will receive: Benjamin will have one share. It will go from the east side to the Mediterranean Sea on the west side.

24"South of Benjamin's land, Simeon will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

25"South of Simeon's land, Issachar will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

26"South of Issachar's land, Zebulun will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

27"South of Zebulun's land, Gad will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

28"The southern border of Gad's land will go east from Tamar on the Dead Sea to the waters of Meribah Kadesh. Then it will

run along the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea.
29 "This is the land you will divide among the tribes of Israel
to be their shares," says the Lord God.

### *The Gates of the City*

30 "These will be the outside borders of the city: The north
side will measure more than one mile. 31 There will be three
gates facing north: Reuben's Gate, Judah's Gate, and Levi's
Gate, named for the tribes of Israel.
32 "The east side will measure more than one mile. There will
be three gates facing east: Joseph's Gate, Benjamin's Gate, and
Dan's Gate.
33 "The south side will measure more than one mile. There
will be three gates facing south: Simeon's Gate, Issachar's Gate,
and Zebulun's Gate.
34 "The west side will measure more than one mile. There will
be three gates facing west: Gad's Gate, Asher's Gate, and
Naphtali's Gate.
35 "The city will measure about six miles around. From then
on the name of the city will be The LORD Is There."

## Psalm 135:8–14

8 He destroyed the firstborn sons in Egypt
the firstborn of both people and animals.

9 He did many signs and miracles in Egypt
against the king and his servants.

10 He defeated many nations
and killed powerful kings:

11 Sihon king of the Amorites,
Og king of Bashan,
and all the kings of Canaan.

12 Then he gave their land as a gift,
a gift to his people, the Israelites.

13 LORD, your name is everlasting;
LORD, you will be remembered forever.

14 The LORD defends his people
and has mercy on his servants.

## Proverbs 29:9

9 When a wise person takes a foolish person to court,
the fool only shouts or laughs, and there is no peace.

## 1 Peter 4:1–19

### *Change Your Lives*

4 Since Christ suffered while he was in his body, strengthen
yourselves with the same way of thinking Christ had. The
person who has suffered in the body is finished with sin.
2 Strengthen yourselves so that you will live here on earth doing
what God wants, not the evil things people want. 3 In the past
you wasted too much time doing what nonbelievers enjoy. You
were guilty of sexual sins, evil desires, drunkenness, wild and
drunken parties, and hateful idol worship. 4 Nonbelievers think
it is strange that you do not do the many wild and wasteful
things they do, so they insult you. 5 But they will have to explain
this to God, who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For
this reason the Good News was preached to those who are now
dead. Even though they were judged like all people, the Good
News was preached to them so they could live in the spirit as
God lives.

### *Use God's Gifts Wisely*

7 The time is near when all things will end. So think clearly
and control yourselves so you will be able to pray. 8 Most
importantly, love each other deeply, because love will cause
people to forgive each other for many sins. 9 Open your homes
to each other, without complaining. 10 Each of you has received
a gift to use to serve others. Be good servants of God's various

gifts of grace. 11Anyone who speaks should speak words from God. Anyone who serves should serve with the strength God gives so that in everything God will be praised through Jesus Christ. Power and glory belong to him forever and ever. Amen.

## *Suffering as a Christian*

12My friends, do not be surprised at the terrible trouble which now comes to test you. Do not think that something strange is happening to you. 13But be happy that you are sharing in Christ's sufferings so that you will be happy and full of joy when Christ comes again in glory. 14When people insult you because you follow Christ, you are blessed, because the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is with you. 15Do not suffer for murder, theft, or any other crime, nor because you trouble other people. 16But if you suffer because you are a Christian, do not be ashamed. Praise God because you wear that name. 17It is time for judgment to begin with God's family. And if that judging begins with us, what will happen to those people who do not obey the Good News of God?

18"If it is very hard for a good person to be saved,
the wicked person and the sinner will surely be lost!"[n]

19So those who suffer as God wants should trust their souls to the faithful Creator as they continue to do what is right.

# November 29

# Immersed in Grace

*He called you to share in his glory in Christ, a glory that will continue forever.*

1 Peter 5:10

TO believe we are totally and eternally debt free is seldom easy. Even if we've stood before the throne and heard it from the king himself, we still doubt. As a result, many are forgiven only a little, not because the grace of the king is limited, but because the faith of the sinner is small. God is willing to forgive all. He's willing to wipe the slate completely clean. He guides us to a pool of mercy and invites us to bathe. Some plunge in, but others just touch the surface. They leave feeling unforgiven …

Where the grace of God is missed, bitterness is born. But where the grace of God is embraced, forgiveness flourishes …

The more we immerse ourselves in grace, the more likely we are to give grace.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

## Daniel 1:1—2:49

### *Daniel Taken to Babylon*

1 During the third year that Jehoiakim was king of Judah,
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and
surrounded it with his army. 2The LORD allowed Nebuchadnezzar
to capture Jehoiakim king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar also took
some of the things from the Temple of God, which he carried to
Babylonia and put in the temple of his gods.

3Then King Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz, his chief
officer, to bring some of the men of Judah into his palace. He
wanted them to be from important families, including the family
of the king of Judah. 4King Nebuchadnezzar wanted only young
Israelite men who had nothing wrong with them. They were to

be handsome and well educated, capable of learning and understanding, and able to serve in his palace. Ashpenaz was to teach them the language and writings of the Babylonians. 5The king gave the young men a certain amount of food and wine every day, just like the food he ate. The young men were to be trained for three years, and then they would become servants of the king of Babylon. 6Among those young men were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the people of Judah.

7Ashpenaz, the chief officer, gave them Babylonian names. Daniel's new name was Belteshazzar, Hananiah's was Shadrach, Mishael's was Meshach, and Azariah's was Abednego.

8Daniel decided not to eat the king's food or drink his wine because that would make him unclean. So he asked Ashpenaz for permission not to make himself unclean in this way.

9God made Ashpenaz, the chief officer, want to be kind and merciful to Daniel, 10but Ashpenaz said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my master, the king. He ordered me to give you this food and drink. If you begin to look worse than other young men your age, the king will see this. Then he will cut off my head because of you."

11Ashpenaz had ordered a guard to watch Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 12Daniel said to the guard, "Please give us this test for ten days: Don't give us anything but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13After ten days compare how we look with how the other young men look who eat the king's food. See for yourself and then decide how you want to treat us, your servants."

14So the guard agreed to test them for ten days. 15After ten days they looked healthier and better fed than all the young men who ate the king's food. 16So the guard took away the king's special food and wine, feeding them vegetables instead.

17God gave these four young men wisdom and the ability to learn many things that people had written and studied. Daniel could also understand visions and dreams.

18At the end of the time set for them by the king, Ashpenaz brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. 19the king talked to them and found that none of the young men were as good as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So those four young men became the king's servants. 20Every time the king asked them about something important, they showed much wisdom and understanding. They were ten times better than all the fortune-tellers and magicians in his kingdom! 21So Daniel continued to be the king's servant until the first year Cyrus was king.

## *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream*

2 During Nebuchadnezzar's second year as king, he had dreams

that bothered him and kept him awake at night. [2]So the king called for his fortune-tellers, magicians, wizards, and wise men, because he wanted them to tell him what he had dreamed. They came in and stood in front of the king.

[3]Then the king said to them, “I had a dream that bothers me, and I want to know what it means.”

[4]The wise men answered the king in the Aramaic language, “O king, live forever! Please tell us, your servants, your dream. Then we will tell you what it means.”

[5]King Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “I meant what I said. You must tell me the dream and what it means. If you don’t, I will have you torn apart, and I will turn your houses into piles of stones. [6]But if you tell me my dream and its meaning, I will reward you with gifts and great honor. So tell me the dream and what it means.”

[7]Again the wise men said to the king, “Tell us, your servants, the dream, and we will tell you what it means.”

[8]King Nebuchadnezzar answered, “I know you are trying to get more time, because you know that I meant what I said. [9]If you don’t tell me my dream, you will be punished. You have all agreed to tell me lies and wicked things, hoping things will change. Now, tell me the dream so that I will know you can tell me what it really means!”

[10]The wise men answered the king, saying, “No one on earth can do what the king asks! No great and powerful king has ever asked the fortune-tellers, magicians, or wise men to do this; [11]the king is asking something that is too hard. Only the gods could tell the king this, but the gods do not live among people.”

[12]When the king heard their answer, he became very angry. He ordered that all the wise men of Babylon be killed. [13]So King Nebuchadnezzar’s order to kill the wise men was announced, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to kill them.

[14]Arioch, the commander of the king’s guards, was going to kill the wise men of Babylon. But Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and skill, [15]saying, “Why did the king order such a terrible punishment?” Then Arioch explained everything to Daniel. [16]So Daniel went to King Nebuchadnezzar and asked for an appointment so that he could tell the king what his dream meant.

[17]Then Daniel went to his house and explained the whole story to his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. [18]Daniel asked his friends to pray that the God of heaven would show them mercy and help them understand this secret so he and his friends would not be killed with the other wise men of Babylon.

[19]During the night God explained the secret to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven. [20]Daniel said:

“Praise God forever and ever,
because he has wisdom and power.

21He changes the times and seasons of the year.
He takes away the power of kings
and gives their power to new kings.

He gives wisdom to those who are wise
and knowledge to those who understand.

22He makes known secrets that are deep and hidden;
he knows what is hidden in darkness,
and light is all around him.

23I thank you and praise you, God of my ancestors,
because you have given me wisdom and power.

You told me what we asked of you;
you told us about the king’s dream.”

## *The Meaning of the Dream*

24Then Daniel went to Arioch, the man King Nebuchadnezzar had chosen to kill the wise men of Babylon. Daniel said to him, “Don’t put the wise men of Babylon to death. Take me to the king, and I will tell him what his dream means.”

25Very quickly Arioch took Daniel to the king and said, “I have found a man among the captives from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.”

26The king asked Daniel, who was also called Belteshazzar, “Are you able to tell me what I dreamed and what it means?”

27Daniel answered, “No wise man, magician, or fortune-teller can explain to the king the secret he has asked about. 28But there is a God in heaven who explains secret things, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at a later time. This is your dream, the vision you saw while lying on your bed:

29O king, as you were lying there, you thought about things to come. God, who can tell people about secret things, showed you what is going to happen. 30God also told this secret to me, not because I have greater wisdom than any other living person, but so that you may know what it means. In that way you will understand what went through your mind.

31“O king, in your dream you saw a huge, shiny, and

frightening statue in front of you. 32The head of the statue was
made of pure gold. Its chest and arms were made of silver. Its
stomach and the upper part of its legs were made of bronze.
33The lower part of the legs were made of iron, while its feet
were made partly of iron and partly of baked clay. 34While you
were looking at the statue, you saw a rock cut free, but no
human being touched the rock. It hit the statue on its feet of
iron and clay and smashed them. 35Then the iron, clay, bronze,
silver, and gold broke to pieces at the same time. They became
like chaff on a threshing floor in the summertime; the wind blew
them away, and there was nothing left. Then the rock that hit
the statue became a very large mountain that filled the whole
earth.

36"That was your dream. Now we will tell the king what it
means. 37O king, you are the greatest king. God of heaven has
given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory. 38Wherever
people, wild animals, and birds live, God made you ruler over
them. King Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head of gold on that
statue.

39"Another kingdom will come after you, but it will not be as
great as yours. Next a third kingdom, the bronze part, will rule
over the earth. 40Then there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as
iron. In the same way that iron crushes and smashes things to
pieces, the fourth kingdom will smash and crush all the other
kingdoms.

41"You saw that the statue's feet and toes were partly baked
clay and partly iron. That means the fourth kingdom will be a
divided kingdom. It will have some of the strength of iron in it,
just as you saw iron was mixed with clay. 42The toes of the
statue were partly iron and partly clay. So the fourth kingdom
will be partly strong like iron and partly breakable like clay.
43You saw the iron mixed with clay, but iron and clay do not hold
together. In the same way the people of the fourth kingdom will
be a mixture, but they will not be united as one people.

44"During the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set
up another kingdom that will never be destroyed or given to
another group of people. This kingdom will crush all the other
kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will continue forever.

45"King Nebuchadnezzar, you saw a rock cut from a
mountain, but no human being touched it. The rock broke the
iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold to pieces. In this way the
great God showed you what will happen. The dream is true, and
you can trust this explanation."

46Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell facedown on the ground in
front of Daniel. The king honored him and commanded that an
offering and incense be presented to him. 47Then the king said
to Daniel, "Truly I know your God is the greatest of all gods, the
Lord of all the kings. He tells people about things they cannot
know. I know this is true, because you were able to tell these

secret things to me.”
48Then the king gave Daniel many gifts plus an important position in his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar made him ruler over the whole area of Babylon and put him in charge of all the wise men of Babylon. 49Daniel asked the king to make Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego leaders over the area of Babylon, so the king did as Daniel asked. Daniel himself became one of the people who stayed at the royal court.

## Psalm 135:15–21

15The idols of other nations are made of silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

16They have mouths, but they cannot speak.
They have eyes, but they cannot see.

17They have ears, but they cannot hear.
They have no breath in their mouths.

18People who make idols will be like them,
and so will those who trust them.

19Family of Israel, praise the LORD.
Family of Aaron, praise the LORD.

20Family of Levi, praise the LORD.
You who respect the LORD should praise him.

21You people of Jerusalem, praise the LORD on Mount Zion.
Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 29:10

10 Murderers hate an honest person
and try to kill those who do right.

## 1 Peter 5:1–14

### *The Flock of God*

5 Now I have something to say to the elders in your group. I also
am an elder. I have seen Christ's sufferings, and I will share in
the glory that will be shown to us. I beg you to 2 shepherd God's
flock, for whom you are responsible. Watch over them because
you want to, not because you are forced. That is how God wants
it. Do it because you are happy to serve, not because you want
money. 3 Do not be like a ruler over people you are responsible
for, but be good examples to them. 4 Then when Christ, the Chief
Shepherd, comes, you will get a glorious crown that will never
lose its beauty.

5 In the same way, younger people should be willing to be
under older people. And all of you should be very humble with
each other.

"God is against the proud,
but he gives grace to the humble."

Proverbs 3:34

6 Be humble under God's powerful hand so he will lift you up
when the right time comes. 7 Give all your worries to him,
because he cares about you.

8 Control yourselves and be careful! The devil, your enemy,
goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to eat.
9 Refuse to give in to him, by standing strong in your faith. You
know that your Christian family all over the world is having the
same kinds of suffering.

10 And after you suffer for a short time, God, who gives all
grace, will make everything right. He will make you strong and
support you and keep you from falling. He called you to share in
his glory in Christ, a glory that will continue forever. 11 All power
is his forever and ever. Amen.

### *Final Greetings*

12 I wrote this short letter with the help of Silas, who I know
is a faithful brother in Christ. I wrote to encourage you and to
tell you that this is the true grace of God. Stand strong in that

grace.

13 The church in Babylon, who was chosen like you, sends you greetings. Mark, my son in Christ, also greets you. 14 Give each other a kiss of Christian love when you meet.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

# November 30

## Have You Seen Him?

*We saw the greatness of Jesus with our own eyes.*

2 Peter 1:16

Jesus. The man. The bronzed Galilean who spoke with such thunderous authority and loved with such childlike humility. The one who claimed to be older than time and greater than death …

Have you seen him?

Those who first did were never the same.

"My Lord and my God!" cried Thomas.

"I have seen the Lord," exclaimed Mary Magdalene.

"We have seen his glory," declared John.

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked?" rejoiced the two Emmaus bound disciples.

But Peter said it best. "We saw the greatness of Jesus with our own eyes."

from *God Came Near*

## Daniel 3:1—4:37

### *The Gold Idol and Blazing Furnace*

3 King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet high and
nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the area of
Babylon. 2Then he called for the leaders: the governors,
assistant governors, captains of the soldiers, people who
advised the king, keepers of the treasury, judges, rulers, and all
other officers in his kingdom. He wanted them to come to the
special service for the statue he had set up. 3So they all came
for the special service and stood in front of the statue that King
Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4Then the man who made
announcements for the king said in a loud voice, "People,
nations, and those of every language, this is what you are

commanded to do: [5]When you hear the sound of the horns, flutes, lyres, zithers,[n] harps, pipes, and all the other musical instruments, you must bow down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. [6]Anyone who doesn't bow down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

[7]Now people, nations, and those who spoke every language were there. When they heard the sound of the horns, flutes, lyres, zithers, pipes, and all the other musical instruments, they bowed down and worshiped the gold statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

[8]Then some Babylonians came up to the king and began speaking against the men of Judah. [9]They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! [10]O king, you gave a command that everyone who heard the horns, lyres, zithers, harps, pipes, and all the other musical instruments would have to bow down and worship the gold statue. [11]Anyone who wouldn't do this was to be thrown into a blazing furnace. [12]O king, there are some men of Judah whom you made officers in the area of Babylon that did not pay attention to your order. Their names are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They do not serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up."

[13]Nebuchadnezzar became very angry and called for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When they were brought to the king, [14]Nebuchadnezzar said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you do not serve my gods nor worship the gold statue I have set up? [15]In a moment you will again hear the sound of the horns, flutes, lyres, zithers, harps, pipes, and all the other musical instruments. If you bow down and worship the statue I made, that will be good. But if you do not worship it, you will immediately be thrown into the blazing furnace. What god will be able to save you from my power then?"

[16]Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, saying, "Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves to you. [17]If you throw us into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from the furnace. He will save us from your power, O king. [18]But even if God does not save us, we want you, O king, to know this: We will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

[19]Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and he changed his mind. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual. [20]Then he commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

[21]So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were tied up and thrown into the blazing furnace while still wearing their robes,

trousers, turbans, and other clothes. 22The king's command was very strict, and the furnace was made so hot that the flames killed the strong soldiers who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace. 23Firmly tied, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell into the blazing furnace.

24Then King Nebuchadnezzar was so surprised that he jumped to his feet. He asked the men who advised him, "Didn't we tie up only three men and throw them into the fire?"

They answered, "Yes, O king."

25The king said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire. They are not tied up, and they are not burned. The fourth man looks like a son of the gods."

26Then Nebuchadnezzar went to the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, come out! Servants of the Most High God, come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. 27When they came out, the governors, assistant governors, captains of the soldiers, and royal advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies. Their hair was not burned, their robes were not burned, and they didn't even smell like smoke!

28Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their God has sent his angel and saved his servants from the fire! These three men trusted their God and refused to obey my command. They were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god other than their own. 29So I now give this command: Anyone from any nation or language who says anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn apart and have his house turned into a pile of stones. No other god can save his people like this." 30Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the area of Babylon.

## *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Tree*

4 King Nebuchadnezzar sent this letter to the people, nations, and those who speak every language in all the world:

I wish you peace and great wealth!

2The Most High God has done miracles and wonderful things for me that I am happy to tell you about.

3His wonderful acts are great,
and his miracles are mighty.

His kingdom goes on forever,
and his rule continues from now on.

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was happy and successful at my palace,
5 but I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying on my
bed, I saw pictures and visions in my mind that alarmed me. 6 So
I ordered all the wise men of Babylon to come to me and tell me
what my dream meant. 7 The fortune-tellers, magicians, and
wise men came, and I told them about the dream. But they
could not tell me what it meant.
8 Finally, Daniel came to me. (I called him Belteshazzar to
honor my god, because the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) I
told my dream to him. 9 I said, "Belteshazzar, you are the most
important of all the fortune-tellers. I know that the spirit of the
holy gods is in you, so there is no secret that is too hard for you
to understand. This was what I dreamed; tell me what it means.
10 These are the visions I saw while I was lying in my bed: I
looked, and there in front of me was a tree standing in the
middle of the earth. And it was very tall. 11 The tree grew large
and strong. The top of the tree touched the sky and could be
seen from anywhere on earth. 12 The leaves of the tree were
beautiful. It had plenty of good fruit on it, enough food for
everyone. The wild animals found shelter under the tree, and
the birds lived in its branches. Every animal ate from it.
13 "As I was looking at those things in the vision while lying
on my bed, I saw an observer, a holy angel coming down from
heaven. 14 He spoke very loudly and said, 'Cut down the tree
and cut off its branches. Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.
Let the animals under the tree run away, and let the birds in its
branches fly away. 15 But leave the stump and its roots in the
ground with a band of iron and bronze around it; let it stay in
the field with the grass around it.
"'Let the man become wet with dew, and let him live among
the animals and plants of the earth. 16 Let him not think like a
human any longer, but let him have the mind of an animal for
seven years.
17 "'The observers gave this command; the holy ones declared
the sentence. This is so all people may know that the Most High
God rules over every kingdom on earth. God gives those
kingdoms to anyone he wants, and he chooses people to rule
them who are not proud.'
18 "That is what I, King Nebuchadnezzar, dreamed. Now
Belteshazzar,[n] tell me what the dream means. None of the wise
men in my kingdom can explain it to me, but you can, because
the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

## *Daniel Explains the Dream*

19 Then Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar, was very quiet
for a while, because his understanding of the dream frightened

him. So the king said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning make you afraid.”

Then Belteshazzar answered, “My master, I wish the dream were about your enemies, and I wish its meaning were for those who are against you! 20You saw a tree in your dream that grew large and strong. Its top touched the sky, and it could be seen from all over the earth. 21Its leaves were beautiful, and it had plenty of fruit for everyone to eat. It was a home for the wild animals, and its branches were nesting places for the birds. 22O king, you are that tree! You have become great and powerful, like the tall tree that touched the sky. Your power reaches to the far parts of the earth.

23“O king, you saw an observer, a holy angel, coming down from heaven who said, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it. But leave the stump and its roots in the ground with a band of iron and bronze around it; leave it in the field with the grass. Let him become wet with dew and live like a wild animal for seven years.’

24“This is the meaning of the dream, O king. The Most High God has commanded these things to happen to my master the king: 25You will be forced away from people to live among the wild animals. People will feed you grass like an ox, and dew from the sky will make you wet. Seven years will pass, and then you will learn this lesson: The Most High God is ruler over every kingdom on earth, and he gives those kingdoms to anyone he chooses.

26“Since the stump of the tree and its roots were left in the ground, your kingdom will be given back to you when you learn that one in heaven rules your kingdom. 27So, O king, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Stop doing wicked things and be kind to the poor. Then you might continue to be successful.”

## *The King’s Dream Comes True*

28All these things happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. 29Twelve months later as he was walking on the roof[n] of his palace in Babylon, 30he said, “I have built this great Babylon as my royal home. I built it by my power to show my glory and my majesty.”

31The words were still in his mouth when a voice from heaven said, “King Nebuchadnezzar, these things will happen to you: Your royal power has been taken away from you. 32You will be forced away from people. You will live with the wild animals and will be fed grass like an ox. Seven years will pass before you learn this lesson: The Most High God rules over every kingdom on earth and gives those kingdoms to anyone he chooses.”

33 Immediately the words came true. Nebuchadnezzar was
forced to go away from people, and he began eating grass like
an ox. He became wet from dew. His hair grew long like the
feathers of an eagle, and his nails grew like the claws of a bird.
34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up
toward heaven, and I could think normally again! Then I gave
praise to the Most High God; I gave honor and glory to him who
lives forever.

God's rule is forever,
and his kingdom continues for all time.

35 People on earth
are not truly important.

God does what he wants
with the powers of heaven
and the people on earth.

No one can stop his powerful hand
or question what he does.

36 At that time I could think normally again, and God gave
back my great honor and power and returned the glory to my
kingdom. The people who advised me and the royal family came
to me for help again. I became king again and was even greater
and more powerful than before. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, give
praise and honor and glory to the King of heaven. Everything he
does is right and fair, and he is able to make proud people
humble.

## Psalm 136:1–9

### *God's Love Continues Forever*

136 Give thanks to the LORD because he is good. His love
continues forever.

[2]Give thanks to the God of gods.
His love continues forever.

[3]Give thanks to the Lord of lords.
His love continues forever.

[4]Only he can do great miracles.
His love continues forever.

[5]With his wisdom he made the skies.
His love continues forever.

[6]He spread out the earth on the seas.
His love continues forever.

[7]He made the sun and the moon.
His love continues forever.

[8]He made the sun to rule the day.
His love continues forever.

[9]He made the moon and stars to rule the night.
His love continues forever.

## Proverbs 29:11

[11]Foolish people lose their tempers,
but wise people control theirs.

## 2 Peter 1:1–21

[1] From Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.
To you who have received a faith as valuable as ours, because our God and Savior Jesus Christ does what is right.

[2]Grace and peace be given to you more and more, because you truly know God and Jesus our Lord.

## *God Has Given Us Blessings*

[3]Jesus has the power of God, by which he has given us everything we need to live and to serve God. We have these things because we know him. Jesus called us by his glory and goodness. [4]Through these he gave us the very great and precious promises. With these gifts you can share in God's nature, and the world will not ruin you with its evil desires.

[5]Because you have these blessings, do your best to add these things to your lives: to your faith, add goodness; and to your goodness, add knowledge; [6]and to your knowledge, add self-control; and to your self-control, add patience; and to your patience, add service for God; [7]and to your service for God, add kindness for your brothers and sisters in Christ; and to this kindness, add love. [8]If all these things are in you and are growing, they will help you to be useful and productive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9]But anyone who does not have these things cannot see clearly. He is blind and has forgotten that he was made clean from his past sins.

[10]My brothers and sisters, try hard to be certain that you really are called and chosen by God. If you do all these things, you will never fall. [11]And you will be given a very great welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[12]You know these things, and you are very strong in the truth, but I will always help you remember them. [13]I think it is right for me to help you remember as long as I am in this body. [14]I know I must soon leave this body, as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me. [15]I will try my best so that you may be able to remember these things even after I am gone.

## *We Saw Christ's Glory*

[16]When we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were not telling just clever stories that someone invented. But we saw the greatness of Jesus with our own eyes. [17]Jesus heard the voice of God, the Greatest Glory, when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice said, "This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him." [18]We heard that voice from heaven while we were with Jesus on the holy mountain.

[19]This makes us more sure about the message the prophets gave. It is good for you to follow closely what they said as you would follow a light shining in a dark place, until the day begins and the morning star rises in your hearts. [20]Most of all, you

must understand this: No prophecy in the Scriptures ever comes from the prophet's own interpretation. [21]No prophecy ever came from what a person wanted to say, but people led by the Holy Spirit spoke words from God.

# December 1

## Just in Time

*“May the God you serve all the time save you!”*

Daniel 6:16

Look at Jonah in the fish belly—surrounded by gastric juices and sucked-in seaweed … He prays … Before he can say amen, the belly convulses, the fish belches, and Jonah lands face first on the beach.

Look at Daniel in the lions’ den; his prospects aren’t much better than Jonah’s. Jonah had been swallowed, and Daniel is about to be …

Or look at Joseph in the pit, a chalky hole in a hot desert. The lid has been pulled over the top and the wool has been pulled over his eyes … Like Jonah and Daniel, Joseph is trapped. He is out of options. There is no exit. There is no hope … Though the road to the palace takes a detour through a prison, it eventually ends up at the throne …

Such are the stories in the Bible. One near-death experience after another. Just when the neck is on the chopping block, just when the noose is around the neck, Calvary comes.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Daniel 5:1—6:28

### *The Writing on the Wall*

5 King Belshazzar gave a big banquet for a thousand royal
guests and drank wine with them. 2As Belshazzar was drinking
his wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver cups that
his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in
Jerusalem. This was so the king, his royal guests, his wives, and
his slave women could drink from those cups. 3So they brought
the gold cups that had been taken from the Temple of God in
Jerusalem. And the king and his royal guests, his wives, and his

slave women drank from them. [4]As they were drinking, they praised their gods, which were made from gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

[5]Suddenly the fingers of a person's hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote.

[6]King Belshazzar was very frightened. His face turned white, his knees knocked together, and he could not stand up because his legs were too weak. [7]The king called for the magicians, wise men, and wizards of Babylon and said to them, "Anyone who can read this writing and explain it will receive purple clothes fit for a king and a gold chain around his neck. And I will make that person the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

[8]Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. [9]King Belshazzar became even more afraid, and his face became even whiter. His royal guests were confused.

[10]Then the king's mother, who had heard the voices of the king and his royal guests, came into the banquet room. She said, "O king, live forever! Don't be afraid or let your face be white with fear! [11]There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, this man showed understanding, knowledge, and wisdom like the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, put this man in charge of all the wise men, fortune-tellers, magicians, and wizards. [12]The man I am talking about is named Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. He was very wise and had knowledge and understanding. He could explain dreams and secrets and could answer very hard problems. Call for Daniel. He will tell you what the writing on the wall means."

[13]So they brought Daniel to the king, and the king asked, "Is your name Daniel? Are you one of the captives my father the king brought from Judah? [14]I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that you are very wise and have knowledge and extraordinary understanding. [15]The wise men and magicians were brought to me to read this writing and to explain what it means, but they could not explain it. [16]I have heard that you are able to explain what things mean and can find the answers to hard problems. Read this writing on the wall and explain it to me. If you can, I will give you purple clothes fit for a king and a gold chain to wear around your neck. And you will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

[17]Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself, or you may give those rewards to someone else. But I will read the writing on the wall for you and will explain to you what it means.

[18]"O king, the Most High God made your father Nebuchadnezzar a great, important, and powerful king. [19]Because God made him important, all the people, nations, and

those who spoke every language were very frightened of Nebuchadnezzar. If he wanted someone to die, he killed that person. If he wanted someone to live, he let that person live. Those he wanted to promote, he promoted. Those he wanted to be less important, he made less important.

20"But Nebuchadnezzar became too proud and stubborn, so he was taken off his royal throne. His glory was taken away. 21He was forced away from people, and his mind became like the mind of an animal. He lived with the wild donkeys and was fed grass like an ox and became wet with dew. These things happened to him until he learned his lesson: The Most High God rules over every kingdom on earth, and he sets anyone he chooses over those kingdoms.

22"Belshazzar, you already knew these things, because you are a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar. Still you have not been sorry for what you have done. 23Instead, you have set yourself against the Lord of heaven. You ordered the drinking cups from the Temple of the Lord to be brought to you. Then you and your royal guests, your wives, and your slave women drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone that are not really gods; they cannot see or hear or understand anything. You did not honor God, who has power over your life and everything you do. 24So God sent the hand that wrote on the wall.

25"These are the words that were written on the wall: 'Mene, mene, tekel, and parsin.'

26"This is what the words mean: Mene: God has counted the days until your kingdom will end. 27Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found not good enough. 28Parsin: Your kingdom is being divided and will be given to the Medes and the Persians."

29Then Belshazzar gave an order for Daniel to be dressed in purple clothes and to have a gold chain put around his neck. And it was announced that Daniel was the third highest ruler in the kingdom. 30That very same night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonian people, was killed. 31So Darius the Mede became the new king when he was sixty-two years old.

## *Daniel and the Lions*

6 Darius thought it would be a good idea to choose one hundred twenty governors who would rule his kingdom. 2He chose three men as supervisors over those governors, and Daniel was one of the supervisors. The supervisors were to ensure that the governors did not try to cheat the king. 3Daniel showed that he could do the work better than the other supervisors and governors, so the king planned to put Daniel in charge of the whole kingdom. 4Because of this, the other supervisors and

governors tried to find reasons to accuse Daniel about his work in the government. But they could not find anything wrong with him or any reason to accuse him, because he was trustworthy and not lazy or dishonest. 5Finally these men said, “We will never find any reason to accuse Daniel unless it is about the law of his God.”

6So the supervisors and governors went as a group to the king and said: “King Darius, live forever! 7The supervisors, assistant governors, governors, the people who advise you, and the captains of the soldiers have all agreed that you should make a new law for everyone to obey: For the next thirty days no one should pray to any god or human except to you, O king. Anyone who doesn’t obey will be thrown into the lions’ den. 8Now, O king, make the law and sign your name to it so that it cannot be changed, because then it will be a law of the Medes and Persians and cannot be canceled.” 9So King Darius signed the law.

10Even though Daniel knew that the new law had been written, he went to pray in an upstairs room in his house, which had windows that opened toward Jerusalem. Three times each day Daniel would kneel down to pray and thank God, just as he always had done.

11Then those men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12So they went to the king and talked to him about the law he had made. They said, “Didn’t you sign a law that says no one may pray to any god or human except you, O king? Doesn’t it say that anyone who disobeys during the next thirty days will be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “Yes, that is the law, and the laws of the Medes and Persians cannot be canceled.”

13Then they said to the king, “Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is not paying attention to you, O king, or to the law you signed. Daniel still prays to his God three times every day.” 14The king became very upset when he heard this. He wanted to save Daniel, and he worked hard until sunset trying to think of a way to save him.

15Then those men went as a group to the king. They said, “Remember, O king, the law of the Medes and Persians says that no law or command given by the king can be changed.”

16So King Darius gave the order, and Daniel was brought in and thrown into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May the God you serve all the time save you!” 17A big stone was brought and placed over the opening of the lions’ den. Then the king used his signet ring and the rings of his royal officers to put special seals on the rock. This ensured that no one would move the rock and bring Daniel out. 18Then King Darius went back to his palace. He did not eat that night, he did not have any entertainment brought to him, and he could not sleep.

19The next morning King Darius got up at dawn and hurried

to the lions' den. [20]As he came near the den, he was worried. He called out to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God! Has your God that you always worship been able to save you from the lions?"

[21]Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! [22]My God sent his angel to close the lions' mouths. They have not hurt me, because my God knows I am innocent. I never did anything wrong to you, O king."

[23]King Darius was very happy and told his servants to lift Daniel out of the lions' den. So they lifted him out and did not find any injury on him, because Daniel had trusted in his God.

[24]Then the king commanded that the men who had accused Daniel be brought to the lions' den. They, their wives, and their children were thrown into the den. The lions grabbed them before they hit the floor of the den and crushed their bones.

[25]Then King Darius wrote a letter to all people and all nations, to those who spoke every language in the world:

I wish you great peace and wealth.

[26]I am making a new law for people in every part of my kingdom. All of you must fear and respect the God of Daniel.

Daniel's God is the living God;
he lives forever.

His kingdom will never be destroyed,
and his rule will never end.

[27]God rescues and saves people
and does mighty miracles
in heaven and on earth.

He is the one who saved Daniel
from the power of the lions.

[28]So Daniel was successful during the time Darius was king and when Cyrus the Persian was king.

## Psalm 136:10–26

[10]He killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians.

His love continues forever.

11 He brought the people of Israel out of Egypt.
His love continues forever.

12 He did it with his great power and strength.
His love continues forever.

13 He parted the water of the Red Sea.
His love continues forever.

14 He brought the Israelites through the middle of it.
His love continues forever.

15 But the king of Egypt and his army drowned in the Red Sea.
His love continues forever.

16 He led his people through the desert.
His love continues forever.

17 He defeated great kings.
His love continues forever.

18 He killed powerful kings.
His love continues forever.

19 He defeated Sihon king of the Amorites.
His love continues forever.

20 He defeated Og king of Bashan.
His love continues forever.

21 He gave their land as a gift.
His love continues forever.

22 It was a gift to his servants, the Israelites.
His love continues forever.

23 He remembered us when we were in trouble.
His love continues forever.

24 He freed us from our enemies.
His love continues forever.

25 He gives food to every living creature.
His love continues forever.

26 Give thanks to the God of heaven.
His love continues forever.

## Proverbs 29:12–13

12 If a ruler pays attention to lies,
all his officers will become wicked.

13 The poor person and the cruel person are alike
in that the LORD gave eyes to both of them.

## 2 Peter 2:1–22

### *False Teachers*

2 There used to be false prophets among God's people, just as
you will have some false teachers in your group. They will
secretly teach things that are wrong—teachings that will cause
people to be lost. They will even refuse to accept the Master,
Jesus, who bought their freedom. So they will bring quick ruin
on themselves. 2 Many will follow their evil ways and say evil
things about the way of truth. 3 Those false teachers only want
your money, so they will use you by telling you lies. Their

judgment spoken against them long ago is still coming, and their ruin is certain.

4When angels sinned, God did not let them go free without punishment. He sent them to hell and put them in caves[n] of darkness where they are being held for judgment. 5And God punished the world long ago when he brought a flood to the world that was full of people who were against him. But God saved Noah, who preached about being right with God, and seven other people with him. 6And God also destroyed the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah[n] by burning them until they were ashes. He made those cities an example of what will happen to those who are against God. 7But he saved Lot from those cities. Lot, a good man, was troubled because of the filthy lives of evil people. 8(Lot was a good man, but because he lived with evil people every day, his good heart was hurt by the evil things he saw and heard.) 9So the Lord knows how to save those who serve him when troubles come. He will hold evil people and punish them, while waiting for the Judgment Day. 10That punishment is especially for those who live by doing the evil things their sinful selves want and who hate authority.

These false teachers are bold and do anything they want. They are not afraid to speak against the angels. 11But even the angels, who are much stronger and more powerful than false teachers, do not accuse them with insults before[n] the Lord. 12But these people speak against things they do not understand. They are like animals that act without thinking, animals born to be caught and killed. And, like animals, these false teachers will be destroyed. 13They have caused many people to suffer, so they themselves will suffer. That is their pay for what they have done. They take pleasure in openly doing evil, so they are like dirty spots and stains among you. They delight in deceiving you while eating meals with you. 14Every time they look at a woman they want her, and their desire for sin is never satisfied. They lead weak people into the trap of sin, and they have taught their hearts to be greedy. God will punish them! 15These false teachers left the right road and lost their way, following the way Balaam went. Balaam was the son of Beor, who loved being paid for doing wrong. 16But a donkey, which cannot talk, told Balaam he was sinning. It spoke with a man’s voice and stopped the prophet’s crazy thinking.

17Those false teachers are like springs without water and clouds blown by a storm. A place in the blackest darkness has been kept for them. 18They brag with words that mean nothing. By their evil desires they lead people into the trap of sin—people who are just beginning to escape from others who live in error. 19They promise them freedom, but they themselves are not free. They are slaves of things that will be destroyed. For people are slaves of anything that controls them. 20They were

made free from the evil in the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But if they return to evil things and those things control them, then it is worse for them than it was before. 21Yes, it would be better for them to have never known the right way than to know it and to turn away from the holy teaching that was given to them. 22What they did is like this true saying: “A dog goes back to what it has thrown up,”[n] and, “After a pig is washed, it goes back and rolls in the mud.”

# December 2

# Four Habits Worth Having

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2 Peter 3:18

Growth is the goal of the Christian. Maturity is mandatory. If a child ceased to develop, the parent would be concerned, right? … When a Christian stops growing, help is needed. If you are the same Christian you were a few months ago, be careful. You might be wise to get a checkup. Not on your body, but on your heart. Not a physical, but a spiritual.

May I suggest one? …

Why don't you check your habits? … Make these four habits regular activities and see what happens.

First, the habit of prayer … Second, the habit of study … Third, the habit of giving … And last of all, the habit of fellowship.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## Daniel 7:1—8:27

### *Daniel's Dream About Four Animals*

7 In Belshazzar's first year as king of Babylon, Daniel had a
dream. He saw visions as he was lying on his bed, and he wrote
down what he had dreamed.

2Daniel said: "I saw my vision at night. In the vision the wind
was blowing from all four directions, which made the sea very
rough. 3I saw four huge animals come up from the sea, and
each animal was different from the others.

4"The first animal looked like a lion, but had wings like an
eagle. I watched this animal until its wings were torn off. It was
lifted from the ground so that it stood up on two feet like a
human, and it was given the mind of a human.

5 “Then I saw a second animal before me that looked like a
bear. It was raised up on one of its sides and had three ribs in
its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and eat all the
meat you want!’
6 “After that, I looked, and there before me was another
animal. This animal looked like a leopard with four wings on its
back that looked like a bird’s wings. This animal had four heads
and was given power to rule.
7 “After that, in my vision at night I saw in front of me a
fourth animal that was cruel, terrible, and very strong. It had
large iron teeth. It crushed and ate what it killed, and then it
walked on whatever was left. This fourth animal was different
from any animal I had seen before, and it had ten horns.
8 “While I was thinking about the horns, another horn grew
up among them. It was a little horn with eyes like a human’s
eyes. It also had a mouth, and the mouth was bragging. The
little horn pulled out three of the other horns.
9 “As I looked,

thrones were put in their places,
and God, the Eternal One, sat on his throne.

His clothes were white like snow,
and the hair on his head was white like wool.

His throne was made from fire,
and the wheels of his throne were blazing with fire.

10 A river of fire was flowing
from in front of him.

Many thousands of angels were serving him,
and millions of angels stood before him.

Court was ready to begin,
and the books were opened.

11 “I kept on looking because the little horn was bragging. I
kept watching until finally the fourth animal was killed. Its body
was destroyed, and it was thrown into the burning fire. 12 (The
power and rule of the other animals had been taken from them,
but they were permitted to live for a certain period of time.)

13 “In my vision at night I saw in front of me someone who
looked like a human being coming on the clouds in the sky. He
came near God, who has been alive forever, and he was led to
God. 14 He was given authority, glory, and the strength of a king.
People of every tribe, nation, and language will serve him. His
rule will last forever, and his kingdom will never be destroyed.

## *The Meaning of the Dream*

15 “I, Daniel, was worried. The visions that went through my
mind frightened me. 16 I came near one of those standing there
and asked what all this meant.

“So he told me and explained to me what these things meant:
17 ‘The four great animals are four kingdoms that will come from
the earth. 18 But the holy people who belong to the Most High
God will receive the power to rule and will have the power to
rule forever, from now on.’

19 “Then I wanted to know what the fourth animal meant,
because it was different from all the others. It was very terrible
and had iron teeth and bronze claws. It was the animal that
crushed and ate what it killed and then walked on whatever was
left. 20 I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head
and about the little horn that grew there. It had pulled out three
of the other ten horns and looked greater than the others. It
had eyes and a mouth that kept bragging. 21 As I watched, the
little horn began making war against God’s holy people and was
defeating them 22 until God, who has been alive forever, came.
He judged in favor of the holy people who belong to the Most
High God; then the time came for them to receive the power to
rule.

23 “And he explained this to me: ‘The fourth animal is a fourth
kingdom that will come on the earth. It will be different from all
the other kingdoms and will destroy people all over the world. It
will walk on and crush the whole earth. 24 The ten horns are ten
kings who will come from this fourth kingdom. After those ten
kings are gone, another king will come. He will be different
from the kings who ruled before him, and he will defeat three of
the other kings. 25 This king will speak against the Most High
God, and he will hurt and kill God’s holy people. He will try to
change times and laws that have already been set. The holy
people that belong to God will be in that king’s power for three
and one-half years.

26 “‘But the court will decide what should happen. The power
of the king will be taken away, and his kingdom will be
completely destroyed. 27 Then the holy people who belong to the
Most High God will have the power to rule. They will rule over
all the kingdoms under heaven with power and greatness, and
their power to rule will last forever. People from all the other

kingdoms will respect and serve them.’

28“That was the end of the dream. I, Daniel, was very afraid. My face became white from fear, but I kept everything to myself.”

## *Daniel’s Vision*

8 During the third year of King Belshazzar’s rule, I, Daniel, saw another vision, which was like the first one. 2In this vision I saw myself in the capital city of Susa, in the area of Elam. I was standing by the Ulai Canal 3when I looked up and saw a male sheep standing beside the canal. It had two long horns, but one horn was longer and newer than the other. 4I watched the sheep charge to the west, the north, and the south. No animal could stand before him, and none could save another animal from his power. He did whatever he wanted and became very powerful.

5While I was watching this, I saw a male goat come from the west. This goat had one large horn between his eyes that was easy to see. He crossed over the whole earth so fast that his feet hardly touched the ground.

6In his anger the goat charged the sheep with the two horns that I had seen standing by the canal. 7I watched the angry goat attack the sheep and break the sheep’s two horns. The sheep was not strong enough to stop it. The goat knocked the sheep to the ground and then walked all over him. No one was able to save the sheep from the goat, 8so the male goat became very great. But when he was strong, his big horn broke off and four horns grew in place of the one big horn. Those four horns pointed in four different directions and were easy to see.

9Then a little horn grew from one of those four horns, and it became very big. It grew to the south, the east, and toward the beautiful land of Judah. 10That little horn grew until it reached to the sky. It even threw some of the army of heaven to the ground and walked on them! 11That little horn set itself up as equal to God, the Commander of heaven’s armies. It stopped the daily sacrifices that were offered to him, and the Temple, the place where people worshiped him, was pulled down. 12Because there was a turning away from God, the people stopped the daily sacrifices. Truth was thrown down to the ground, and the horn was successful in everything it did.

13Then I heard a holy angel speaking. Another holy angel asked the first one, “How long will the things in this vision last —the daily sacrifices, the turning away from God that brings destruction, the Temple being pulled down, and the army of heaven being walked on?”

14The angel said to me, “This will happen for twenty-three hundred evenings and mornings. Then the holy place will be repaired.”

15 I, Daniel, saw this vision and tried to understand what it
meant. In it I saw someone who looked like a man standing near
me. 16 And I heard a man's voice calling from the Ulai Canal:
"Gabriel, explain the vision to this man."
17 Gabriel came to where I was standing. When he came close
to me, I was very afraid and bowed facedown on the ground.
But Gabriel said to me, "Human being, understand that this
vision is about the time of the end."
18 While Gabriel was speaking, I fell into a deep sleep with
my face on the ground. Then he touched me and lifted me to my
feet. 19 He said, "Now, I will explain to you what will happen in
the time of God's anger. Your vision was about the set time of
the end.
20 "You saw a male sheep with two horns, which are the kings
of Media and Persia. 21 The male goat is the king of Greece, and
the big horn between its eyes is the first king. 22 The four horns
that grew in the place of the broken horn are four kingdoms.
Those four kingdoms will come from the nation of the first king,
but they will not be as strong as the first king.
23 "When the end comes near for those kingdoms, a bold and
cruel king who tells lies will come. This will happen when many
people have turned against God. 24 This king will be very
powerful, but his power will not come from himself. He will
cause terrible destruction and will be successful in everything
he does. He will destroy powerful people and even God's holy
people. 25 This king will succeed by using lies and force. He will
think that he is very important. He will destroy many people
without warning; he will try to fight even the Prince of princes!
But that cruel king will be destroyed, and not by human power.
26 "The vision that has been shown to you about these
evenings and mornings is true. But seal up the vision, because
those things won't happen for a long time."
27 I, Daniel, became very weak and was sick for several days
after that vision. Then I got up and went back to work for the
king, but I was very upset about the vision. I didn't understand
what it meant.

## Psalm 137:1–6

### *Israelites in Captivity*

137 By the rivers in Babylon we sat and cried when we
remembered Jerusalem.

[2]On the poplar trees nearby
we hung our harps.

[3]Those who captured us asked us to sing;
our enemies wanted happy songs.
They said, “Sing us a song about Jerusalem!”

[4]But we cannot sing songs about the LORD
while we are in this foreign country!

[5]Jerusalem, if I forget you,
let my right hand lose its skill.

[6]Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,

if I do not think about Jerusalem
as my greatest joy.

## Proverbs 29:14

[14]If a king judges poor people fairly,
his government will continue forever.

## 2 Peter 3:1–18

### *Jesus Will Come Again*

[3] My friends, this is the second letter I have written you to help your honest minds remember. [2]I want you to think about the words the holy prophets spoke in the past, and remember the command our Lord and Savior gave us through your apostles. [3]It is most important for you to understand what will happen in the last days. People will laugh at you. They will live doing the evil things they want to do. [4]They will say, “Jesus promised to

come again. Where is he? Our fathers have died, but the world continues the way it has been since it was made.” 5But they do not want to remember what happened long ago. By the word of God heaven was made, and the earth was made from water and with water. 6Then the world was flooded and destroyed with water. 7And that same word of God is keeping heaven and earth that we now have in order to be destroyed by fire. They are being kept for the Judgment Day and the destruction of all who are against God.

8But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: To the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. 9The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives.

10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The skies will disappear with a loud noise. Everything in them will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be exposed.[n] 11In that way everything will be destroyed. So what kind of people should you be? You should live holy lives and serve God, 12as you wait for and look forward to the coming of the day of God. When that day comes, the skies will be destroyed with fire, and everything in them will melt with heat. 13But God made a promise to us, and we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth where goodness lives.

14Dear friends, since you are waiting for this to happen, do your best to be without sin and without fault. Try to be at peace with God. 15Remember that we are saved because our Lord is patient. Our dear brother Paul told you the same thing when he wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16He writes about this in all his letters. Some things in Paul’s letters are hard to understand, and people who are ignorant and weak in faith explain these things falsely. They also falsely explain the other Scriptures, but they are destroying themselves by doing this.

17Dear friends, since you already know about this, be careful. Do not let those evil people lead you away by the wrong they do. Be careful so you will not fall from your strong faith. 18But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Glory be to him now and forever! Amen.

# December 3

## The Gift of God's Smile

*"We do not ask these things because we are good; instead, we ask because of your mercy."*

Daniel 9:18

If only, when God smiles and says we are saved, we'd salute him, thank him, and live like those who have just received a gift from the commander in chief. We seldom do that, though. We prefer to get salvation the old-fashioned way: We earn it. To accept grace is to admit failure, a step we are hesitant to take. We opt to impress God with how good we are rather than confessing how great he is. We dizzy ourselves with doctrine. Burden ourselves with rules. Think that God will smile on our efforts.

He doesn't.

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

from *In the Eye of the Storm*

### Daniel 9:1—11:1

### *Daniel's Prayer*

9 These things happened during the first year Darius son of
Xerxes was king over Babylon. He was a descendant of the
Medes. 2During Darius' first year as king, I, Daniel, was reading
the Scriptures. I saw that the LORD told Jeremiah that Jerusalem
would be empty ruins for seventy years.

3Then I turned to the Lord God and prayed and asked him for
help. To show my sadness, I fasted, put on rough cloth, and sat
in ashes. 4I prayed to the LORD my God and told him about all of
our sins. I said, "Lord, you are a great God who causes fear and
wonder. You keep your agreement of love with all who love you

and obey your commands.
5 “But we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked
and turned against you, your commands, and your laws. 6 We did
not listen to your servants, the prophets, who spoke for you to
our kings, our leaders, our ancestors, and all the people of the
land.
7 “Lord, you are good and right, but we are full of shame
today—the people of Judah and Jerusalem, all the people of
Israel, those near and far whom you scattered among many
nations because they were not loyal to you. 8 LORD, we are all
ashamed. Our kings and leaders and our fathers are ashamed,
because we have sinned against you.
9 “But, Lord our God, you show us mercy and forgive us even
though we have turned against you. 10 We have not obeyed the
LORD our God or the teachings he gave us through his servants,
the prophets. 11 All the people of Israel have disobeyed your
teachings and have turned away, refusing to obey you. So you
brought on us the curses and promises of punishment written in
the Teachings of Moses, the servant of God, because we sinned
against you.
12 “You said these things would happen to us and our leaders,
and you made them happen; you brought on us a great disaster.
Nothing has ever been done on earth like what was done to
Jerusalem. 13 All this disaster came to us just as it is written in
the Teachings of Moses. But we have not pleaded with the LORD
our God. We have not stopped sinning. We have not paid
attention to your truth. 14 The LORD was ready to bring the
disaster on us, and he did it because the LORD our God is right in
everything he does. But we still did not obey him.
15 “Lord our God, you used your power and brought us out of
Egypt. Because of that, your name is known even today. But we
have sinned and have done wrong. 16 Lord, you do what is right,
but please do not be angry with Jerusalem, your city on your
holy hill. Because of our sins and the evil things done by our
ancestors, people all around insult and make fun of Jerusalem
and your people.
17 “Now, our God, hear the prayers of your servant. Listen to
my prayer for help, and for your sake do good things for your
holy place that is in ruins. 18 My God, pay attention and hear me.
Open your eyes and see all the terrible things that have
happened to us. See how our lives have been ruined and what
has happened to the city that is called by your name. We do not
ask these things because we are good; instead, we ask because
of your mercy. 19 Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear us and
do something! For your sake, don’t wait, because your city and
your people are called by your name.”

## *Gabriel’s Explanation*

20While I was saying these things in my prayer to the LORD,
my God, confessing my sins and the sins of the people of Israel
and praying for God's holy hill, 21Gabriel came to me. (I had
seen him in my last vision.) He came flying quickly to me about
the time of the evening sacrifice, while I was still praying. 22He
taught me and said to me, "Daniel, I have come to give you
wisdom and to help you understand. 23When you first started
praying, an answer was given, and I came to tell you, because
God loves you very much. So think about the message and
understand the vision.

24"God has ordered four hundred ninety years for your
people and your holy city for these reasons: to stop people from
turning against God; to put an end to sin; to take away evil; to
bring in goodness that continues forever; to bring about the
vision and prophecy; and to appoint a most holy place.

25"Learn and understand these things. A command will come
to rebuild Jerusalem. The time from this command until the
appointed leader comes will be forty-nine years and four
hundred thirty-four years. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets
and a trench filled with water around it, but it will be built in
times of trouble. 26After the four hundred thirty-four years the
appointed leader will be killed; he will have nothing. The people
of the leader who is to come will destroy the city and the holy
place. The end of the city will come like a flood, and war will
continue until the end. God has ordered that place to be
completely destroyed. 27That leader will make firm an
agreement with many people for seven years. He will stop the
offerings and sacrifices after three and one-half years. A
destroyer will do blasphemous things until the ordered end
comes to the destroyed city."

## *Daniel's Vision of a Man*

10 During Cyrus' third year as king of Persia, Daniel, whose
name was Belteshazzar, received a vision about a great war. It
was a true message that Daniel understood.

2At that time I, Daniel, had been very sad for three weeks. 3I
did not eat any fancy food or meat, or drink any wine, or use
any perfumed oil for three weeks.

4On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, I was standing
beside the great Tigris River. 5While standing there, I looked up
and saw a man dressed in linen clothes with a belt of fine gold
wrapped around his waist. 6His body was like shiny yellow
quartz. His face was bright like lightning, and his eyes were like
fire. His arms and legs were shiny like polished bronze, and his
voice sounded like the roar of a crowd.

7I, Daniel, was the only person who saw the vision. The men

with me did not see it, because they were so frightened that they ran away and hid. [8]So I was left alone, watching this great vision. I lost my strength, my face turned white like a dead person, and I was helpless. [9]Then I heard the man in the vision speaking. As I listened, I fell into a deep sleep with my face on the ground.

[10]Then a hand touched me and set me on my hands and knees. I was so afraid that I was shaking. [11]The man in the vision said to me, “Daniel, God loves you very much. Think carefully about the words I will speak to you, and stand up, because I have been sent to you.” When he said this, I stood up, but I was still shaking.

[12]Then the man said to me, “Daniel, do not be afraid. Some time ago you decided to get understanding and to humble yourself before your God. Since that time God has listened to you, and I have come because of your prayers. [13]But the prince of Persia has been fighting against me for twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the most important angels, came to help me, because I had been left there with the king of Persia. [14]Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people, because the vision is about a time in the future.”

[15]While he was speaking to me, I bowed facedown and could not speak. [16]Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, so I opened my mouth and started to speak. I said to the one standing in front of me, “Master, I am upset and afraid because of what I saw in the vision. I feel helpless. [17]Master, how can I, your servant, talk with you? My strength is gone, and it is hard for me to breathe.”

[18]The one who looked like a man touched me again and gave me strength. [19]He said, “Daniel, don’t be afraid. God loves you very much. Peace be with you. Be strong now; be courageous.”

When he spoke to me, I became stronger and said, “Master, speak, since you have given me strength.”

[20]Then he said, “Daniel, do you know why I have come to you? Soon I must go back to fight against the prince of Persia. When I go, the prince of Greece will come, [21]but I must first tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. No one stands with me against these enemies except Michael, the angel ruling over your people.

[11] In the first year that Darius the Mede was king, I stood up to support Michael in his fight against the prince of Persia.

## Psalm 137:7–9

7 LORD, remember what the Edomites did
on the day Jerusalem fell.

They said, “Tear it down!
Tear it down to its foundations!”

8 People of Babylon, you will be destroyed.
The people who pay you back for what you did to us will be happy.

9 They will grab your babies
and throw them against the rocks.

## Proverbs 29:15

15 Correction and punishment make children wise,
but those left alone will disgrace their mother.

## 1 John 1:1–10

1 We write you now about what has always existed, which we have heard, we have seen with our own eyes, we have looked at, and we have touched with our hands. We write to you about the Word[n] that gives life. 2 He who gives life was shown to us. We saw him and can give proof about it. And now we announce to you that he has life that continues forever. He was with God the Father and was shown to us. 3 We announce to you what we have seen and heard, because we want you also to have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with God the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write this to you so we may be full of joy.[n]

### *God Forgives Our Sins*

5 Here is the message we have heard from Christ and now announce to you: God is light,[n] and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 So if we say we have fellowship with God, but we continue living in darkness, we are liars and do not follow the

truth. [7]But if we live in the light, as God is in the light, we can share fellowship with each other. Then the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from every sin.

[8]If we say we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9]But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done. [10]If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and we do not accept God's teaching.

# December 4

# Love Hates Evil

*"Many people who have already died will live again. Some of them will wake up to have life forever, but some will wake up to find shame and disgrace forever."*

Daniel 12:2

Does hell serve a purpose? ... Remove it from the Bible and, at the same time, remove any notion of a just God and a trustworthy Scripture ... If there is no hell, God is not just. If there is no punishment of sin, heaven is apathetic toward the rapists and pillagers and mass murderers of society. If there is no hell, God is blind toward the victims and has turned his back on those who pray for relief. If there is no wrath toward evil, then God is not love, for love hates that which is evil.

To say there is no hell is also to say God is a liar and his Scripture untrue. The Bible repeatedly and stoutly affirms the dualistic outcome of history. Some will be saved. Some will be lost.

from *When Christ Comes*

## Daniel 11:2—12:13

### *Kingdoms of the South and North*

2 "Now then, Daniel, I tell you the truth: Three more kings
will rule in Persia, and then a fourth king will come. He will be
much richer than all the kings of Persia before him and will use
his riches to get power. He will stir up everyone against the
kingdom of Greece. 3 Then a mighty king will come, who will
rule with great power and will do anything he wants. 4 After that
king has come, his kingdom will be broken up and divided out
toward the four parts of the world. His kingdom will not go to
his descendants, and it will not have the power that he had,
because his kingdom will be pulled up and given to other

people.

5“The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger. He will begin to rule his own kingdom with great power. 6Then after a few years, a new friendship will develop. The daughter of the king of the South will marry the king of the North in order to bring peace. But she will not keep her power, and his family will not last. She, her husband, her child, and those who brought her to that country will be killed.

7“But a person from her family will become king of the South and will attack the armies of the king of the North. He will go into that king’s strong, walled city and will fight and win. 8He will take their gods, their metal idols, and their valuable things made of silver and gold back to Egypt. Then he will not bother the king of the North for a few years. 9Next, the king of the North will attack the king of the South, but he will be beaten back to his own country.

10“The sons of the king of the North will prepare for war. They will get a large army together that will move through the land very quickly, like a powerful flood. Later, that army will come back and fight all the way to the strong, walled city of the king of the South. 11Then the king of the South will become very angry and will march out to fight against the king of the North. The king of the North will have a large army, but he will lose the battle, 12and the soldiers will be carried away. The king of the South will then be very proud and will kill thousands of soldiers from the northern army, but he will not continue to be successful. 13The king of the North will gather another army, larger than the first one. After several years he will attack with a large army and many weapons.

14“In those times many people will be against the king of the South. Some of your own people who love to fight will turn against the king of the South, thinking it is time for God’s promises to come true. But they will fail. 15Then the king of the North will come. He will build ramps to the tops of the city walls and will capture a strong, walled city. The southern army will not have the power to fight back; even their best soldiers will not be strong enough to stop the northern army. 16So the king of the North will do whatever he wants; no one will be able to stand against him. He will gain power and control in the beautiful land of Israel and will have the power to destroy it. 17The king of the North will decide to use all his power to fight against the king of the South, but he will make a peace agreement with the king of the South. The king of the North will give one of his daughters as a wife to the king of the South so that he can defeat him. But those plans will not succeed or help him. 18Then the king of the North will turn his attention to cities along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and will capture them. But a commander will put an end to the pride of the king

of the North, turning his pride back on him. [19]After that
happens the king of the North will go back to the strong, walled
cities of his own country, but he will lose his power. That will be
the end of him.

[20]"The next king of the North will send out a tax collector so
he will have plenty of money. In a few years that ruler will be
killed, although he will not die in anger or in a battle.

[21]"That ruler will be followed by a very cruel and hated man,
who will not have the honor of being from a king's family. He
will attack the kingdom when the people feel safe, and he will
take power by lying to the people. [22]He will sweep away in
defeat large and powerful armies and even a prince who made
an agreement. [23]Many nations will make agreements with that
cruel and hated ruler, but he will lie to them. He will gain much
power, but only a few people will support him. [24]The richest
areas will feel safe, but that cruel and hated ruler will attack
them. He will succeed where his ancestors did not. He will rob
the countries he defeats and will give those things to his
followers. He will plan to defeat and destroy strong cities, but
he will be successful for only a short time.

[25]"That very cruel and hated ruler will have a large army
that he will use to stir up his strength and courage. He will
attack the king of the South. The king of the South will gather a
large and very powerful army and prepare for war. But the
people who are against him will make secret plans, and the king
of the South will be defeated. [26]People who were supposed to
be his good friends will try to destroy him. His army will be
swept away in defeat; many of his soldiers will be killed in
battle. [27]Those two kings will want to hurt each other. They will
sit at the same table and lie to each other, but it will not do
either one any good, because God has set a time for their end to
come. [28]The king of the North will go back to his own country
with much wealth. Then he will decide to go against the holy
agreement. He will take action and then return to his own
country.

[29]"At the right time the king of the North will attack the king
of the South again, but this time he will not be successful as he
was before. [30]Ships from the west will come and fight against
the king of the North, so he will be afraid. Then he will return
and show his anger against the holy agreement. He will be good
to those who have stopped obeying the holy agreement.

[31]"The king of the North will send his army to make the
Temple in Jerusalem unclean. They will stop the people from
offering the daily sacrifice, and then they will set up a
blasphemous object that brings destruction. [32]The king of the
North will tell lies and cause those who have not obeyed God to
be ruined. But those who know God and obey him will be strong
and fight back.

[33]"Those who are wise will help the others understand what

is happening. But they will be killed with swords, or burned, or taken captive, or robbed of their homes and possessions. These things will continue for many days. 34When the wise ones are suffering, they will get a little help, but many who join the wise ones will not help them in their time of need. 35Some of the wise ones will be killed. But the hard times must come so they can be made stronger and purer and without faults until the time of the end comes. Then, at the right time, the end will come.

## *The King Who Praises Himself*

36"The king of the North will do whatever he wants. He will brag about himself and praise himself and think he is even better than a god. He will say things against the God of gods that no one has ever heard. And he will be successful until all the bad things have happened. Then what God has planned to happen will happen. 37The king of the North will not care about the gods his ancestors worshiped or the god that women worship. He won't care about any god. Instead, he will make himself more important than any god. 38The king of the North will worship power and strength, which his ancestors did not worship. He will honor the god of power with gold and silver, expensive jewels and gifts. 39That king will attack strong, walled cities with the help of a foreign god. He will give much honor to the people who join him, making them rulers in charge of many other people. And he will make them pay him for the land they rule.

40"At the time of the end, the king of the South will fight a battle against the king of the North. The king of the North will attack with chariots, soldiers on horses, and many large ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through their lands like a flood. 41The king of the North will attack the beautiful land of Judah. He will defeat many countries, but Edom, Moab, and the leaders of Ammon will be saved from him. 42The king of the North will show his power in many countries; Egypt will not escape. 43The king will get treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt. The Libyan and Nubian people will obey him. 44But the king of the North will hear news from the east and the north that will make him afraid and angry. He will go to destroy completely many nations. 45He will set up his royal tents between the sea and the beautiful mountain where the holy Temple is built. But, finally, his end will come, and no one will help him.

## *The Time of the End*

12 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your

people, will stand up. There will be a time of much trouble, the worst time since nations have been on earth, but your people will be saved. Everyone whose name is written in God's book will be saved. 2Many people who have already died will live again. Some of them will wake up to have life forever, but some will wake up to find shame and disgrace forever. 3The wise people will shine like the brightness of the sky. Those who teach others to live right will shine like stars forever and ever.

4"But you, Daniel, close up the book and seal it. These things will happen at the time of the end. Many people will go here and there to find true knowledge."

5Then I, Daniel, looked, and saw two other men. One was standing on my side of the river, and the other was standing on the far side. 6The man who was dressed in linen was standing over the water in the river. One of the two men spoke to him and asked, "How long will it be before these amazing things come true?"

7The man dressed in linen, who stood over the water, raised his hands toward heaven. And I heard him swear by the name of God who lives forever, "It will be for three and one-half years. The power of the holy people will finally be broken, and then all these things will come true."

8I heard the answer, but I did not really understand, so I asked, "Master, what will happen after all these things come true?"

9He answered, "Go your way, Daniel. The message is closed up and sealed until the time of the end. 10Many people will be made clean, pure, and spotless, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. Those wicked people will not understand these things, but the wise will understand them.

11"The daily sacrifice will be stopped. Then, after 1,290 days from that time, a blasphemous object that brings destruction will be set up. 12Those who wait for the end of the 1,335 days will be happy.

13"As for you, Daniel, go your way until the end. You will get your rest, and at the end you will rise to receive your reward."

## Psalm 138:1–3

### *A Hymn of Thanksgiving*

**A psalm of David.**

138 LORD, I will thank you with all my heart; I will sing to you
before the gods.

2I will bow down facing your holy Temple,
and I will thank you for your love and loyalty.

You have made your name and your word
greater than anything.

3On the day I called to you, you answered me.
You made me strong and brave.

## Proverbs 29:16

16When there are many wicked people, there is much sin,
but those who do right will see them destroyed.

## 1 John 2:1–29

### *Jesus Is Our Helper*

2 My dear children, I write this letter to you so you will not sin.
But if anyone does sin, we have a helper in the presence of the
Father—Jesus Christ, the One who does what is right. 2He died
in our place to take away our sins, and not only our sins but the
sins of all people.

3We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands.
4Anyone who says, “I know God,” but does not obey God’s
commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. 5But if
someone obeys God’s teaching, then in that person God’s love
has truly reached its goal. This is how we can be sure we are
living in God: 6Whoever says that he lives in God must live as
Jesus lived.

### *The Command to Love Others*

7 My dear friends, I am not writing a new command to you
but an old command you have had from the beginning. It is the
teaching you have already heard. 8 But also I am writing a new
command to you, and you can see its truth in Jesus and in you,
because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is
already shining.
9 Anyone who says, "I am in the light,"[n] but hates a brother or
sister, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves a brother or
sister lives in the light and will not cause anyone to stumble in
his faith. 11 But whoever hates a brother or sister is in darkness,
lives in darkness, and does not know where to go, because the
darkness has made that person blind.

12 I write to you, dear children,
because your sins are forgiven through Christ.

13 I write to you, fathers,
because you know the One who existed from the
beginning.

I write to you, young people,
because you have defeated the Evil One.

14 I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers,
because you know the One who existed from the
beginning.

I write to you, young people,
because you are strong;
the teaching of God lives in you,
and you have defeated the Evil One.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If you love
the world, the love of the Father is not in you. 16 These are the
ways of the world: wanting to please our sinful selves, wanting
the sinful things we see, and being too proud of what we have.
None of these come from the Father, but all of them come from
the world. 17 The world and everything that people want in it are
passing away, but the person who does what God wants lives

forever.

## *Reject the Enemies of Christ*

18 My dear children, these are the last days. You have heard
that the enemy of Christ is coming, and now many enemies of
Christ are already here. This is how we know that these are the
last days. 19 These enemies of Christ were in our fellowship, but
they left us. They never really belonged to us; if they had been a
part of us, they would have stayed with us. But they left, and
this shows that none of them really belonged to us.

20 You have the gift[n] that the Holy One gave you, so you all
know the truth.[n] 21 I do not write to you because you do not
know the truth but because you do know the truth. And you
know that no lie comes from the truth.

22 Who is the liar? It is the person who does not accept Jesus
as the Christ. This is the enemy of Christ: the person who does
not accept the Father and his Son. 23 Whoever does not accept
the Son does not have the Father. But whoever confesses the
Son has the Father, too.

24 Be sure you continue to follow the teaching you heard from
the beginning. If you continue to follow what you heard from
the beginning, you will stay in the Son and in the Father. 25 And
this is what the Son promised to us—life forever.

26 I am writing this letter about those people who are trying
to lead you the wrong way. 27 Christ gave you a special gift that
is still in you, so you do not need any other teacher. His gift
teaches you about everything, and it is true, not false. So
continue to live in Christ, as his gift taught you.

28 Yes, my dear children, live in him so that when Christ
comes back, we can be without fear and not be ashamed in his
presence. 29 Since you know that Christ is righteous, you know
that all who do right are God's children.

# December 5

## The Power to Love

*This is what God commands: … that we love each other.*

1 John 3:23

Does bumping into certain people leave you brittle, breakable, and fruitless? Do you easily fall apart? If so, your love may be grounded in the wrong soil. It may be rooted in their love (which is fickle) or in your resolve to love (which is frail). John urges us to rely on the love *God* has for us (1 John 4:16, emphasis mine). He alone is the power source.

Many people tell us to love. Only God gives us the power to do so.

We know what God wants us to do. "This is what God commands: … that we love each other" (1 John 3:23). But how can we? How can we be kind to the vow breakers? To those who are unkind to us? How can we be patient with people who have the warmth of a vulture and the tenderness of a porcupine? How can we forgive the moneygrubbers and backstabbers we meet, love, and marry? How can we love as God loves? We want to. We long to. But how can we?

By living loved.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Hosea 1:1—2:23

1 The LORD spoke his word to Hosea son of Beeri during the time
that Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah
and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

### *Hosea's Wife and Children*

2When the LORD began speaking through Hosea, the LORD
said to him, "Go, and marry an unfaithful woman and have
unfaithful children, because the people in this country have
been completely unfaithful to the LORD." 3So Hosea married

Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Hosea's son.

4 The LORD said to Hosea, "Name him Jezreel, because soon I will punish the family of Jehu for the people they killed at Jezreel. In the future I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel 5 and break the power of Israel's army in the Valley of Jezreel."

6 Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. The LORD said to Hosea, "Name her Lo-Ruhamah,[n] because I will not pity Israel anymore, nor will I forgive them. 7 But I will show pity to the people of Judah. I will save them, but not by using bows or swords, horses or horsemen, or weapons of war. I, the LORD their God, will save them."

8 After Gomer had stopped nursing Lo-Ruhamah, she became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. 9 The LORD said, "Name him Lo-Ammi,[n] because you are not my people, and I am not your God.

## *God's Promise to Israel*

10 "But the number of the Israelites will become like the grains of sand of the sea, which no one can measure or count. They were called, 'You are not my people,' but later they will be called 'children of the living God.' 11 The people of Judah and Israel will join together again and will choose one leader for themselves. They will come up from the land, because the day of Jezreel[n] will be truly great.

2 "You are to call your brothers, 'my people,' and your sisters, 'you have been shown pity.'

## *God Speaks About Israel*

2 "Plead with your mother.[n]
Accuse her, because she is no longer my wife,
and I am no longer her husband.

Tell her to stop acting like a prostitute,
to stop behaving like an unfaithful wife.

3 If she refuses, I will strip her naked
and leave her bare like the day she was born.

I will make her dry like a desert,

like a land without water,
and I will kill her with thirst.

4 I will not take pity on her children,
because they are the children of a prostitute.

5 Their mother has acted like a prostitute;
the one who became pregnant with them has acted disgracefully.

She said, ‘I will chase after my lovers,[n]
who give me my food and water,

wool and flax, wine and olive oil.’

6 So I will block her road with thornbushes;
I will build a wall around her
so she cannot find her way.

7 She will run after her lovers,
but she won’t catch them.

She will look for them,
but she won’t find them.

Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband,[n]
because life was better then for me than it is now.’

8 But she does not know that I was the one
who gave her grain, new wine, and oil.

I gave her much silver and gold,
but she used it for Baal.

9 “So I will come back and take away my grain at harvest time

and my new wine when it is ready.

I will take back my wool and linen
that covered her nakedness.

10 So I will show her nakedness to her lovers,
and no one will save her from me.

11 I will put an end to all her celebrations:
her yearly festivals, her New Moon festivals, and her Sabbaths.
I will stop all of her special feasts.

12 I will destroy her vines and fig trees,
which she said were her pay from her lovers.

I will turn them into a forest,
and wild animals will eat them.

13 I will punish her for all the times
she burned incense to the Baals.

She put on her rings and jewelry
and went chasing after her lovers,

but she forgot me!”
says the LORD.

14 “So I am going to attract her;
I will lead her into the desert
and speak tenderly to her.

15 There I will give her back her vineyards,
and I will make the Valley of Trouble a door of hope.

There she will respond as when she was young,

as when she came out of Egypt.”

16 The LORD says, “In the future she will call me ‘my husband’;
no longer will she call me ‘my baal.’ n

17 I will never let her say the names of Baal again;
people won’t use their names anymore.

18 At that time I will make an agreement for them
with the wild animals, the birds, and the crawling things.

I will smash from the land
the bow and the sword and the weapons of war,
so my people will live in safety.

19 And I will make you my promised bride forever.
I will be good and fair;
I will show you my love and mercy.

20 I will be true to you as my promised bride,
and you will know the LORD.

21 “At that time I will speak to you,” says the LORD.
“I will speak to the skies,
and they will give rain to the earth.

22 The earth will produce grain, new wine, and oil;
much will grow because my people are called Jezreel. n

23 I will plant my people in the land,
and I will show pity to the one I had called ‘not shown pity.’

I will say, ‘You are my people’
to those I had called ‘not my people.’
And they will say to me, ‘You are our God.’”

## Psalm 138:4–5

4 LORD, let all the kings of the earth praise you
when they hear the words you speak.

5 They will sing about what the LORD has done,
because the LORD's glory is great.

## Proverbs 29:17

17 Correct your children, and you will be proud;
they will give you satisfaction.

## 1 John 3:1–24

### *We Are God's Children*

3 The Father has loved us so much that we are called children of
God. And we really are his children. The reason the people in
the world do not know us is that they have not known him.
2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and we have not yet
been shown what we will be in the future. But we know that
when Christ comes again, we will be like him, because we will
see him as he really is. 3 Christ is pure, and all who have this
hope in Christ keep themselves pure like Christ.

4 The person who sins breaks God's law. Yes, sin is living
against God's law. 5 You know that Christ came to take away sins
and that there is no sin in Christ. 6 So anyone who lives in Christ
does not go on sinning. Anyone who goes on sinning has never
really understood Christ and has never known him.

7 Dear children, do not let anyone lead you the wrong way.
Christ is righteous. So to be like Christ a person must do what
is right. 8 The devil has been sinning since the beginning, so
anyone who continues to sin belongs to the devil. The Son of
God came for this purpose: to destroy the devil's work.

9 Those who are God’s children do not continue sinning,
because the new life from God remains in them. They are not
able to go on sinning, because they have become children of
God. 10 So we can see who God’s children are and who the
devil’s children are: Those who do not do what is right are not
God’s children, and those who do not love their brothers and
sisters are not God’s children.

## *We Must Love Each Other*

11 This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We
must love each other. 12 Do not be like Cain who belonged to the
Evil One and killed his brother. And why did he kill him?
Because the things Cain did were evil, and the things his
brother did were good.

13 Brothers and sisters, do not be surprised when the people
of the world hate you. 14 We know we have left death and have
come into life because we love each other. Whoever does not
love is still dead. 15 Everyone who hates a brother or sister is a
murderer,[n] and you know that no murderers have eternal life in
them. 16 This is how we know what real love is: Jesus gave his
life for us. So we should give our lives for our brothers and
sisters. 17 Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a
brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God’s love is
not living in that person. 18 My children, we should love people
not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true
caring.

19–20 This is the way we know that we belong to the way of
truth. When our hearts make us feel guilty, we can still have
peace before God. God is greater than our hearts, and he knows
everything. 21 My dear friends, if our hearts do not make us feel
guilty, we can come without fear into God’s presence. 22 And
God gives us what we ask for because we obey God’s commands
and do what pleases him. 23 This is what God commands: that
we believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love each other,
just as he commanded. 24 The people who obey God’s commands
live in God, and God lives in them. We know that God lives in us
because of the Spirit God gave us.

# December 6

## God's in Charge

*God's Spirit, who is in you, is greater than the devil, who is in the world.*

1 John 4:4

satan has no power except that which God gives him. To the first-century church in Smyrna, Christ said, "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer for ten days. But be faithful, even if you have to die, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Analyze Jesus' words for a minute. Christ informs the church of the persecution, the duration of the persecution (ten days), the reason for the persecution (to test you), and the outcome of the persecution (a crown of life). In other words, Jesus uses Satan to fortify his church …

Even when [Satan] appears to win, he loses.

from *The Great House of God*

### Hosea 3:1—4:19

### *Hosea Buys a Wife*

3 The LORD said to me again, "Go, show your love to a woman
loved by someone else, who has been unfaithful to you. In the
same way the LORD loves the people of Israel, even though they
worship other gods and love to eat the raisin cakes."[n]

2So I bought her for six ounces of silver and ten bushels of
barley. 3Then I told her, "You must wait for me for many days.
You must not be a prostitute, and you must not have sexual
relations with any other man. I will act the same way toward
you."

4In the same way Israel will live many days without a king or
leader, without sacrifices or holy stone pillars, and without the

holy vest or an idol. 5After this, the people of Israel will return
to the LORD their God and follow him and the king from David's
family. In the last days they will turn in fear to the LORD, and he
will bless them.

## *The Lord's Word Against Israel*

4 People of Israel, listen to the LORD's message.
The LORD has this
against you who live in the land:

"The people are not true, not loyal to God,
nor do those who live in the land even know him.

2Cursing, lying, killing, stealing and adultery are
everywhere.
One murder follows another.

3Because of this the land dries up,
and all its people are dying.

Even the wild animals and the birds of the air
and the fish of the sea are dying.

## *God's Case Against the Priests*

4"No one should accuse
or blame another person.

Don't blame the people, you priests,
when they quarrel with you.

5You will be ruined in the day,
and your prophets will be ruined with you in the night.

I will also destroy your mother.[n]

6 My people will be destroyed,
because they have no knowledge.

You have refused to learn,
so I will refuse to let you be priests to me.

You have forgotten the teachings of your God,
so I will forget your children.

7 The more priests there are,
the more they sin against me.

I will take away their honor
and give them shame.

8 Since the priests live off the sin offerings of the people,
they want the people to sin more and more.

9 The priests are as wrong as the people,
and I will punish them both for what they have done.
I will repay them for the wrong they have done.

10 "They will eat
but not have enough;

they will have sexual relations with the prostitutes,
but they will not have children,

because they have left the LORD
to give themselves to 11 prostitution,

to old and new wine,
which take away their ability to understand.

## *God's Case Against the People*

12 “My people ask wooden idols for advice;
    they ask those sticks of wood to advise them!

Like prostitutes, they have chased after other gods
    and have left their own God.

13 They make sacrifices on the tops of the mountains.
    They burn offerings on the hills,

under oaks, poplars, and other trees,
    because their shade is nice.

So your daughters become prostitutes,
    and your daughters-in-law are guilty of adultery.

14 “But I will not punish your daughters
    for becoming prostitutes,

nor your daughters-in-law
    for their sins of adultery.

I will not punish them,
    because the men have sexual relations with prostitutes

and offer sacrifices with the temple prostitutes.
    A foolish people will be ruined.

15 “Israel, you act like a prostitute,
    but do not be guilty toward the LORD.

Don’t go to Gilgal
    or go up to Beth Aven.[n]

Don’t make promises,
    saying, ‘As surely as the LORD lives …’

16 The people of Israel are stubborn
like a stubborn young cow.

Now the LORD will feed them
like lambs in the open country.

17 The Israelites have chosen to worship idols,
so leave them alone.

18 When they finish their drinking,
they completely give themselves to being prostitutes;
they love these disgraceful ways.

19 They will be swept away as if by a whirlwind,
and their sacrifices will bring them only shame.

## Psalm 138:6–8

6 Though the LORD is supreme,
he takes care of those who are humble,
but he stays away from the proud.

7 LORD, even when I have trouble all around me,
you will keep me alive.

When my enemies are angry,
you will reach down and save me by your power.

8 LORD, you do everything for me.
LORD, your love continues forever.
Do not leave us, whom you made.

## Proverbs 29:18

18 Where there is no word from God, people are uncontrolled,
but those who obey what they have been taught are happy.

## 1 John 4:1–21

### *Warning Against False Teachers*

4 My dear friends, many false prophets have gone out into the world. So do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God. 2 This is how you can know God's Spirit: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human is from God. 3 And every spirit who refuses to say this about Jesus is not from God. It is the spirit of the enemy of Christ, which you have heard is coming, and now he is already in the world.

4 My dear children, you belong to God and have defeated them; because God's Spirit, who is in you, is greater than the devil, who is in the world. 5 And they belong to the world, so what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. But those who are not from God do not listen to us. That is how we know the Spirit that is true and the spirit that is false.

### *Love Comes from God*

7 Dear friends, we should love each other, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has become God's child and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him. 10 This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us. He sent his Son to die in our place to take away our sins.

11 Dear friends, if God loved us that much we also should love each other. 12 No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is made perfect in us.

13 We know that we live in God and he lives in us, because he gave us his Spirit. 14 We have seen and can testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God has God living inside, and that person lives in God. 16 And so we know the love that God has for us, and we trust that love.

God is love. Those who live in love live in God, and God lives

in them. [17]This is how love is made perfect in us: that we can be without fear on the day God judges us, because in this world we are like him. [18]Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love drives out fear. It is punishment that makes a person fear, so love is not made perfect in the person who fears.

[19]We love because God first loved us. [20]If people say, "I love God," but hate their brothers or sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen. [21]And God gave us this command: Those who love God must also love their brothers and sisters.

# December 7

## Assurance of Victory

*This is the victory that conquers the world—our faith.*

1 John 5:4

what is unique about the kingdom of God is that you are assured of victory. You have won! You are assured that you will someday stand before the face of God and see the King of kings. You are assured that someday you will enter a world where there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more sorrow.

If you have no faith in the future, then you have no power in the present. If you have no faith in the life beyond this life, then your present life is going to be powerless. But if you believe in the future and are assured of victory, then there should be a dance in your step and a smile on your face.

from *The Inspirational Study Bible*

### Hosea 5:1—7:2

### *God's Word Against the Leaders*

5 "Listen, you priests.
Pay attention, people of Israel.

Listen, royal family,
because you will all be judged.

You have been like a trap at Mizpah
and like a net spread out at Mount Tabor.

2 You have done many evil things,
so I will punish you all.

3 I know all about the people of Israel;
what they have done is not hidden from me.

Now that Israel acts like a prostitute,
it has made itself unclean.

4 "They will not give up their deeds
and return to their God.

They are determined to be unfaithful to me;
they do not know the LORD.

5 Israel's pride testifies against them.
The people of Israel will stumble because of their sin,
and the people of Judah will stumble with them.

6 They will come to worship the LORD,
bringing their flocks and herds,

but they will not be able to find him,
because he has left them.

7 They have not been true to the LORD;
they are children who do not belong to him.

So their false worship
will destroy them and their land.

8 "Blow the horn in Gibeah
and the trumpet in Ramah.

Give the warning at Beth Aven,
and be first into battle, people of Benjamin.

9 Israel will be ruined
on the day of punishment.

To the tribes of Israel
I tell the truth.

10 The leaders of Judah are like those
who steal other people's land.

I will pour my punishment over them
like a flood of water.

11 Israel is crushed by the punishment,
because it decided to follow idols.

12 I am like a moth to Israel,
like a rot to the people of Judah.

13 "When Israel saw its illness
and Judah saw its wounds,

Israel went to Assyria for help
and sent to the great king of Assyria.

But he cannot heal you
or cure your wounds.

14 I will be like a lion to Israel,
like a young lion to Judah.

I will attack them
and tear them to pieces.

I will drag them off,
and no one will be able to save them.

15 Then I will go back to my place
until they suffer for their guilt and turn back to me.
In their trouble they will look for me.”

## *The People Are Not Faithful*

6 “Come, let’s go back to the LORD.
He has hurt us, but he will heal us.
He has wounded us, but he will bandage our wounds.

2 In two days he will put new life in us;
on the third day he will raise us up
so that we may live in his presence 3 and know him.

Let’s try to learn about the LORD;
he will come to us as surely as the dawn comes.

He will come to us like rain,
like the spring rain that waters the ground.”

4 The LORD says, “Israel, what should I do with you?
Judah, what should I do with you?

Your faithfulness is like a morning mist,
like the dew that goes away early in the day.

5 I have warned you by my prophets
that I will kill you and destroy you.
My justice comes out like bright light.

6 I want faithful love
more than I want animal sacrifices.

I want people to know me
more than I want burnt offerings.

7 But they have broken the agreement as Adam did;
they have been unfaithful to me.

8 Gilead is a city of people who do evil;
their footprints are bloody.

9 The priests are like robbers waiting to attack people;
they murder people on the road to Shechem[n]
and do wicked things.

10 I have seen horrible things in Israel.

Look at Israel's prostitution;
Israel has become unclean.

11 "Judah, I have set a harvest time for you
when I will make the lives of my people good again.

7 When I heal Israel,
Israel's sin will go away,
and so will Samaria's evil.

"They cheat a lot!
Thieves break into houses,
and robbers are in the streets.

2 It never enters their minds
that I remember all their evil deeds.

The bad things they do are all around them;
they are right in front of me.

## Psalm 139:1–6

### *God Knows Everything*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

139 LORD, you have examined me and know all about me.

2You know when I sit down and when I get up.
You know my thoughts before I think them.

3You know where I go and where I lie down.
You know everything I do.

4LORD, even before I say a word,
you already know it.

5You are all around me—in front and in back—
and have put your hand on me.

6Your knowledge is amazing to me;
it is more than I can understand.

## Proverbs 29:19

19Words alone cannot correct a servant,
because even if they understand, they won't respond.

## 1 John 5:1–21

### *Faith in the Son of God*

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is God's child, and whoever loves the Father also loves the Father's children. 2This is how we know we love God's children: when we love God and obey his commands. 3Loving God means obeying his

commands. And God's commands are not too hard for us,
4because everyone who is a child of God conquers the world.
And this is the victory that conquers the world—our faith. 5So
the one who conquers the world is the person who believes that
Jesus is the Son of God.

6Jesus Christ is the One who came by water[n] and blood.[n] He
did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And the
Spirit says that this is true, because the Spirit is the truth. 7So
there are three witnesses:[n] 8the Spirit, the water, and the blood;
and these three witnesses agree. 9We believe people when they
say something is true. But what God says is more important,
and he has told us the truth about his own Son. 10Anyone who
believes in the Son of God has the truth that God told us.
Anyone who does not believe makes God a liar, because that
person does not believe what God told us about his Son. 11This
is what God told us: God has given us eternal life, and this life is
in his Son. 12Whoever has the Son has life, but whoever does
not have the Son of God does not have life.

## *We Have Eternal Life Now*

13I write this letter to you who believe in the Son of God so
you will know you have eternal life. 14And this is the boldness
we have in God's presence: that if we ask God for anything that
agrees with what he wants, he hears us. 15If we know he hears
us every time we ask him, we know we have what we ask from
him.

16If anyone sees a brother or sister sinning (sin that does not
lead to eternal death), that person should pray, and God will
give the sinner life. I am talking about people whose sin does
not lead to eternal death. There is sin that leads to death. I do
not mean that a person should pray about that sin. 17Doing
wrong is always sin, but there is sin that does not lead to
eternal death.

18We know that those who are God's children do not continue
to sin. The Son of God keeps them safe, and the Evil One cannot
touch them. 19We know that we belong to God, but the Evil One
controls the whole world. 20We also know that the Son of God
has come and has given us understanding so that we can know
the True One. And our lives are in the True One and in his Son,
Jesus Christ. He is the true God and the eternal life.

21So, dear children, keep yourselves away from false gods.

# December 8

## God Has No Limitations

*Where can I go to get away from your Spirit?*

Psalm 139:7

You and I are governed. The weather determines what we wear. The terrain tells us how to travel. Gravity dictates our speed, and health determines our strength. We may challenge these forces and alter them slightly, but we never remove them.

God—our Shepherd—doesn't check the weather; he makes it. He doesn't defy gravity; he created it. He isn't affected by health; he has no body. Jesus said, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Since he has no body, he has no limitations—equally active in Cambodia as he is in Connecticut. "Where can I go to get away from your Spirit?" asked David. "Where can I run from you? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I lie down in the grave, you are there" (Psalm 139:7–8).

from *Traveling Light*

### Hosea 7:3—8:14

#### *Israel's Evil Kings*

3 "They make the king happy with their wickedness;
their rulers are glad with their lies.

4 But all of them are traitors.
They are like an oven heated by a baker.

While he mixes the dough,
he does not need to stir up the fire.

5 The kings get so drunk they get sick every day.
The rulers become crazy with wine;
they make agreements with those who do not know the true God.

6 They burn like an oven;
their hearts burn inside them.

All night long their anger is low,
but when morning comes, it becomes a roaring fire.

7 All these people are as hot as an oven;
they burn up their rulers.

All their kings fall,
and no one calls on me.

## *Israel and the Other Nations*

8 "Israel mixes with other nations;
he is like a pancake cooked only on one side.

9 Foreign nations have eaten up his strength,
but he doesn't know it.

Israel is weak and feeble, like an old man,
but he doesn't know it.

10 Israel's pride will cause their defeat;
they will not turn back to the LORD their God
or look to him for help in all this.

11 Israel has become like a pigeon—
easy to fool and stupid.

First they call to Egypt for help.

Then they run to Assyria.

12 When they go, I will catch them in a net,
I will bring them down like birds from the sky;
I will punish them countless times for their evil.

13 How terrible for them because they left me!
They will be destroyed, because they turned against me.

I want to save them,
but they have spoken lies against me.

14 They do not call to me from their hearts.
They just lie on their beds and cry.

They come together to ask for grain and new wine,
but they really turn away from me.

15 Though I trained them and gave them strength,
they have made evil plans against me.

16 They did not turn to the Most High God.
They are like a loose bow that can't shoot.

Because their leaders brag about their strength,
they will be killed with swords,

and the people in Egypt
will laugh at them.

## *Israel Has Trusted Wrong Things*

8 "Put the trumpet to your lips and give the
warning!
The enemy swoops down on the LORD's people like an eagle.

The Israelites have broken my agreement
and have turned against my teachings.

2 They cry out to me,
‘Our God, we in Israel know you!’

3 But Israel has rejected what is good,
so the enemy will chase them.

4 They chose their own kings
without asking my permission.

They chose their own leaders,
people I did not know.

They made their silver and gold into idols,
and for all this they will be destroyed.

5 I hate the calf-shaped idol of Israel!
I am very angry with the people.

How long will they remain unclean?

6 The idol is something a craftsman made;
it is not God.

Israel’s calf-shaped idol
will surely be smashed to pieces.

7 “Israel’s foolish plans are like planting the wind,
but they will harvest a storm.

Like a stalk with no head of grain,
it produces nothing.

Even if it produced something,
other nations would eat it.

8 Israel is eaten up;
the people are mixed among the other nations
and have become useless to me.

9 Israel is like a wild donkey all by itself.
They have run to Assyria;
They have hired other nations to protect them.

10 Although Israel is mixed among the nations,
I will gather them together.

They will become weaker and weaker
as they suffer under the great king of Assyria.

11 "Although Israel built more altars to remove sin,
they have become altars for sinning.

12 I have written many teachings for them,
but they think the teachings are strange and foreign.

13 The Israelites offer sacrifices to me as gifts
and eat the meat,

but the LORD is not pleased with them.
He remembers the evil they have done,

and he will punish them for their sins.
They will be slaves again as they were in Egypt.

14 Israel has forgotten their Maker and has built palaces;
Judah has built many strong, walled cities.

But I will send fire on their cities

and destroy their strong buildings.”

## Psalm 139:7–12

7 Where can I go to get away from your Spirit?
Where can I run from you?

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there.
If I lie down in the grave, you are there.

9 If I rise with the sun in the east
and settle in the west beyond the sea,

10 even there you would guide me.
With your right hand you would hold me.

11 I could say, “The darkness will hide me.
Let the light around me turn into night.”

12 But even the darkness is not dark to you.
The night is as light as the day;
darkness and light are the same to you.

## Proverbs 29:20

20 Do you see people who speak too quickly?
There is more hope for a foolish person than for them.

## 2 John 1–13

1 From the Elder.[n]

To the chosen lady[n] and her children:

I love all of you in the truth,[n] and all those who know the truth love you. 2We love you because of the truth that lives in us and will be with us forever.

3Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, will be with us in truth and love.

4I was very happy to learn that some of your children are following the way of truth, as the Father commanded us. 5And now, dear lady, this is not a new command but is the same command we have had from the beginning. I ask you that we all love each other. 6And love means living the way God commanded us to live. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is this: Live a life of love.

7Many false teachers are in the world now who do not confess that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human. Anyone who does not confess this is a false teacher and an enemy of Christ. 8Be careful yourselves that you do not lose everything you[n] have worked for, but that you receive your full reward.

9Anyone who goes beyond Christ's teaching and does not continue to follow only his teaching does not have God. But whoever continues to follow the teaching of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10If someone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not welcome or accept that person into your house. 11If you welcome such a person, you share in the evil work.

12I have many things to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face so we can be full of joy. 13The children of your chosen sister[n] greet you.

# December 9

## Life Is Long Enough

*All the days planned for me were written in your book before I was one day old.*

Psalm 139:16

NO person lives one day more or less than God intends. "All the days planned for me were written in your book before I was one day old." But her days here were so few …

His life was so brief …

To us it seems that way. We speak of a short life, but compared to eternity, who has a long one? A person's days on earth may appear as a drop in the ocean. Yours and mine may seem like a thimbleful. But compared to the Pacific of eternity, even the years of Methuselah filled no more than a glass …

In God's plan every life is long enough and every death is timely. And though you and I might wish for a longer life, God knows better.

from *Traveling Light*

### Hosea 9:1—10:15

#### *Israel's Punishment*

9 Israel, do not rejoice;
don't shout for joy as the other nations do.

You have been like a prostitute against your God.
You love the pay of prostitutes on every threshing floor.

2But the threshing floor and the winepress will not feed the

people,
and there won't be enough new wine.

3 The people will not stay in the LORD's land.
Israel will return to being captives as they were in Egypt,
and in Assyria they will eat food that they are not allowed to eat.

4 The Israelites will not give offerings of wine to the LORD;
they will not give him sacrifices.

Their sacrifices will be like food that is eaten at a funeral;
it is unclean, and everyone who eats it becomes unclean.

Their food will only satisfy their hunger;
they cannot sacrifice it in the Temple.

5 What will you do then on the day of feasts
and on the day of the LORD's festival?

6 Even if the people are not destroyed,
Egypt will capture them;
Memphis[n] will bury them.

Weeds will grow over their silver treasures,
and thorns will drive them out of their tents.

7 The time of punishment has come,
the time to pay for sins.
Let Israel know this:

You think the prophet is a fool,
and you say the spiritual person is crazy.

You have sinned very much,
and your hatred is great.

[8]Is Israel a watchman?
Are God's people prophets?

Everywhere Israel goes, traps are set for him.
He is an enemy in God's house.

[9]The people of Israel have gone deep into sin
as the people of Gibeah[n] did.

The Lord will remember the evil things they have done,
and he will punish their sins.

[10]"When I found Israel,
it was like finding grapes in the desert.

Your ancestors were like
finding the first figs on the fig tree.

But when they came to Baal Peor,
they began worshiping an idol,
and they became as hateful as the thing they worshiped.

[11]Israel's glory will fly away like a bird;
there will be no more pregnancy, no more births, no more getting pregnant.

[12]But even if the Israelites bring up children,
I will take them all away.

How terrible it will be for them
when I go away from them!

[13]I have seen Israel, like Tyre,
given a pleasant place.

But the people of Israel will soon bring out

their children to be killed.”

14 LORD, give them what they should have.
What will you give them?
Make their women unable to have children;
give them dried-up breasts that cannot feed their babies.

15 “The Israelites were very wicked in Gilgal,
so I have hated them there.

Because of the sinful things they have done,
I will force them to leave my land.

I will no longer love them;
their leaders have turned against me.

16 Israel is beaten down;
its root is dying, and it has no fruit.

If they have more children,
I will kill the children they love.”

17 God will reject them,
because they have not obeyed him;
they will wander among the nations.

## *Israel Will Pay for Sin*

10 Israel is like a large vine
that produced plenty of fruit.

As the people became richer,
they built more altars for idols.

As their land became better,
they put up better stone pillars to honor gods.

[2]Their heart was false,
and now they must pay for their guilt.

The LORD will break down their altars;
he will destroy their holy stone pillars.

[3]Then they will say, “We have no king,
because we didn’t honor the LORD.

As for the king,
he couldn’t do anything for us.”

[4]They make many false promises
and agreements which they don’t keep.

So people sue each other in court;
they are like poisonous weeds growing in a plowed field.

[5]The people from Israel are worried about
the calf-shaped idol at Beth Aven.

The people will cry about it,
and the priests will cry about it.
They used to shout for joy about its glory,

[6]but it will be carried off to Assyria
as a gift to the great king.

Israel will be disgraced,
and the people will be ashamed for not obeying.

[7]Israel will be destroyed;
its king will be like a chip of wood floating on the water.

[8]The places of false worship will be destroyed,
the places where Israel sins.

Thorns and weeds will grow up
and cover their altars.

Then they will say to the mountains, “Cover us!”
and to the hills, “Fall on us!”

9 “Israel, you have sinned since the time of Gibeah,[n]
and the people there have continued sinning.

But war will surely overwhelm them in Gibeah,
because of the evil they have done there.

10 When I am ready,
I will come to punish them.

Nations will come together against them,
and they will be punished for their double sins.

11 Israel is like a well-trained young cow
that likes to thresh grain.

I will put a yoke on her neck
and make her work hard in the field.

Israel will plow,
and Judah will break up the ground.

12 I said, ‘Plant goodness,
harvest the fruit of loyalty,
plow the new ground of knowledge.

Look for the LORD until he comes
and pours goodness on you like water.’

13 But you have plowed evil
and harvested trouble;
you have eaten the fruit of your lies.

Because you have trusted in your own power
and your many soldiers,

14 your people will hear the noise of battle,
and all your strong, walled cities will be destroyed.

It will be like the time King Shalman
destroyed Beth Arbel in battle,
when mothers and their children were bashed to death.

15 The same will happen to you, people of Bethel,
because you did so much evil.

When the sun comes up,
the king of Israel will die.

## Psalm 139:13–16

13 You made my whole being;
you formed me in my mother's body.

14 I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way.
What you have done is wonderful.
I know this very well.

15 You saw my bones being formed
as I took shape in my mother's body.

When I was put together there,
16 you saw my body as it was formed.

All the days planned for me
were written in your book
before I was one day old.

## Proverbs 29:21

21 If you spoil your servants when they are young,
they will bring you grief later on.

## 3 John 1–15

1 From the Elder.[n]
To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth:[n]
2 My dear friend, I know your soul is doing fine, and I pray
that you are doing well in every way and that your health is
good. 3 I was very happy when some brothers and sisters came
and told me about the truth in your life and how you are
following the way of truth. 4 Nothing gives me greater joy than
to hear that my children are following the way of truth.
5 My dear friend, it is good that you help the brothers and
sisters, even those you do not know. 6 They told the church
about your love. Please help them to continue their trip in a way
worthy of God. 7 They started out in service to Christ, and they
have been accepting nothing from nonbelievers. 8 So we should
help such people; when we do, we share in their work for the
truth.
9 I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves
to be their leader, will not listen to us. 10 So if I come, I will talk
about what Diotrephes is doing, about how he lies and says evil
things about us. But more than that, he refuses to accept the
other brothers and sisters; he even stops those who do want to
accept them and puts them out of the church.
11 My dear friend, do not follow what is bad; follow what is
good. The one who does good belongs to God. But the one who
does evil has never known God.
12 Everyone says good things about Demetrius, and the truth
agrees with what they say. We also speak well of him, and you
know what we say is true.
13 I have many things I want to write you, but I do not want to
use pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon and talk face to face.
15 Peace to you. The friends here greet you. Please greet each
friend there by name.

# December 10

## He Is Your God

*“I am God and not a human; I am the Holy One, and I am among you.”*

Hosea 11:9

Before you read any further, reflect on those last four words, “I am among you.” Do you believe that? Do you believe God is near? He wants you to. He wants you to know he is in the midst of your world. Wherever you are as you read these words, he is present. In your car. On the plane. In your office, your bedroom, your den. He’s near.

God is in the thick of things in your world. He has not taken up residence in a distant galaxy. He has not removed himself from history. He has not chosen to seclude himself on a throne in an incandescent castle.

He has drawn near. He has involved himself in the carpools, heartbreaks, and funeral homes of our day. He is as near to us on Monday as on Sunday. In the schoolroom as in the sanctuary. At the coffee break as much as the communion table.

from *And the Angels Were Silent*

### Hosea 11:1—12:14

#### *God’s Love for Israel*

11 “When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and I called my son out of Egypt.

2But when I called the people of Israel,
they went away from me.

They offered sacrifices to the Baals
and burned incense to the idols.

3 It was I who taught Israel to walk,
and I took them by the arms,

but they did not understand
that I had healed them.

4 I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ropes of love.

I lifted the yoke from their neck
and bent down and fed them.

5 “The Israelites will become captives again, as they were in Egypt,
and Assyria will become their king,
because they refuse to turn back to God.

6 War will sweep through their cities
and will destroy them
and kill them because of their wicked plans.

7 My people have made up their minds
to turn away from me.

The prophets call them to turn to me,
but none of them honors me at all.

8 “Israel, how can I give you up?
How can I give you away, Israel?

I don’t want to make you like Admah
or treat you like Zeboiim.[n]

My heart beats for you,
and my love for you stirs up my pity.

9 I won't punish you in my anger,
and I won't destroy Israel again.

I am God and not a human;
I am the Holy One, and I am among you.
I will not come against you in anger.

10 They will go after the LORD,
and he will roar like a lion.

When he roars,
his children will hurry to him from the west.

11 They will come swiftly
like birds from Egypt
and like doves from Assyria.

I will settle them again in their homes,"
says the LORD.

## *The Lord Is Against Israel*

12 Israel has surrounded me with lies;
the people have made evil plans.

And Judah turns against God,
the faithful Holy One.

12 What Israel does is as useless as chasing the
wind;
he chases the east wind all day.

They tell more and more lies

and do more and more violence.

They make agreements with Assyria,
and they send a gift of olive oil to Egypt.

2 The LORD also has some things against Judah.
He will punish Israel for what they have done;
he will give them what they deserve.

3 Their ancestor Jacob held on to his brother's heel
while the two of them were being born.

When he grew to be a man,
he wrestled with God.

4 When Jacob wrestled with the angel and won,
he cried and asked for his blessing.

Later, God met with him at Bethel
and spoke with him there.

5 It was the LORD God All-Powerful;
the LORD is his great name.

6 You must return to your God;
love him, do what is just,
and always trust in him as your God.

7 The merchants use dishonest scales;
they like to cheat people.

8 Israel said, "I am rich! I am someone with power!"
All their money will do them no good
because of the sins they have done.

9 "But I am the LORD your God,

who brought you out of Egypt.

I will make you live in tents again
as you used to do on worship days.

10 I spoke to the prophets
and gave them many visions;
through them, I taught my lessons to you.”

11 The people of Gilead are evil,
worth nothing.

Though people sacrifice bulls at Gilgal,
their altars will become like piles of stone
in a plowed field.

12 Your ancestor Jacob fled to Northwest Mesopotamia
where he worked to get a wife;
he tended sheep to pay for her.

13 Later the LORD used a prophet
to bring Jacob’s descendants out of Egypt;

he used a prophet
to take care of the Israelites.

14 But the Israelites made the Lord angry when they killed other people,
and they deserve to die for their crimes.

The Lord will make them pay
for the disgraceful things they have done.

## Psalm 139:17–24

17 God, your thoughts are precious to me.
They are so many!

18 If I could count them,
they would be more than all the grains of sand.

When I wake up,
I am still with you.

19 God, I wish you would kill the wicked!
Get away from me, you murderers!

20 They say evil things about you.
Your enemies use your name thoughtlessly.

21 LORD, I hate those who hate you;
I hate those who rise up against you.

22 I feel only hate for them;
they are my enemies.

23 God, examine me and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 See if there is any bad thing in me.
Lead me on the road to everlasting life.

## Proverbs 29:22

22 An angry person causes trouble;
a person with a quick temper sins a lot.

## Jude 1–25

[1]From Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.
To all who have been called by God. God the Father loves you, and you have been kept safe in Jesus Christ:
[2]Mercy, peace, and love be yours richly.

## *God Will Punish Sinners*

[3]Dear friends, I wanted very much to write you about the salvation we all share. But I felt the need to write you about something else: I want to encourage you to fight hard for the faith that was given the holy people of God once and for all time. [4]Some people have secretly entered your group. Long ago the prophets wrote about these people who will be judged guilty. They are against God and have changed the grace of our God into a reason for sexual sin. They also refuse to accept Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord.

[5]I want to remind you of some things you already know: Remember that the Lord[n] saved his people by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. But later he destroyed all those who did not believe. [6]And remember the angels who did not keep their place of power but left their proper home. The Lord has kept these angels in darkness, bound with everlasting chains, to be judged on the great day. [7]Also remember the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah[n] and the other towns around them. In the same way they were full of sexual sin and people who desired sexual relations that God does not allow. They suffer the punishment of eternal fire, as an example for all to see.

[8]It is the same with these people who have entered your group. They are guided by dreams and make themselves filthy with sin. They reject God's authority and speak against the angels. [9]Not even the archangel[n] Michael, when he argued with the devil about who would have the body of Moses, dared to judge the devil guilty. Instead, he said, "The Lord punish you." [10]But these people speak against things they do not understand. And what they do know, by feeling, as dumb animals know things, are the very things that destroy them. [11]It will be terrible for them. They have followed the way of Cain, and for money they have given themselves to doing the wrong that Balaam did. They have fought against God as Korah did, and like Korah, they surely will be destroyed. [12]They are like dirty spots in your special Christian meals you share. They eat with you and have no fear, caring only for themselves. They are clouds without rain, which the wind blows around. They are autumn trees without fruit that are pulled out of the ground. So they are twice dead. [13]They are like wild waves of the sea, tossing up their own shameful actions like foam. They are like stars that wander in the sky. A place in the blackest darkness

has been kept for them forever.

14Enoch, the seventh descendant from Adam, said about these people: “Look, the Lord is coming with many thousands of his holy angels to 15judge every person. He is coming to punish all who are against God for all the evil they have done against him. And he will punish the sinners who are against God for all the evil they have said against him.”

16These people complain and blame others, doing the evil things they want to do. They brag about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want.

## *A Warning and Things to Do*

17Dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ said before. 18They said to you, “In the last times there will be people who laugh about God, following their own evil desires which are against God.” 19These are the people who divide you, people whose thoughts are only of this world, who do not have the Spirit.

20But dear friends, use your most holy faith to build yourselves up, praying in the Holy Spirit. 21Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the Lord Jesus Christ with his mercy to give you life forever.

22Show mercy to some people who have doubts. 23Take others out of the fire, and save them. Show mercy mixed with fear to others, hating even their clothes which are dirty from sin.

## *Praise God*

24God is strong and can help you not to fall. He can bring you before his glory without any wrong in you and can give you great joy. 25He is the only God, the One who saves us. To him be glory, greatness, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord for all time past, now, and forever. Amen.

# December 11

## No Strings Attached

*He is the One who loves us, who made us free from our sins with the blood of his death.*

Revelation 1:5

when we love with expectations, we say, “I love you. But I’ll love you even more if …”Christ’s love had none of this. No strings, no expectations, no hidden agendas, no secrets.

His love for us was, and is, up front and clear. “I love you,” he says. “Even if you let me down. I love you in spite of your failures.”

One step behind the expectations of Christ come his forgiveness and tenderness. Tumble off the tightrope of what our Master expects and you land safely in his net of tolerance.

from *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*

### Hosea 13:1—14:9

### *The Final Word Against Israel*

13 People used to fear the tribe of Ephraim;
they were important people in Israel.

But they sinned by worshiping Baal,
so they must die.

2 But they still keep on sinning more and more.
They make idols of their silver,

idols that are cleverly made,
the work of a craftsman.

Yet the people of Israel say to each other,
“Kiss those calf idols and sacrifice to them.”

3So those people will be like the morning mist;
they will disappear like the morning dew.

They will be like chaff blown from the threshing floor,
like smoke going out a window.

4“I, the LORD, have been your God
since you were in the land of Egypt.

You should have known no other God except me.
I am the only one who saves.

5I cared for them in the desert
where it was hot and dry.

6I gave them food, and they became full and satisfied.
But then they became too proud and forgot me.

7That is why I will be like a lion to them,
like a leopard waiting by the road.

8I will attack like a bear robbed of her cubs,
ripping their bodies open.

I will devour them like a lion
and tear them apart like a wild animal.

9“Israel, I will destroy you.
Who will be your helper then?

10 What good is your king?
Can he save you in any of your towns?

What good are your leaders?
You said, ‘Give us a king and leaders.’

11 So I gave you a king, but only in anger,
and I took him away in my great anger.

12 The sins of Israel are on record,
stored away, waiting for punishment.

13 The pain of birth will come for him,
but he is like a foolish baby
who won’t come out of its mother’s womb.

14 Will I save them from the place of the dead?
Will I rescue them from death?

Where is your sickness, death?
Where is your pain, place of death?
I will show them no mercy.

15 Israel is doing well among the nations,
but the LORD will send a wind from the east,

coming from the desert,
that will dry up his springs and wells of water.

He will destroy from their treasure houses everything of value.

16 The nation of Israel will be ruined,
because it fought against God.

The people of Israel will die in war;

their children will be torn to pieces,
and their pregnant women will be ripped open.”

## *Israel Returns to God*

14 Israel, return to the LORD your God,
because your sins have made you fall.

2Come back to the LORD
and say these words to him:

“Take away all our sin
and kindly receive us,

and we will keep the promises we made to you.

3Assyria cannot save us,
nor will we trust in our horses.

We will not say again, ‘Our gods,’
to the things our hands have made.
You show mercy to orphans.”

4The LORD says,

“I will forgive them for leaving me
and will love them freely,
because I am not angry with them anymore.

5I will be like the dew to Israel,
and they will blossom like a lily.

Like the cedar trees in Lebanon,
their roots will be firm.

6 They will be like spreading branches,
like the beautiful olive trees
and the sweet-smelling cedars in Lebanon.

7 The people of Israel will again live under my protection.
They will grow like the grain,

they will bloom like a vine,
and they will be as famous as the wine of Lebanon.

8 Israel, have nothing to do with idols.
I, the LORD, am the one who answers your prayers and watches over you.

I am like a green pine tree;
your blessings come from me.”

9 A wise person will know these things,
and an understanding person will take them to heart.

The LORD’s ways are right.
Good people live by following them,
but those who turn against God die because of them.

## Psalm 140:1–5

### *A Prayer for Protection*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

140 LORD, rescue me from evil people; protect me from cruel people

2 who make evil plans,
who always start fights.

3 They make their tongues sharp as a snake's;
their words are like snake poison. *Selah*

4 LORD, guard me from the power of wicked people;
protect me from cruel people
who plan to trip me up.

5 The proud hid a trap for me.
They spread out a net beside the road;
they set traps for me. *Selah*

## Proverbs 29:23

23 Pride will ruin people,
but those who are humble will be honored.

## Revelation 1:1–20

### *John Tells About This Book*

1 This is the revelation[n] of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him,
to show his servants what must soon happen. And Jesus sent his
angel to show it to his servant John, 2 who has told everything he
has seen. It is the word of God; it is the message from Jesus
Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of God's
message, and blessed are the people who hear this message
and do what is written in it. The time is near when all of this
will happen.

### *Jesus' Message to the Churches*

4 From John.
To the seven churches in Asia:
Grace and peace to you from the One who is and was and is
coming, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from
Jesus Christ. Jesus is the faithful witness, the first among those
raised from the dead. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth.
He is the One who loves us, who made us free from our sins

with the blood of his death. [6]He made us to be a kingdom of priests who serve God his Father. To Jesus Christ be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

[7]Look, Jesus is coming with the clouds, and everyone will see him, even those who stabbed him. And all peoples of the earth will cry loudly because of him. Yes, this will happen! Amen.

[8]The Lord God says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega.[n] I am the One who is and was and is coming. I am the Almighty.”

[9]I, John, am your brother. All of us share with Christ in suffering, in the kingdom, and in patience to continue. I was on the island of Patmos,[n] because I had preached the word of God and the message about Jesus. [10]On the Lord’s day I was in the Spirit, and I heard a loud voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet. [11]The voice said, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”

[12]I turned to see who was talking to me. When I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands [13]and someone among the lampstands who was “like a Son of Man.”[n] He was dressed in a long robe and had a gold band around his chest. [14]His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like flames of fire. [15]His feet were like bronze that glows hot in a furnace, and his voice was like the noise of flooding water. [16]He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword came out of his mouth. He looked like the sun shining at its brightest time.

[17]When I saw him, I fell down at his feet like a dead man. He put his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. [18]I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead. [19]So write the things you see, what is now and what will happen later. [20]Here is the secret of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

# December 12

## The Best Is Yet to Be

*"I will also give to each one who wins the victory a white stone with a new name written on it."*

Revelation 2:17

makes sense. Fathers are fond of giving their children special names. Princess. Tiger. Sweetheart. Bubba. Angel … Isn't it incredible to think that God has saved a name just for you? One you don't even know? We've always assumed that the name we got is the name we will keep. Not so … The road ahead is so bright a fresh name is needed. Your eternity is so special no common name will do.

So God has one reserved just for you. There is more to your life than you ever thought. There is more to your story than what you have read …

And so I plead … Be there when God whispers your name.

from *When God Whispers Your Name*

## Joel 1:1—3:21

### *Locusts Destroy the Crops*

1 The LORD spoke his word to Joel son of Pethuel:
2 Elders, listen to this message.
Listen to me, all you who live in the land.

Nothing like this has ever happened during your lifetime
or during your ancestors' lifetimes.

[3]Tell your children about these things,
let your children tell their children,
and let your grandchildren tell their children.

[4]What the cutting locusts have left,
the swarming locusts have eaten;

what the swarming locusts have left,
the hopping locusts have eaten,

and what the hopping locusts have left,
the destroying locusts[n] have eaten.

[5]Drunks, wake up and cry!
All you people who drink wine, cry!

Cry because your wine
has been taken away from your mouths.

[6]A powerful nation has come into my land
with too many soldiers to count.

It has teeth like a lion,
jaws like a female lion.

[7]It has made my grapevine a waste
and made my fig tree a stump.

It has stripped all the bark off my trees
and left the branches white.

[8]Cry as a young woman cries
when the man she was going to marry has died.

[9]There will be no more grain or drink offerings
to offer in the Temple of the LORD.

Because of this, the priests,
the servants of the LORD, are sad.

10 The fields are ruined;
the ground is dried up.

The grain is destroyed,
the new wine is dried up,
and the olive oil runs out.

11 Be sad, farmers.
Cry loudly, you who grow grapes.

Cry for the wheat and the barley.
Cry because the harvest of the field is lost.

12 The vines have become dry,
and the fig trees are dried up.

The pomegranate trees, the date palm trees, the apple trees —
all the trees in the field have died.

And the happiness of the people has died, too.

13 Priests, put on your rough cloth and cry to show your sadness.
Servants of the altar, cry out loud.

Servants of my God,
keep your rough cloth on all night to show your sadness.

Cry because there will be no more grain or drink offerings
to offer in the Temple of your God.

14 Call for a day when everyone fasts!
Tell everyone to stop work!

Bring the elders
and everyone who lives in the land

to the Temple of the LORD your God,
and cry out to the LORD.

15 What a terrible day it will be!
The LORD's day of judging is near,

when punishment will come
like a destroying attack from the Almighty.

16 Our food is taken away
while we watch.

Joy and happiness are gone
from the Temple of our God.

17 Though we planted fig seeds,
they lie dry and dead in the dirt.

The barns are empty and falling down.
The storerooms for grain have been broken down,
because the grain has dried up.

18 The animals are groaning!
The herds of cattle wander around confused,

because they have no grass to eat;
even the flocks of sheep suffer.

19 LORD, I am calling to you for help,
because fire has burned up the open pastures,
and flames have burned all the trees in the field.

20 Wild animals also need your help.

The streams of water have dried up,
and fire has burned up the open pastures.

## *The Coming Day of Judgment*

2 Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem;
shout a warning on my holy mountain.

Let all the people who live in the land shake with fear,
because the LORD's day of judging is coming;
it is near.

2It will be a dark, gloomy day,
cloudy and black.

Like the light at sunrise,
a great and powerful army will spread over the mountains.

There has never been anything like it before,
and there will never be anything like it again.

3In front of them a fire destroys;
in back of them a flame burns.

The land in front of them is like the garden of Eden;
the land behind them is like an empty desert.
Nothing will escape from them.

4They look like horses,
and they run like war horses.

5It is like the noise of chariots
rumbling over the tops of the mountains,

like the noise of a roaring fire

burning dry stalks.

They are like a powerful army lined up for battle.

6 When they see them, nations shake with fear,
and everyone’s face becomes pale.

7 They charge like soldiers;
they climb over the wall like warriors.

They all march straight ahead
and do not move off their path.

8 They do not run into each other,
because each walks in line.

They break through all efforts to stop them
and keep coming.

9 They run into the city.
They run at the wall

and climb into the houses,
entering through windows like thieves.

10 Before them, earth and sky shake.

The sun and the moon become dark,
and the stars stop shining.

11 The LORD shouts out orders
to his army.

His army is very large!
Those who obey him are very strong!

The LORD's day of judging
is an overwhelming and terrible day.
No one can stand up against it!

## *Change Your Hearts*

12 The LORD says, "Even now, come back to me with all your heart.
Fast, cry, and be sad."

13 Tearing your clothes is not enough to show you are sad;
let your heart be broken.

Come back to the LORD your God,
because he is kind and shows mercy.

He doesn't become angry quickly,
and he has great love.
He can change his mind about doing harm.

14 Who knows? Maybe he will turn back to you
and leave behind a blessing for you.

Grain and drink offerings belong to the LORD your God.

15 Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem;
call for a day when everyone fasts.
Tell everyone to stop work.

16 Bring the people together
and make the meeting holy for the LORD.

Bring together the elders,
as well as the children,
and even babies that still feed at their mothers' breasts.

The bridegroom should come from his room,
the bride from her bedroom.

17 The priests, the LORD's servants, should cry
between the altar and the entrance to the Temple.

They should say, "LORD, have mercy on your people.
Don't let them be put to shame;
don't let other nations make fun of them.

Don't let people in other nations ask,
'Where is their God?'"

## *The Lord Restores the Land*

18 Then the LORD became concerned about his land
and felt sorry for his people.

19 He said to them:
"I will send you grain, new wine, and olive oil,
so that you will have plenty.

No more will I shame you
among the nations.

20 I will force the army from the north to leave your land
and go into a dry, empty land.

Their soldiers in front will be forced into the Dead Sea,
and those in the rear into the Mediterranean Sea.

Their bodies will rot and stink.
The LORD has surely done a wonderful thing!"

21 Land, don't be afraid;
be happy and full of joy,

because the LORD has done a wonderful thing.

22 Wild animals, don't be afraid,
because the open pastures have grown grass.

The trees have given fruit;
the fig trees and the grapevines have grown much fruit.

23 So be happy, people of Jerusalem;
be joyful in the LORD your God.

Because he does what is right,
he has brought you rain;

he has sent the fall rain
and the spring rain for you, as before.

24 And the threshing floors will be full of grain;
the barrels will overflow with new wine and olive oil.

## *The Lord Speaks*

25 "Though I sent my great army against you—
those swarming locusts and hopping locusts,
the destroying locusts and the cutting locusts[n] that ate your crops—

I will pay you back
for those years of trouble.

26 Then you will have plenty to eat
and be full.

You will praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has done miracles for you.

My people will never again be shamed.

27 Then you will know that I am among the people of Israel,
that I am the LORD your God,
and there is no other God.

My people will never be shamed again.

28 "After this,
I will pour out my Spirit on all kinds of people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
and your young men will see visions.

29 At that time I will pour out my Spirit
also on male slaves and female slaves.

30 I will show miracles
in the sky and on the earth:
blood, fire, and thick smoke.

31 The sun will become dark,
the moon red as blood,
before the overwhelming and terrible day of the LORD comes.

32 Then anyone who calls on the LORD
will be saved,

because on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be people who will be saved,

just as the LORD has said.

Those left alive after the day of punishment

are the people whom the LORD called.

## *Punishment for Judah's Enemies*

3 "In those days and at that time,
when I will make things better for Judah and Jerusalem,

2I will gather all the nations together
and bring them down into the Valley Where the LORD Judges.
There I will judge them,

because those nations scattered my own people Israel
and forced them to live in other nations.

They divided up my land

3and threw lots for my people.

They traded boys for prostitutes,
and they sold girls to buy wine to drink.

4"Tyre and Sidon and all of you regions of Philistia! What did you have against me? Were you punishing me for something I did, or were you doing something to hurt me? I will very quickly do to you what you have done to me. 5You took my silver and gold, and you put my precious treasures in your temples. 6You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks so that you could send them far from their land.
7"You sent my people to that faraway place, but I will get them and bring them back, and I will do to you what you have done to them. 8I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabean people far away." The LORD said this.

## *God Judges the Nations*

9Announce this among the nations:

Prepare for war!

Wake up the soldiers!
Let all the men of war come near and attack.

10 Make swords from your plows,
and make spears from your hooks for trimming trees.

Let even the weak person say,
"I am a soldier."

11 All of you nations, hurry,
and come together in that place.

LORD, send your soldiers
to gather the nations.

12 "Wake up, nations,
and come to attack in the Valley Where the LORD Judges.

There I will sit to judge
all the nations on every side.

13 Swing the cutting tool,
because the harvest is ripe.

Come, walk on them as you would walk on grapes to get their juice,
because the winepress is full
and the barrels are spilling over,

because these people are so evil!"

14 There are huge numbers of people
in the Valley of Decision,[n]

because the LORD's day of judging is near
in the Valley of Decision.

15 The sun and the moon will become dark,
and the stars will stop shining.

16 The LORD will roar like a lion from Jerusalem;
his loud voice will thunder from that city,
and the sky and the earth will shake.

But the LORD will be a safe place for his people,
a strong place of safety for the people of Israel.

17 "Then you will know that I, the LORD your God,
live on my holy Mount Zion.

Jerusalem will be a holy place,
and strangers will never even go through it again.

## *A New Life Promised for Judah*

18 "On that day wine will drip from the mountains,
milk will flow from the hills,
and water will run through all the ravines of Judah.

A fountain will flow from the Temple of the LORD
and give water to the valley of acacia trees.

19 But Egypt will become empty,
and Edom an empty desert,

because they were cruel to the people of Judah.
They killed innocent people in that land.

20 But there will always be people living in Judah,
and people will live in Jerusalem from now on.

[21]Egypt and Edom killed my people,
so I will definitely punish them.”

The LORD lives in Jerusalem!

## Psalm 140:6–13

[6]I said to the LORD, “You are my God.”
LORD, listen to my prayer for help.

[7]LORD God, my mighty savior,
you protect me in battle.

[8]LORD, do not give the wicked what they want.
Don’t let their plans succeed,
or they will become proud. *Selah*

[9]Those around me have planned trouble.
Now let it come to them.

[10]Let burning coals fall on them.
Throw them into the fire
or into pits from which they cannot escape.

[11]Don’t let liars settle in the land.
Let evil quickly hunt down cruel people.

[12]I know the LORD will get justice for the poor
and will defend the needy in court.

[13]Good people will praise his name;
honest people will live in his presence.

## Proverbs 29:24

24 Partners of thieves are their own worst enemies.
If they have to testify in court, they are afraid to say anything.

## Revelation 2:1–29

### *To the Church in Ephesus*

2 “Write this to the angel of the church in Ephesus:“The One who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands says this: 2 I know what you do, how you work hard and never give up. I know you do not put up with the false teachings of evil people. You have tested those who say they are apostles but really are not, and you found they are liars. 3 You have patience and have suffered troubles for my name and have not given up.

4 “But I have this against you: You have left the love you had in the beginning. 5 So remember where you were before you fell. Change your hearts and do what you did at first. If you do not change, I will come to you and will take away your lampstand from its place. 6 But there is something you do that is right: You hate what the Nicolaitans[n] do, as much as I.

7 “Every person who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who win the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life, which is in the garden of God.

### *To the Church in Smyrna*

8 “Write this to the angel of the church in Smyrna:

“The One who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again, says this: 9 I know your troubles and that you are poor, but really you are rich! I know the bad things some people say about you. They say they are Jews, but they are not true Jews. They are a synagogue that belongs to Satan. 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer for ten days. But be faithful, even if you have to die, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 “Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit

says to the churches. Those who win the victory will not be hurt by the second death.

## *To the Church in Pergamum*

12 “Write this to the angel of the church in Pergamum:

“The One who has the sharp, double-edged sword says this:
13 I know where you live. It is where Satan has his throne. But you are true to me. You did not refuse to tell about your faith in me even during the time of Antipas, my faithful witness who was killed in your city, where Satan lives.

14 “But I have a few things against you: You have some there who follow the teaching of Balaam. He taught Balak how to cause the people of Israel to sin by eating food offered to idols and by taking part in sexual sins. 15 You also have some who follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans.[n] 16 So change your hearts and lives. If you do not, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword that comes out of my mouth.

17 “Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

“I will give some of the hidden manna to everyone who wins the victory. I will also give to each one who wins the victory a white stone with a new name written on it. No one knows this new name except the one who receives it.

## *To the Church in Thyatira*

18 “Write this to the angel of the church in Thyatira:

“The Son of God, who has eyes that blaze like fire and feet like shining bronze, says this: 19 I know what you do. I know about your love, your faith, your service, and your patience. I know that you are doing more now than you did at first.

20 “But I have this against you: You let that woman Jezebel spread false teachings. She says she is a prophetess, but by her teaching she leads my people to take part in sexual sins and to eat food that is offered to idols. 21 I have given her time to change her heart and turn away from her sin, but she does not want to change. 22 So I will throw her on a bed of suffering. And all those who take part in adultery with her will suffer greatly if they do not turn away from the wrongs she does. 23 I will also kill her followers. Then all the churches will know I am the One who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you for what you have done.

24 “But others of you in Thyatira have not followed her teaching and have not learned what some call Satan’s deep secrets. I say to you that I will not put any other load on you.
25 Only continue in your loyalty until I come.

26 “I will give power over the nations to everyone who wins

the victory and continues to be obedient to me until the end.

[27]‘You will rule over them with an iron rod,
as when pottery is broken into pieces.’

Psalm 2:9

[28]This is the same power I received from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. [29]Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

# December 13

## Your Day Is Coming

*"Continue strong in your faith so no one will take away your crown."*

Revelation 3:11

some of you have never won a prize in your life. Oh, maybe you were quartermaster in your Boy Scout troop or in charge of sodas at the homeroom Christmas party, but that's about it. You've never won much. You've watched the Mark McGwires of this world carry home the trophies and walk away with the ribbons. All you have are "almosts" and "what ifs."

If that hits home, then you'll cherish this promise: "When Christ, the Chief Shepherd, comes, you will get a glorious crown that will never lose its beauty" (1 Peter 5:4).

Your day is coming. What the world has overlooked, your Father has remembered, and sooner than you can imagine, you will be blessed by him.

from *When Christ Comes*

### Amos 1:1—3:15

1 These are the words of Amos, one of the shepherds from the
town of Tekoa. He saw this vision about Israel two years before
the earthquake. It was at the time Uzziah was king of Judah and
Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.
2 Amos said,

"The LORD will roar from Jerusalem;
he will send his voice from Jerusalem.

The pastures of the shepherds will become dry,
and even the top of Mount Carmel will dry up."

## *Israel's Neighbors Are Punished*

### *The People of Aram*

3 This is what the LORD says:

"For the many crimes of Damascus,
I will punish them.

They drove over the people of Gilead
with threshing boards that had iron teeth.

4 So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael
that will destroy the strong towers of Ben-Hadad.

5 I will break down the bar of the gate to Damascus
and destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven,

as well as the leader of Beth Eden.
The people of Aram will be taken captive to the country of Kir," says the LORD.

### *The People of Philistia*

6 This is what the LORD says:

"For the many crimes of Gaza,
I will punish them.

They sold all the people of one area
as slaves to Edom.

7 So I will send a fire on the walls of Gaza
that will destroy the city's strong buildings.

8 I will destroy the king of the city of Ashdod,
as well as the leader of Ashkelon.

Then I will turn against the people of the city of Ekron,

and the last of the Philistines will die," says the Lord God.

***The People of Phoenicia***

[9]This is what the LORD says:

"For the many crimes of Tyre,
I will punish them.

They sold all the people of one area
as slaves to Edom,
and they forgot the agreement among relatives they had made with Israel.

[10]So I will send fire on the walls of Tyre
that will destroy the city's strong buildings."

***The People of Edom***

[11]This is what the LORD says:

"For the many crimes of Edom,
I will punish them.

They hunted down their relatives, the Israelites, with the sword,
showing them no mercy.

They were angry all the time
and kept on being very angry.

[12]So I will send fire on the city of Teman
that will even destroy the strong buildings of Bozrah."[n]

***The People of Ammon***

[13]This is what the LORD says:

"For the many crimes of Ammon,
I will punish them.

They ripped open the pregnant women in Gilead
so they could take over that land

and make their own country larger.

14 So I will send fire on the city wall of Rabbah
that will destroy its strong buildings.

It will come during a day of battle,
during a stormy day with strong winds.

15 Then their king and leaders will be taken captive;
they will all be taken away together," says the LORD.

***The People of Moab***

2 This is what the LORD says:
"For the many crimes of Moab,
I will punish them.

They burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime.

2 So I will send fire on Moab
that will destroy the strong buildings of the city of Kerioth.

The people of Moab will die in a great noise,
in the middle of the sounds of war and trumpets.

3 So I will bring an end to the king of Moab,
and I will kill all its leaders with him," says the LORD.

***The People of Judah***

4 This is what the LORD says:

"For the many crimes of Judah,
I will punish them.

They rejected the teachings of the LORD
and did not keep his commands;

they followed the same gods
as their ancestors had followed.

5So I will send fire on Judah,
and it will destroy the strong buildings of Jerusalem.”

## *Israel Is Punished*

6This is what the LORD says:

“For the many crimes of Israel,
I will punish them.

For silver, they sell people who have done nothing wrong;
they sell the poor to buy a pair of sandals.

7They walk on poor people as if they were dirt,
and they refuse to be fair to those who are suffering.

Fathers and sons have sexual relations with the same woman,
and so they ruin my holy name.

8As they worship at their altars,
they lie down on clothes taken from the poor.

They fine people,
and with that money they buy wine to drink in the house of their god.

9“But it was I who destroyed the Amorites before them,
who were tall like cedar trees and as strong as oaks—

I destroyed them completely.

10It was I who brought you from the land of Egypt
and led you for forty years through the desert

so I could give you the land of the Amorites.

11 I made some of your children to be prophets
and some of your young people to be Nazirites.

People of Israel, isn't this true?" says the LORD.

12 "But you made the Nazirites drink wine
and told the prophets not to prophesy.

13 Now I will make you get stuck,
as a wagon loaded with grain gets stuck.

14 No one will escape, not even the fastest runner.
Strong people will not be strong enough;
warriors will not be able to save themselves.

15 Soldiers with bows and arrows will not stand and fight,
and even fast runners will not get away;
soldiers on horses will not escape alive.

16 At that time even the bravest warriors
will run away without their armor," says the LORD.

## *Warning to Israel*

3 Listen to this word that the LORD has spoken against you, people of Israel, against the whole family he brought out of Egypt.

2 "I have chosen only you
out of all the families of the earth,

so I will punish you
for all your sins."

3 Two people will not walk together

unless they have agreed to do so.

4 A lion in the forest does not roar
unless it has caught an animal;

it does not growl in its den
when it has caught nothing.

5 A bird will not fall into a trap
where there is no bait;

the trap will not spring shut
if there is nothing to catch.

6 When a trumpet blows a warning in a city,
the people tremble.

When trouble comes to a city,
the LORD has caused it.

7 Before the Lord God does anything,
he tells his plans to his servants the prophets.

8 The lion has roared!
Who wouldn't be afraid?

The Lord God has spoken.
Who will not prophesy?

9 Announce this to the strong buildings of Ashdod
and to the strong buildings of Egypt:

"Come to the mountains of Samaria,
where you will see great confusion
and people hurting others."

10 “The people don’t know how to do what is right,” says the LORD.
“Their strong buildings are filled with treasures they took
by force from others.”

11 So this is what the Lord God says:

“An enemy will take over the land
and pull down your strongholds;
he will take the treasures out of your strong buildings.”

12 This is what the LORD says:

“A shepherd might save from a lion’s mouth
only two leg bones or a scrap of an ear of his sheep.

In the same way only a few Israelites in Samaria will be saved—
people who now sit on their beds
and on their couches.”

13 “Listen and be witnesses against the family of Jacob,” says the Lord God, the God All-Powerful.

14 “When I punish Israel for their sins,
I will also destroy the altars at Bethel.

The corners of the altar will be cut off,
and they will fall to the ground.

15 I will tear down the winter house,
together with the summer house.

The houses decorated with ivory will be destroyed,
and the great houses will come to an end,” says the LORD.

## Psalm 141:1–4

## *A Prayer Not to Sin*

**A psalm of David.**

141 LORD, I call to you. Come quickly. Listen to me when I call
to you.

2Let my prayer be like incense placed before you,
and my praise like the evening sacrifice.

3LORD, help me control my tongue;
help me be careful about what I say.

4Take away my desire to do evil
or to join others in doing wrong.

Don't let me eat tasty food
with those who do evil.

## Proverbs 29:25

25Being afraid of people can get you into trouble,
but if you trust the LORD, you will be safe.

## Revelation 3:1–22

## *To the Church in Sardis*

3 "Write this to the angel of the church in Sardis: "The One who has the seven spirits and the seven stars says this: I know what you do. People say that you are alive, but really you are dead. 2Wake up! Strengthen what you have left before it dies completely. I have found that what you are doing is less than what my God wants. 3So do not forget what you have received

and heard. Obey it, and change your hearts and lives. So you must wake up, or I will come like a thief, and you will not know when I will come to you. 4But you have a few there in Sardis who have kept their clothes unstained, so they will walk with me and will wear white clothes, because they are worthy. 5Those who win the victory will be dressed in white clothes like them. And I will not erase their names from the book of life, but I will say they belong to me before my Father and before his angels. 6Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

## *To the Church in Philadelphia*

7"Write this to the angel of the church in Philadelphia:

"This is what the One who is holy and true, who holds the key of David, says. When he opens a door, no one can close it. And when he closes it, no one can open it. 8I know what you do. I have put an open door before you, which no one can close. I know you have little strength, but you have obeyed my teaching and were not afraid to speak my name. 9Those in the synagogue that belongs to Satan say they are Jews, but they are not true Jews; they are liars. I will make them come before you and bow at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. 10You have obeyed my teaching about not giving up your faith. So I will keep you from the time of trouble that will come to the whole world to test those who live on earth.

11"I am coming soon. Continue strong in your faith so no one will take away your crown. 12I will make those who win the victory pillars in the temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem,[n] that comes down out of heaven from my God. I will also write on them my new name. 13Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

## *To the Church in Laodicea*

14"Write this to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

"The Amen,[n] the faithful and true witness, the ruler of all God has made, says this: 15I know what you do, that you are not hot or cold. I wish that you were hot or cold! 16But because you are lukewarm—neither hot, nor cold—I am ready to spit you out of my mouth. 17You say, 'I am rich, and I have become wealthy and do not need anything.' But you do not know that you are really miserable, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. 18I advise you to buy from me gold made pure in fire so you can be truly rich. Buy from me white clothes so you can be clothed and so you can cover your shameful nakedness. Buy from me medicine to put

on your eyes so you can truly see.

19 “I correct and punish those whom I love. So be eager to do
right, and change your hearts and lives. 20 Here I am! I stand at
the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I
will come in and eat with you, and you will eat with me.

21 “Those who win the victory will sit with me on my throne in
the same way that I won the victory and sat down with my
Father on his throne. 22 Everyone who has ears should listen to
what the Spirit says to the churches.”

# December 14

## A Big View of God

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. He was, he is, and he is coming."*

Revelation 4:8

Exactly what is worship? I like King David's definition. "Glorify the LORD with me, and let us praise his name together" (Psalm 34:3). Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of him. Stepping into the cockpit to see where he sits and observe how he works. Of course, his size doesn't change, but our perception of him does. As we draw nearer, he seems larger. Isn't that what we need? A *big* view of God? Don't we have *big* problems, *big* worries, *big* questions? Of course we do. Hence we need a big view of God.

Worship offers that. How can we sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy" and not have our vision expanded?

from *Just Like Jesus*

## Amos 4:1—5:27

### *Israel Will Not Return*

4 Listen to this message, you cows of Bashan[n] on
the Mountain of Samaria.

You take things from the poor
and crush people who are in need.

Then you command your husbands,
"Bring us something to drink!"

2 The Lord God has promised this:
"Just as surely as I am a holy God,

the time will come
when you will be taken away by hooks,
and what is left of you with fishhooks.

3 You will go straight out of the city
through holes in the walls,
and you will be thrown on the garbage dump," says the LORD.

4 "Come to the city of Bethel and sin;
come to Gilgal and sin even more.

Offer your sacrifices every morning,
and bring one-tenth of your crops every three days.

5 Offer bread made with yeast as a sacrifice to show your thanks,
and brag about the special offerings you bring,
because this is what you love to do, Israelites," says the Lord God.

6 "I did not give you any food in your cities,
and there was not enough to eat in any of your towns,
but you did not come back to me," says the LORD.

7 "I held back the rain from you
three months before harvest time.

Then I let it rain on one city
but not on another.

Rain fell on one field,
but another field got none and dried up.

8 People weak from thirst went from town to town for water,

but they could not get enough to drink.
Still you did not come back to me," says the LORD.

9"I made your crops die from disease and mildew.
When your gardens and your vineyards got larger,

locusts ate your fig and olive trees.
But still you did not come back to me," says the LORD.

10"I sent disasters against you,
as I did to Egypt.

I killed your young men with swords,
and your horses were taken from you.

I made you smell the stink from all the dead bodies,
but still you did not come back to me," says the LORD.

11"I destroyed some of you
as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

You were like a burning stick pulled from a fire,
but still you did not come back to me," says the LORD.

12"So this is what I will do to you, Israel;
because I will do this to you,
get ready to meet your God, Israel."

13He is the one who makes the mountains
and creates the wind
and makes his thoughts known to people.

He changes the dawn into darkness
and walks over the mountains of the earth.
His name is the LORD God All-Powerful.

## *Israel Needs to Repent*

5 Listen to this funeral song that I sing about
you, people of Israel.

2 “The young girl Israel has fallen,
and she will not rise up again.

She was left alone in her own land,
and there is no one to help her up.”

3 This is what the Lord God says:

“If a thousand soldiers leave a city,
only a hundred will return;

if a hundred soldiers leave a city,
only ten will return.”

4 This is what the LORD says to the nation of Israel:

“Come to me and live.
5 But do not look in Bethel

or go to Gilgal,
and do not go down to Beersheba.

The people of Gilgal will be taken away as captives,
and Bethel will become nothing.”

6 Come to the LORD and live,
or he will move like fire against the descendants of Joseph.

The fire will burn Bethel,
and there will be no one to put it out.

7 You turn justice upside down,
and you throw on the ground what is right.

8 God is the one who made the star groups Pleiades and Orion;
he changes darkness into the morning light,
and the day into dark night.

He calls for the waters of the sea
to pour out on the earth.
The LORD is his name.

9 He destroys the protected city;
he ruins the strong, walled city.

10 You hate those who speak in court against evil,
and you can't stand those who tell the truth.

11 You walk on poor people,
forcing them to give you grain.

You have built fancy houses of cut stone,
but you will not live in them.

You have planted beautiful vineyards,
but you will not drink the wine from them.

12 I know your many crimes,
your terrible sins.

You hurt people who do right,
you take money to do wrong,
and you keep the poor from getting justice in court.

13 In such times the wise person will keep quiet,
because it is a bad time.

14 Try to do good, not evil,
so that you will live,

and the LORD God All-Powerful will be with you
just as you say he is.

15 Hate evil and love good;
be fair in the courts.

Maybe the LORD God All-Powerful will be kind
to the people of Joseph who are left alive.

16 This is what the Lord, the LORD God All-Powerful, says:

"People will be crying in all the streets;
they will be saying, 'Oh, no!' in the public places.

They will call the farmers to come and weep
and will pay people to cry out loud for them.

17 People will be crying in all the vineyards,
because I will pass among you to punish you," says the LORD.

## *The Lord's Day of Judging*

18 How terrible it will be for you who want
the LORD's day of judging to come.

Why do you want that day to come?
It will bring darkness for you, not light.

19 It will be like someone who runs from a lion
and meets a bear,

or like someone who goes into his house

and puts his hand on the wall,
and then is bitten by a snake.

20 So the LORD's day of judging will bring darkness, not light;
it will be very dark, not light at all.

21 The LORD says, "I hate and reject your feasts;
I cannot stand your religious meetings.

22 If you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I won't accept them.

You bring your best fellowship offerings of fattened cattle,
but I will ignore them.

23 Take the noise of your songs away from me!
I won't listen to the music of your harps.

24 But let justice flow like a river,
and let goodness flow like a never-ending stream.

25 "People of Israel, you did not bring me sacrifices and offerings
while you traveled in the desert for forty years.

26 You have carried with you
your king, the god Sakkuth,
and Kaiwan your idol,
and the star gods you have made.

27 So I will send you away as captives beyond Damascus,"
says the LORD, whose name is the God All-Powerful.

## Psalm 141:5–10

5 If a good person punished me, that would be kind.
If he corrected me, that would be like perfumed oil on my head.
I shouldn't refuse it.

But I pray against those who do evil.
6 Let their leaders be thrown down the cliffs.
Then people will know that I have spoken correctly:

7 "The ground is plowed and broken up.
In the same way, our bones have been scattered at the grave."

8 God, I look to you for help.
I trust in you, LORD. Don't let me die.

9 Protect me from the traps they set for me
and from the net that evil people have spread.

10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
but let me pass by safely.

## Proverbs 29:26

26 Many people want to speak to a ruler,
but justice comes only from the LORD.

## Revelation 4:1–11

### *John Sees Heaven*

4 After the vision of these things I looked, and there before me was an open door in heaven. And the same voice that spoke to me before, that sounded like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this." 2 Immediately

I was in the Spirit, and before me was a throne in heaven, and someone was sitting on it. 3The One who sat on the throne looked like precious stones, like jasper and carnelian. All around the throne was a rainbow the color of an emerald. 4Around the throne there were twenty-four other thrones with twenty-four elders sitting on them. They were dressed in white and had golden crowns on their heads. 5Lightning flashes and noises and thunder came from the throne. Before the throne seven lamps were burning, which are the seven spirits of God. 6Also before the throne there was something that looked like a sea of glass, clear like crystal.

In the center and around the throne were four living creatures with eyes all over them, in front and in back. 7The first living creature was like a lion. The second was like a calf. The third had a face like a man. The fourth was like a flying eagle. 8Each of these four living creatures had six wings and was covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.
He was, he is, and he is coming."

9These living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever. 10Then the twenty-four elders bow down before the One who sits on the throne, and they worship him who lives forever and ever. They put their crowns down before the throne and say:

11"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,

because you made all things.
Everything existed and was made,
because you wanted it."

# December 15

## God Listens

*I cry out to the* LORD*; I pray to the* LORD *for mercy.*

Psalm 142:1

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

Intently. Carefully.

from *The Great House of God*

### Amos 6:1—7:17

#### *Israel Will Be Destroyed*

6 How terrible it will be for those who have an
easy life in Jerusalem,
for those who feel safe living on Mount Samaria.

You think you are the important people of the best nation in the world;
the Israelites come to you for help.

2Go look at the city of Calneh,

and from there go to the great city Hamath;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.

You are no better than these kingdoms.
Your land is no larger than theirs.

3 You put off the day of punishment,
but you bring near the day when you can do evil to others.

4 You lie on beds decorated with ivory
and stretch out on your couches.

You eat tender lambs
and fattened calves.

5 You make up songs on your harps,
and, like David, you compose songs on musical instruments.

6 You drink wine by the bowlful
and use the best perfumed lotions.
But you are not sad over the ruin of Israel,

7 so you will be some of the first ones taken as slaves.
Your feasting and lying around will come to an end.

8 The Lord God made this promise; the LORD God All-Powerful says:

"I hate the pride of the Israelites,
and I hate their strong buildings,

so I will let the enemy take the city
and everything in it."

9 At that time there might be only ten people left alive in just one house, but they will also die. 10 When the relatives come to get the bodies to take them outside, one of them will call to the

other and ask, “Are there any other dead bodies with you?”
That person will answer, “No.”
Then the one who asked will say, “Hush! We must not say the name of the LORD.”

11 The LORD has given the command;
the large house will be broken into pieces,
and the small house into bits.

12 Horses do not run on rocks,
and people do not plow rocks with oxen.

But you have changed fairness into poison;
you have changed what is right into a bitter taste.

13 You are happy that the town of Lo Debar was captured,
and you say, “We have taken Karnaim[n] by our own strength.”

14 The LORD God All-Powerful says,
“Israel, I will bring a nation against you

that will make your people suffer from Lebo Hamath in the north
to the valley south of the Dead Sea.”

## *The Vision of Locusts*

7 This is what the Lord God showed me: He was forming a swarm of locusts, after the king had taken his share of the first crop and the second crop had just begun growing. 2 When the locusts ate all the crops in the country, I said, “Lord God, forgive us. How could Israel live through this? It is too small already!”
3 So the LORD changed his mind about this. “It will not happen,” said the LORD.

## *The Vision of Fire*

4 This is what the Lord God showed me: The Lord God was calling for fire to come down like rain. It burned up the deep water and was going to burn up the land. 5 Then I cried out,

“Lord God, stop! How could Israel live through this? It is too small already.”

6So the LORD changed his mind about this too. “It will not happen,” said the Lord God.

## *The Vision of the Plumb Line*

7This is what he showed me: The Lord stood by a straight wall, with a plumb line in his hand. 8The LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?”

I said, “A plumb line.”

Then the Lord said, “See, I will put a plumb line among my people Israel to show how crooked they are. I will not look the other way any longer.

9“The places where Isaac’s descendants worship will be destroyed,
Israel’s holy places will be turned into ruins,
and I will attack King Jeroboam’s family with the sword.”

## *Amaziah Speaks Against Amos*

10Amaziah, a priest at Bethel, sent this message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is making evil plans against you with the people of Israel. He has been speaking so much that this land can’t hold all his words. 11This is what Amos has said:

‘Jeroboam will die by the sword,
and the people of Israel will be taken as captives
out of their own country.’”

12Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Seer, go back right now to Judah. Do your prophesying and earn your living there, 13but don’t prophesy anymore here at Bethel. This is the king’s holy place, and it is the nation’s temple.”

14Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I do not make my living as a prophet, nor am I a member of a group of prophets. I make my living as a shepherd, and I take care of sycamore trees. 15But the LORD took me away from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ 16So listen to the LORD’s word. You tell me,

‘Don’t prophesy against Israel,
and stop prophesying against the descendants of Isaac.’

17 “Because you have said this, the LORD says:

‘Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and daughters will be killed with swords.

Other people will measure your land and divide it among themselves,
and you will die in a foreign country.

The people of Israel will definitely be taken
from their own land as captives.’”

## Psalm 142:1–7

### *A Prayer for Safety*

**A maskil of David when he was in the cave. A prayer.**

142 I cry out to the LORD; I pray to the LORD for mercy.

2 I pour out my problems to him;
I tell him my troubles.

3 When I am afraid,
you, LORD, know the way out.

In the path where I walk,
a trap is hidden for me.

4 Look around me and see.
No one cares about me.

I have no place of safety;
no one cares if I live.

5 LORD, I cry out to you.
I say, “You are my protection.
You are all I want in this life.”

6 Listen to my cry,
because I am helpless.

Save me from those who are chasing me,
because they are too strong for me.

7 Free me from my prison,
and then I will praise your name.

Then good people will surround me,
because you have taken care of me.

## Proverbs 29:27

27 Good people hate those who are dishonest,
and the wicked hate those who are honest.

## Revelation 5:1–14

5 Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the One sitting on the
throne. The scroll had writing on both sides and was kept
closed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a powerful angel calling in a
loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the
scroll?” 3 But there was no one in heaven or on earth or under
the earth who could open the scroll or look inside it. 4 I cried
bitterly because there was no one who was worthy to open the
scroll or look inside. 5 But one of the elders said to me, “Do not
cry! The Lion[n] from the tribe of Judah, David’s descendant, has
won the victory so that he is able to open the scroll and its
seven seals.”
6 Then I saw a Lamb standing in the center of the throne and
in the middle of the four living creatures and the elders. The
Lamb looked as if he had been killed. He had seven horns and

seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that were sent into all the world. [7]The Lamb came and took the scroll from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. [8]When he took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed down before the Lamb. Each one of them had a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's holy people. [9]And they all sang a new song to the Lamb:

"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,

because you were killed,
and with the blood of your death you bought people for God
from every tribe, language, people, and nation.

[10]You made them to be a kingdom of priests for our God,
and they will rule on the earth."

[11]Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels around the throne, and the four living creatures, and the elders. There were thousands and thousands of angels, [12]saying in a loud voice:

"The Lamb who was killed is worthy
to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and strength,
honor, glory, and praise!"

[13]Then I heard all creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea saying:

"To the One who sits on the throne
and to the Lamb

be praise and honor and glory and power
forever and ever."

[14]The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders bowed down and worshiped.

# December 16

## Spiritual Water

*As a dry land needs rain, I thirst for you.*

Psalm 143:6

*"The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up inside… . giving eternal life."*

John 4:14

Deprive your body of necessary fluid, and your body will tell you. Deprive your soul of spiritual water, and your soul will tell you. Dehydrated hearts send desperate messages. Snarling tempers. Waves of worry. Growling mastodons of guilt and fear. You think God wants you to live with these? Hopelessness. Sleeplessness. Loneliness. Resentment. Irritability. Insecurity. These are warnings. Symptoms of a dryness deep within.

Treat your soul as you treat your thirst. Take a gulp. Imbibe moisture. Flood your heart with a good swallow of water.

Where do you find water for the soul? "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

from *Come Thirsty*

### Amos 8:1—9:15

#### *The Vision of Ripe Fruit*

8 This is what the Lord God showed me: a basket of summer
fruit. 2He said to me, "Amos, what do you see?"

I said, "A basket of summer fruit."

Then the LORD said to me, "An end[n] has come for my people
Israel, because I will not overlook their sins anymore.

3"On that day the palace songs will become funeral songs,"

says the Lord God. “There will be dead bodies thrown
everywhere! Silence!”

4 Listen to me, you who walk on helpless people,
you who are trying to destroy the poor people of this
country, saying,

5 “When will the New Moon festival be over
so we can sell grain?

When will the Sabbath be over
so we can bring out wheat to sell?

We can charge them more
and give them less,
and we can change the scales to cheat the people.

6 We will buy poor people for silver,
and needy people for the price of a pair of sandals.
We will even sell the wheat that was swept up from the
floor.”

7 The LORD has sworn by his name, the Pride of Jacob, “I will
never forget everything that these people did.

8 The whole land will shake because of it,
and everyone who lives in the land will cry for those who
died.

The whole land will rise like the Nile;
it will be shaken, and then it will fall
like the Nile River in Egypt.”

9 The Lord God says:

“At that time I will cause the sun to go down at noon
and make the earth dark on a bright day.

10 I will change your festivals into days of crying for the dead,

and all your songs will become songs of sadness.

I will make all of you wear rough cloth to show your sadness;
I will make you shave your heads as well.

I will make it like a time of crying for the death of an only son,
and its end like the end of an awful day.”

11 The Lord God says: “The days are coming
when I will cause a time of hunger in the land.

The people will not be hungry for bread or thirsty for water,
but they will be hungry for words from the LORD.

12 They will wander from the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea,
from the north to the east.

They will search for the word of the LORD,
but they won’t find it.

13 At that time the beautiful young women and the young men
will become weak from thirst.

14 They make promises by the idol in Samaria
and say, ‘As surely as the god of Dan lives … ’
and, ‘As surely as the god of Beersheba[n] lives, we promise … ’

So they will fall
and never get up again.”

## *Israel Will Be Destroyed*

9 I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said:“Smash the top of the pillars
so that even the bottom of the doors will shake.

Make the pillars fall on the people’s heads;
anyone left alive I will kill with a sword.

Not one person will get away;
no one will escape.

2If they dig down as deep as the place of the dead,
I will pull them up from there.

If they climb up into heaven,
I will bring them down from there.

3If they hide at the top of Mount Carmel,
I will find them and take them away.

If they try to hide from me at the bottom of the sea,
I will command a snake to bite them.

4If they are captured and taken away by their enemies,
I will command the sword to kill them.

I will keep watch over them,
but I will keep watch to give them trouble, not to do them good.”

5The Lord God All-Powerful touches the land,
and the land shakes.
Then everyone who lives in the land cries for the dead.

The whole land rises like the Nile River
and falls like the river of Egypt.

6 The LORD builds his upper rooms above the skies;
he sets their foundations on the earth.

He calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out on the land.
The LORD is his name.

7 The LORD says,

“Israel, you are no different to me than the people of Cush.

I brought Israel out of the land of Egypt,
and the Philistines from Crete,
and the Arameans from Kir.

8 I, the Lord God, am watching the sinful kingdom Israel.

I will destroy it
from off the earth,

but I will not completely destroy
Jacob’s descendants,” says the LORD.

9 “I am giving the command
to scatter the nation of Israel among all nations.

It will be like someone shaking grain through a strainer,
but not even a tiny stone falls through.

10 All the sinners among my people
will die by the sword—

those who say,
‘Nothing bad will happen to us.’

## *The Lord Promises to Restore Israel*

11 “The kingdom of David is like a fallen tent,
but in that day I will set it up again
and mend its broken places.

I will rebuild its ruins
as it was before.

12 Then Israel will take over what is left of Edom
and the other nations that belong to me,”

says the LORD,
who will make it happen.

13 The LORD says, “The time is coming when there will be all kinds of food.

People will still be harvesting crops
when it’s time to plow again.

People will still be taking the juice from grapes
when it’s time to plant again.

Wine will drip from the mountains
and pour from the hills.

14 I will bring my people Israel back from captivity;
they will build the ruined cities again,
and they will live in them.

They will plant vineyards and drink the wine from them;
they will plant gardens and eat their fruit.

15 I will plant my people on their land,
and they will not be pulled out again
from the land which I have given them,”
says the LORD your God.

## Psalm 143:1–6

### *A Prayer Not to Be Killed*

**A psalm of David.**

143 LORD, hear my prayer; listen to my cry for mercy.

Answer me
because you are loyal and good.

2Don’t judge me, your servant,
because no one alive is right before you.

3My enemies are chasing me;
they crushed me to the ground.

They made me live in darkness
like those long dead.

4I am afraid;
my courage is gone.

5I remember what happened long ago;
I consider everything you have done.
I think about all you have made.

6I lift my hands to you in prayer.
As a dry land needs rain, I thirst for you. *Selah*

## Proverbs 30:1–4

## *Wise Words from Agur*

30 These are the words of Agur son of Jakeh. This is his message
to Ithiel and Ucal:

2 "I am the most stupid person there is,
and I have no understanding.

3 I have not learned to be wise,
and I don't know much about God, the Holy One.

4 Who has gone up to heaven and come back down?
Who can hold the wind in his hand?

Who can gather up the waters in his coat?
Who has set in place the ends of the earth?

What is his name or his son's name?
Tell me, if you know!

## Revelation 6:1–17

6 Then I watched while the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse. The rider on the horse held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out, determined to win the victory.

3 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" 4 Then another horse came out, a red one. Its rider was given power to take away peace from the earth and to make people kill each other, and he was given a big sword.

5 When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse, and its rider held a pair of scales in his hand. 6 Then I heard something that sounded like a voice coming from the middle of the four living creatures. The voice said, "A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, and do not damage the olive oil and wine!"

7 When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of

the fourth living creature say, “Come!” [8]I looked, and there before me was a pale horse. Its rider was named death, and Hades[n] was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill people by war, by starvation, by disease, and by the wild animals of the earth.

[9]When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been killed because they were faithful to the word of God and to the message they had received. [10]These souls shouted in a loud voice, “Holy and true Lord, how long until you judge the people of the earth and punish them for killing us?” [11]Then each one of them was given a white robe and was told to wait a short time longer. There were still some of their fellow servants and brothers and sisters in the service of Christ who must be killed as they were. They had to wait until all of this was finished.

[12]Then I watched while the Lamb opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became black like rough black cloth, and the whole moon became red like blood. [13]And the stars in the sky fell to the earth like figs falling from a fig tree when the wind blows. [14]The sky disappeared as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place.

[15]Then the kings of the earth, the rulers, the generals, the rich people, the powerful people, the slaves, and the free people hid themselves in caves and in the rocks on the mountains. [16]They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us. Hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the anger of the Lamb! [17]The great day for their anger has come, and who can stand against it?”

# December 17

## The Angels Offer Worship

*All the angels were standing around the throne … saying, "Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength belong to our God forever and ever."*

Revelation 7:11–12

Only one sight enthralls angels—God's face. They know that he is Lord of all. And as a result, they worship him. Whether in the temple with Isaiah or the pasture with the Bethlehem shepherds, angels worship …

"All the angels were standing around the throne … saying: 'Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength belong to our God forever and ever.'"

Doesn't their worship proclaim volumes about God's beauty? Angels could gaze at the Grand Tetons and Grand Canyon, Picasso paintings and the Sistine Chapel, but they choose, instead, to fix their eyes on the glory of God. They can't see enough of him, and they can't be silent about what they see.

from *Come Thirsty*

## Obadiah 1–21

### *The Lord Will Punish the Edomites*

[1]This is the vision of Obadiah.
This is what the Lord God says about Edom:[n]

We have heard a message from the LORD.
A messenger has been sent among the nations, saying,

"Attack! Let's go attack Edom!"

## *The Lord Speaks to the Edomites*

2 “Soon I will make you the smallest of nations.
You will be greatly hated by everyone.

3 Your pride has fooled you,
you who live in the hollow places of the cliff.
Your home is up high,

you who say to yourself,
‘No one can bring me down to the ground.’

4 Even if you fly high like the eagle
and make your nest among the stars,
I will bring you down from there,” says the LORD.

5 “You will really be ruined!

If thieves came to you,
if robbers came by night,
they would steal only enough for themselves.

If workers came and picked the grapes from your vines,
they would leave a few behind.

6 But you, Edom, will really lose everything!
People will find all your hidden treasures!

7 All the people who are your friends
will force you out of the land.

The people who are at peace with you
will trick you and defeat you.

Those who eat your bread with you now

are planning a trap for you,
and you will not notice it.”

8 The LORD says, “On that day
I will surely destroy the wise people from Edom,
and those with understanding from the mountains of Edom.

9 Then, city of Teman, your best warriors will be afraid,
and everyone from the mountains of Edom will be killed.

10 You did violence to your relatives, the Israelites,
so you will be covered with shame
and destroyed forever.

11 You stood aside without helping
while strangers carried Israel’s treasures away.

When foreigners entered Israel’s city gate
and threw lots to decide what part of Jerusalem they would take,
you were like one of them.

## *Commands That Edom Broke*

12 “Edom, do not laugh at your brother Israel in his time of trouble

or be happy about the people of Judah when they are destroyed.
Do not brag when cruel things are done to them.

13 Do not enter the city gate of my people
in their time of trouble

or laugh at their problems
in their time of trouble.

Do not take their treasures
in their time of trouble.

14 Do not stand at the crossroads
to destroy those who are trying to escape.

Do not capture those who escape alive and turn them over to their enemy
in their time of trouble.

## *The Nations Will Be Judged*

15 "The LORD's day of judging is coming soon
to all the nations.

The same evil things you did to other people
will happen to you;
they will come back upon your own head.

16 Because you drank in my Temple,
all the nations will drink on and on.

They will drink and drink
until they disappear.

17 But on Mount Zion some will escape the judgment,
and it will be a holy place.

The people of Jacob will take back their land
from those who took it from them.

18 The people of Jacob will be like a fire
and the people of Joseph[n] like a flame.

But the people of Esau[n] will be like dry stalks.
The people of Jacob will set them on fire and burn them

up.

There will be no one left of the people of Esau.”

This will happen because the LORD has said it.

19Then God’s people will regain southern Judah from Edom;
they will take back the mountains of Edom.

They will take back the western hills
from the Philistines.

They will regain the lands of Ephraim and Samaria,
and Benjamin will take over Gilead.

20People from Israel who once were forced to leave their homes
will take the land of the Canaanites,
all the way to Zarephath.

People from Judah who once were forced to leave Jerusalem and live in Sepharad
will take back the cities of southern Judah.

21Powerful warriors will go up on Mount Zion,
where they will rule the people living on Edom’s mountains.
And the kingdom will belong to the LORD.

## Psalm 143:7–12

7LORD, answer me quickly,
because I am getting weak.

Don’t turn away from me,
or I will be like those who are dead.

8 Tell me in the morning about your love,
because I trust you.

Show me what I should do,
because my prayers go up to you.

9 LORD, save me from my enemies;
I hide in you.

10 Teach me to do what you want,
because you are my God.

Let your good Spirit
lead me on level ground.

11 LORD, let me live
so people will praise you.

In your goodness
save me from my troubles.

12 In your love defeat my enemies.
Destroy all those who trouble me,
because I am your servant.

## Proverbs 30:5–6

5 “Every word of God is true.
He guards those who come to him for safety.

6 Do not add to his words,

or he will correct you and prove you are a liar.

## Revelation 7:1–17

### *The 144,000 People of Israel*

7 After the vision of these things I saw four angels standing at
the four corners of the earth. The angels were holding the four
winds of the earth to keep them from blowing on the land or on
the sea or on any tree. 2Then I saw another angel coming up
from the east who had the seal of the living God. And he called
out in a loud voice to the four angels to whom God had given
power to harm the earth and the sea. 3He said to them, “Do not
harm the land or the sea or the trees until we mark with a sign
the foreheads of the people who serve our God.” 4Then I heard
how many people were marked with the sign. There were one
hundred forty-four thousand from every tribe of the people of
Israel.

5From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were
marked with the sign,

from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,

6from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,

7from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,

[8]from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand,

and from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand
were marked with the sign.

## *The Great Crowd Worships God*

[9]After the vision of these things I looked, and there was a great number of people, so many that no one could count them. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language of the earth. They were all standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. [10]They were shouting in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." [11]All the angels were standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. They all bowed down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12]saying, "Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength belong to our God forever and ever. Amen!"

[13]Then one of the elders asked me, "Who are these people dressed in white robes? Where did they come from?"

[14]I answered, "You know, sir."

And the elder said to me, "These are the people who have come out of the great distress. They have washed their robes[n] and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [15]Because of this, they are before the throne of God. They worship him day and night in his temple. And the One who sits on the throne will be present with them. [16]Those people will never be hungry again, and they will never be thirsty again. The sun will not hurt them, and no heat will burn them, [17]because the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of water that give life. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

# December 18

# A Place for the Weary

*He protects me like a strong, walled city, and he loves me. He is my defender and my Savior, my shield and my protection.*

Psalm 144:2

IS there anything more frail than a bruised reed? Look at the bruised reed at the water's edge. A once slender and tall stalk of sturdy river grass, it is now bowed and bent. Are you a bruised reed? Was it so long ago that you stood so tall, so proud? ...

Then something happened. You were bruised ...
by harsh words
by a friend's anger
by a spouse's betrayal ...

The bruised reed ... Society knows what to do with you ... The world will break you off; the world will snuff you out.

But the artists of Scripture proclaim that God won't. Painted on canvas after canvas is the tender touch of a Creator who has a special place for the bruised and weary of the world. A God who is the friend of the wounded heart.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## Jonah 1:1—4:11

### *God Calls and Jonah Runs*

1 The LORD spoke his word to Jonah son of Amittai: 2"Get up, go
to the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it, because I
see the evil things they do."

3But Jonah got up to run away from the LORD by going to
Tarshish. He went to the city of Joppa, where he found a ship
that was going to the city of Tarshish. Jonah paid for the trip
and went aboard, planning to go to Tarshish to run away from
the LORD.

4But the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, which made the
sea so stormy that the ship was in danger of breaking apart.
5The sailors were afraid, and each man cried to his own god.
They began throwing the cargo from the ship into the sea to
make the ship lighter.

But Jonah had gone down far inside the ship to lie down, and
he fell fast asleep. 6The captain of the ship came and said, "Why
are you sleeping? Get up and pray to your god! Maybe your god
will pay attention to us, and we won't die!"

7Then the men said to each other, "Let's throw lots to see
who caused these troubles to happen to us."

When they threw lots, the lot showed that the trouble had
happened because of Jonah. 8Then they said to him, "Tell us,
who caused our trouble? What is your job? Where do you come
from? What is your country? Who are your people?"

9Then Jonah said to them, "I am a Hebrew. I fear the LORD,
the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

10The men were very afraid, and they asked Jonah, "What
terrible thing did you do?" (They knew he was running away
from the LORD because he had told them.)

11Since the wind and the waves of the sea were becoming
much stronger, they said to him, "What should we do to you to
make the sea calm down for us?"

12Jonah said to them, "Pick me up, and throw me into the
sea, and then it will calm down. I know it is my fault that this
great storm has come on you."

13Instead, the men tried to row the ship back to the land, but
they could not, because the sea was becoming more stormy.

## *Jonah's Punishment*

14So the men cried to the LORD, "LORD, please don't let us die
because of this man's life; please don't think we are guilty of
killing an innocent person. LORD, you have caused all this to
happen; you wanted it this way." 15So they picked up Jonah and
threw him into the sea, and the sea became calm. 16Then they
began to fear the LORD very much; they offered a sacrifice to the
LORD and made promises to him.

17The LORD caused a big fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was
inside the fish three days and three nights.

2 While Jonah was inside the fish, he prayed to the LORD his God
and said,

2"When I was in danger,
I called to the LORD,
and he answered me.

I was about to die,
so I cried to you,
and you heard my voice.

3 You threw me into the sea,
down, down into the deep sea.

The water was all around me,
and your powerful waves flowed over me.

4 I said, ‘I was driven out of your presence,
but I hope to see your Holy Temple again.’

5 The waters of the sea closed around my throat.
The deep sea was all around me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

6 When I went down to where the mountains of the sea start to rise,
I thought I was locked in this prison forever,

but you saved me from the pit of death,
LORD my God.

7 “When my life had almost gone,
I remembered the LORD.

I prayed to you,
and you heard my prayers in your Holy Temple.

8 “People who worship useless idols
give up their loyalty to you.

9 But I will praise and thank you
while I give sacrifices to you,
and I will keep my promises to you.

Salvation comes from the LORD!”

10Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and the fish threw up
Jonah onto the dry land.

## *God Calls and Jonah Obeys*

3 The LORD spoke his word to Jonah again and said, 2“Get up, go
to the great city Nineveh, and preach to it what I tell you to
say.”

3So Jonah obeyed the LORD and got up and went to Nineveh.
It was a very large city; just to walk across it took a person
three days. 4After Jonah had entered the city and walked for
one day, he preached to the people, saying, “After forty days,
Nineveh will be destroyed!”

5The people of Nineveh believed God. They announced that
they would fast for a while, and they put on rough cloth to show
their sadness. All the people in the city did this, from the most
important to the least important.

6When the king of Nineveh heard this news, he got up from
his throne, took off his robe, and covered himself with rough
cloth and sat in ashes to show how upset he was.

7He sent this announcement through Nineveh:

By command of the king and his important men: No person
or animal, herd or flock, will be allowed to taste anything. Do
not let them eat food or drink water. 8But every person and
animal should be covered with rough cloth, and people should
cry loudly to God. Everyone must turn away from evil living and
stop doing harm all the time. 9Who knows? Maybe God will
change his mind. Maybe he will stop being angry, and then we
will not die.

10When God saw what the people did, that they stopped
doing evil, he changed his mind and did not do what he had
warned. He did not punish them.

## *God’s Mercy Makes Jonah Angry*

4 But this made Jonah very unhappy, and he became angry. 2He
prayed to the LORD, “When I was still in my own country this is
what I said would happen, and that is why I quickly ran away to
Tarshish. I knew that you are a God who is kind and shows
mercy. You don’t become angry quickly, and you have great
love. I knew you would choose not to cause harm. 3So now I ask
you, LORD, please kill me. It is better for me to die than to live.”

4Then the LORD said, “Do you think it is right for you to be
angry?”

5Jonah went out and sat down east of the city. There he made
a shelter for himself and sat in the shade, waiting to see what

would happen to the city. 6The LORD made a plant grow quickly
up over Jonah, which gave him shade and helped him to be
more comfortable. Jonah was very pleased to have the plant.
7But the next day when the sun rose, God sent a worm to attack
the plant so that it died.
8As the sun rose higher in the sky, God sent a very hot east
wind to blow, and the sun became so hot on Jonah's head that
he became very weak and wished he were dead. He said, "It is
better for me to die than to live."
9But God said to Jonah, "Do you think it is right for you to be
angry about the plant?"
Jonah answered, "It is right for me to be angry! I am so
angry I could die!"
10And the LORD said, "You are so concerned for that plant
even though you did nothing to make it grow. It appeared one
day, and the next day it died. 11Then shouldn't I show concern
for the great city Nineveh, which has more than one hundred
twenty thousand people who do not know right from wrong, and
many animals, too?"

## Psalm 144:1–8

### *A Prayer for Victory*

**Of David.**

144 Praise the LORD, my Rock, who trains me for war,
who trains me for battle.

2He protects me like a strong, walled city, and he loves me.
He is my defender and my Savior,

my shield and my protection.
He helps me keep my people under control.

3LORD, why are people important to you?
Why do you even think about human beings?

4People are like a breath;

their lives are like passing shadows.

5 LORD, tear open the sky and come down.
Touch the mountains so they will smoke.

6 Send the lightning and scatter my enemies.
Shoot your arrows and force them away.

7 Reach down from above.
Save me and rescue me out of this sea of enemies,
from these foreigners.

8 They are liars;
they are dishonest.

## Proverbs 30:7–9

7 "I ask two things from you, LORD.
Don't refuse me before I die.

8 Keep me from lying and being dishonest.
And don't make me either rich or poor;
just give me enough food for each day.

9 If I have too much, I might reject you
and say, 'I don't know the LORD.'

If I am poor, I might steal
and disgrace the name of my God.

## Revelation 8:1–13

## *The Seventh Seal*

8 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in
heaven for about half an hour. 2And I saw the seven angels who
stand before God and to whom were given seven trumpets.

3Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden
pan for incense. He was given much incense to offer with the
prayers of all God's holy people. The angel put this offering on
the golden altar before the throne. 4The smoke from the incense
went up from the angel's hand to God with the prayers of God's
people. 5Then the angel filled the incense pan with fire from the
altar and threw it on the earth, and there were flashes of
lightning, thunder and loud noises, and an earthquake.

## *The Seven Angels and Trumpets*

6Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets
prepared to blow them.

7The first angel blew his trumpet, and hail and fire mixed
with blood were poured down on the earth. And a third of the
earth, and all the green grass, and a third of the trees were
burned up.

8Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and something
that looked like a big mountain, burning with fire, was thrown
into the sea. And a third of the sea became blood, 9a third of the
living things in the sea died, and a third of the ships were
destroyed.

10Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a large star,
burning like a torch, fell from the sky. It fell on a third of the
rivers and on the springs of water. 11The name of the star is
Wormwood.[n] And a third of all the water became bitter, and
many people died from drinking the water that was bitter.

12Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the
sun, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were
struck. So a third of them became dark, and a third of the day
was without light, and also the night.

13While I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying high in
the air cry out in a loud voice, "Trouble! Trouble! Trouble for
those who live on the earth because of the remaining sounds of
the trumpets that the other three angels are about to blow!"

# December 19

## Reasons for Joy

*Happy are the people whose God is the* LORD.

Psalm 144:15

"How's life?" someone asks. And we who've been resurrected from the dead say, "Well, things could be better." Or "Couldn't get a parking place." Or "My parents won't let me move to Hawaii." Or "People won't leave me alone so I can finish my sermon on selfishness." …

Are you so focused on what you don't have that you are blind to what you do?

You have a ticket to heaven no thief can take, an eternal home no divorce can break.

Every sin of your life has been cast to the sea.
Every mistake you've made is nailed to the tree.
You're blood-bought and heaven-made.
A child of God—forever saved.
So be grateful, joyful—for isn't it true?
What you don't have is much less than what you do.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

## Micah 1:1—3:12

### *Samaria and Israel to Be Punished*

1 During the time that Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings
of Judah, the word of the LORD came to Micah, who was from
Moresheth. He saw these visions about Samaria and Jerusalem.

2 Hear this, all you nations;
listen, earth and all you who live on it.

The Lord God will be a witness against you,
the Lord from his Holy Temple.

3 See, the LORD is coming out of his place;
he is coming down to walk on the tops of the mountains.

4 The mountains will melt under him,
and the valleys will crack open,

like wax near a fire,
like water running down a hillside.

5 All this is because of Jacob's sin,
because of the sins of the nation of Israel.

What is the place of Jacob's sin?
Isn't it Samaria?

What is Judah's place of idol worship?
Isn't it Jerusalem?

## *The Lord Speaks*

6 "So I will make Samaria a pile of ruins in the open country,
a place for planting vineyards.

I will pour her stones down into the valley
and strip her down to her foundations.

7 All her idols will be broken into pieces;
all the gifts to her idols will be burned with fire.
I will destroy all her idols,

and because Samaria earned her money by being unfaithful to me,
this money will be carried off by others who are not

faithful to me.”

## *Micah’s Great Sadness*

8 I will moan and cry because of this evil,
going around barefoot and naked.

I will cry loudly like the wild dogs
and make sad sounds like the owls do,

9 because Samaria’s wound cannot be healed.
It will spread to Judah;

it will reach the city gate of my people,
all the way to Jerusalem.

10 Don’t tell it in Gath.[n]
Don’t cry in Acco.[n]

Roll in the dust
at Beth Ophrah.[n]

11 Pass on your way, naked and ashamed,
you who live in Shaphir.[n]

Those who live in Zaanan[n]
won’t come out.

The people in Beth Ezel[n] will cry,
but they will not give you any support.

12 Those who live in Maroth[n]
will be anxious for good news to come,

because trouble will come from the LORD,

all the way to the gate of Jerusalem.

13 You people living in Lachish,[n]
harness the fastest horse to the chariot.

Jerusalem's sins started in you;
yes, Israel's sins were found in you.

14 So you must give farewell gifts
to Moresheth[n] in Gath.

The houses in Aczib[n] will be false help
to the kings of Israel.

15 I will bring against you people who will take your land,
you who live in Mareshah.[n]

The glory of Israel
will go in to Adullam.

16 Cut off your hair to show you are sad
for the children you love.

Make yourself bald like the eagle,
because your children will be taken away to a foreign land.

## *The Evil Plans of People*

2 How terrible it will be for people who plan
wickedness,
who lie on their beds and make evil plans.

When the morning light comes, they do what they planned,
because they have the power to do so.

2 They want fields, so they take them;
they want houses, so they take them away.

They cheat people to get their houses;
they rob them even of their property.

3 That is why the LORD says:

“Look, I am planning trouble against such people,
and you won’t be able to save yourselves.

You will no longer walk proudly,
because it will be a terrible time.

4 At that time people will make fun of you
and sing this sad song about you:

‘We are completely ruined;
the LORD has taken away my people’s land.

Yes, he has taken it away from me
and divided our fields among our enemies!’”

5 So you will have no one from the LORD’s people
to throw lots to divide the land.

## *Micah Is Asked Not to Prophesy*

6 The prophets say, “Don’t prophesy to us!
Don’t prophesy about these things!
Nothing to make us feel bad will happen!”

7 But I must say this, people of Jacob:
The LORD is becoming angry about what you have done.

My words are welcome

to the person who does what is right.

[8]But you are fighting against my people like an enemy.
You take the coats from people who pass by;

you rob them of their safety;
you plan war.

[9]You've forced the women of my people
from their nice houses;

you've taken my glory
from their children forever.

[10]Get up and leave.
This is not your place of rest anymore.

You have made this place unclean,
and it is doomed to destruction.

[11]But you people want a false prophet
who will tell you nothing but lies.

You want one who promises to prophesy good things for you
if you give him wine and beer.
He's just the prophet for you.

## *The Lord Promises to Rescue His People*

[12]"Yes, people of Jacob, I will bring all of you together;
I will bring together all those left alive in Israel.

I will put them together like sheep in a pen,
like a flock in its pasture;
the place will be filled with many people.

13 Someone will open the way and lead the people out.
The people will break through the gate and leave the city
where they were held captive.

Their king will go out in front of them,
and the LORD will lead them."

## *The Leaders of Israel Are Guilty of Evil*

3 Then I said,
"Listen, leaders of the people of Jacob;
listen, you rulers of the nation of Israel.

You should know how to decide cases fairly,
2 but you hate good and love evil.

You skin my people alive
and tear the flesh off their bones.

3 You eat my people's flesh
and skin them and break their bones;

you chop them up like meat for the pot,
like meat in a cooking pan.

4 They will cry to the LORD,
but he won't answer them.

At that time he will hide his face from them,
because what they have done is evil."

5 The LORD says this about the prophets who teach his people
the wrong way of living:

"If these prophets are given food to eat,
they shout, 'Peace!'

But if someone doesn’t give them what they ask for,
they call for a holy war against that person.

6 So it will become like night for them, without visions.
It will become dark for them, without any way to tell the future.

The sun is about to set for the prophets;
their day will become dark.

7 The seers will be ashamed;
the people who see the future will be embarrassed.

Yes, all of them will cover their mouths,
because there will be no answer from God.”

## *Micah Is an Honest Prophet of God*

8 But I am filled with power,
with the Spirit of the LORD,
and with justice and strength,

to tell the people of Jacob how they have turned against God,
and the people of Israel how they have sinned.

9 Leaders of Jacob and rulers of Israel,
listen to me,

you who hate fairness
and twist what is right.

10 You build Jerusalem by murdering people;
you build it with evil.

11 Its judges take money
to decide who wins in court.

Its priests only teach for pay,
and its prophets only look into the future when they get paid.

But they lean on the LORD and say,
"The LORD is here with us,
so nothing bad will happen to us."

12 Because of you,
Jerusalem will be plowed like a field.

The city will become a pile of rocks,
and the hill on which the Temple stands will be covered with bushes.

## Psalm 144:9–15

9 God, I will sing a new song to you;
I will play to you on the ten-stringed harp.

10 You give victory to kings.
You save your servant David from cruel swords.

11 Save me, rescue me from these foreigners.
They are liars; they are dishonest.

12 Let our sons in their youth
grow like plants.

Let our daughters be
like the decorated stones in the Temple.

13 Let our barns be filled
with crops of all kinds.

Let our sheep in the fields have
thousands and tens of thousands of lambs.
14 Let our cattle be strong.

Let no one break in.
Let there be no war,
no screams in our streets.

15Happy are those who are like this;
happy are the people whose God is the LORD.

## Proverbs 30:10

10"Do not say bad things about servants to their masters,
or they will curse you, and you will suffer for it.

## Revelation 9:1–21

9 Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fall from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the deep hole that leads to the bottomless pit. 2Then it opened up the hole that leads to the bottomless pit, and smoke came up from the hole like smoke from a big furnace. Then the sun and sky became dark because of the smoke from the hole. 3Then locusts came down to the earth out of the smoke, and they were given the power to sting like scorpions.[n] 4They were told not to harm the grass on the earth or any plant or tree. They could harm only the people who did not have the sign of God on their foreheads. 5These locusts were not given the power to kill anyone, but to cause pain to the people for five months. And the pain they felt was like the pain a scorpion gives when it stings someone. 6During those days people will look for a way to die, but they will not find it. They will want to die, but death will run away from them.

7The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore what looked like crowns of gold, and their faces looked like human faces. 8Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9Their chests looked like iron breastplates, and the sound of their wings was like the

noise of many horses and chariots hurrying into battle. [10]The locusts had tails with stingers like scorpions, and in their tails was their power to hurt people for five months. [11]The locusts had a king who was the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in the Hebrew language is Abaddon and in the Greek language is Apollyon.[n]

[12]The first trouble is past; there are still two other troubles that will come.

[13]Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns on the golden altar that is before God. [14]The voice said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Free the four angels who are tied at the great river Euphrates.” [15]And they let loose the four angels who had been kept ready for this hour and day and month and year so they could kill a third of all people on the earth. [16]I heard how many troops on horses were in their army—two hundred million.

[17]The horses and their riders I saw in the vision looked like this: They had breastplates that were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow like sulfur. The heads of the horses looked like heads of lions, with fire, smoke, and sulfur coming out of their mouths. [18]A third of all the people on earth were killed by these three terrible disasters coming out of the horses’ mouths: the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur. [19]The horses’ power was in their mouths and in their tails; their tails were like snakes with heads, and with them they hurt people.

[20]The other people who were not killed by these terrible disasters still did not change their hearts and turn away from what they had made with their own hands. They did not stop worshiping demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—things that cannot see or hear or walk. [21]These people did not change their hearts and turn away from murder or evil magic, from their sexual sins or stealing.

# December 20

## Got It All Figured Out

*The LORD is great and worthy of our praise; no one can understand how great he is.*

Psalm 145:3

we understand how storms are created. We map solar systems and transplant hearts. We measure the depths of the oceans and send signals to distant planets. We … have studied the system and are learning how it works.

And, for some, the loss of mystery has led to the loss of majesty. The more we know, the less we believe. Strange, don't you think? Knowledge of the workings shouldn't negate wonder. Knowledge should stir wonder. Who has more reason to worship than the astronomer who has seen the stars? …

Ironically, the more we know, the less we worship. We are more impressed with our discovery of the light switch than with the one who invented electricity … Rather than worship the Creator, we worship the creation (see Romans 1:25).

No wonder there is no wonder. We've figured it all out.

from *In the Grip of Grace*

### Micah 4:1—5:15

#### *The Mountain of the Lord*

4 In the last days
the mountain on which the LORD's Temple stands
will become the most important of all mountains.

It will be raised above the hills,
and people from other nations will come streaming to it.

2 Many nations will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the Temple of the God of Jacob,

so that he can teach us his ways,
and we can obey his teachings.”

His teachings will go out from Jerusalem,
the word of the LORD from that city.

3 The Lord will judge many nations;
he will make decisions about strong nations that are far away.

They will hammer their swords into plow blades
and their spears into hooks for trimming trees.

Nations will no longer raise swords against other nations;
they will not train for war anymore.

4 Everyone will sit under his own vine and fig tree,
and no one will make him afraid,
because the LORD All-Powerful has said it.

5 All other nations may follow their own gods,
but we will follow the LORD our God forever and ever.

6 The LORD says, “At that time,

I will gather the crippled;
I will bring together those who were sent away,
those whom I caused to have trouble.

7 I will keep alive those who were crippled,
and I will make a strong nation of those who were sent away.

The LORD will be their king in Mount Zion from now on and

forever.

8 And you, watchtower of the flocks,[n] hill of Jerusalem,
to you will come the kingdom as in the past.
Jerusalem, the right to rule will come again to you.”

## *Why the Israelites Must Go to Babylon*

9 Now, why do you cry so loudly?
Is your king gone?

Have you lost your helper,
so that you are in pain, like a woman trying to give birth?

10 People of Jerusalem, strain and be in pain.
Be like a woman trying to give birth,

because now you must leave the city
and live in the field.

You will go to Babylon,
but you will be saved from that place.

The LORD will go there
and buy you back from your enemies.

11 But now many nations
have come to fight against you,

saying, “Let’s destroy Jerusalem.
We will look at her and be glad we have defeated her.”

12 But they don’t know
what the LORD is thinking;

they don’t understand his plan.
He has gathered them like bundles of grain to the threshing floor.

13 “Get up and beat them, people of Jerusalem.
I will make you strong as if you had horns of iron

and hoofs of bronze.
You will beat many nations into small pieces
and give their wealth to the LORD,
their treasure to the Lord of all the earth.”

5 So, strong city, gather your soldiers together, because we are surrounded and attacked.

They will hit the leader of Israel
in the face with a club.

## *The Ruler to Be Born in Bethlehem*

2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are too small to be among the army groups from Judah,

from you will come one who will rule Israel for me.
He comes from very old times,
from days long ago.”

3 The LORD will give up his people
until the one who is having a baby gives birth;

then the rest of his relatives will return
to the people of Israel.

4 At that time the ruler of Israel will stand
and take care of his people

with the LORD's strength
and with the power of the name of the LORD his God.

The Israelites will live in safety,
because his greatness will reach all over the earth.
5 He will bring peace.

## *Rescue and Punishment*

Assyria will surely come into our country
and walk over our large buildings.

We will set up seven shepherds,
eight leaders of the people.

6 They will destroy the Assyrians with their swords;
they will conquer the land of Assyria with their swords drawn.

They will rescue us from the Assyrians when they come into our land,
when they walk over our borders.

7 Then the people of Jacob who are left alive
will be to other people

like dew from the LORD
or rain on the grass—

it does not wait for human beings;
it does not pause for any person.

8 Those of Jacob's people who are left alive
will be scattered among many nations and peoples.

They will be like a lion among the animals of the forest,

like a young lion in a flock of sheep:

As it goes, it jumps on them
and tears them to pieces,
and no one can save them.

9 So you will raise your fist in victory over your enemies,
and all your enemies will be destroyed.

10 The LORD says, “At that time,
I will take your horses from you
and destroy your chariots.

11 I will destroy the cities in your country
and tear down all your defenses.

12 I will take away the magic charms you use
so you will have no more fortune-tellers.

13 I will destroy your statues of gods
and the stone pillars you worship

so that you will no longer worship
what your hands have made.

14 I will tear down Asherah idols from you
and destroy your cities.

15 In my anger and rage,
I will pay back the nations that have not listened.”

## Psalm 145:1–7

### *Praise to God the King*

**A psalm of praise. Of David.**

145 I praise your greatness, my God the King; I will praise
you forever and ever.

2I will praise you every day;
I will praise you forever and ever.

3The LORD is great and worthy of our praise;
no one can understand how great he is.

4Parents will tell their children what you have done.
They will retell your mighty acts,

5wonderful majesty, and glory.
And I will think about your miracles.

6They will tell about the amazing things you do,
and I will tell how great you are.

7They will remember your great goodness
and will sing about your fairness.

## Proverbs 30:11–14

11"Some people curse their fathers
and do not bless their mothers.

12Some people think they are pure,
but they are not really free from evil.

13Some people have such a proud look!
They look down on others.

14 Some people have teeth like swords;
their jaws seem full of knives.

They want to remove the poor from the earth
and the needy from the land.

## Revelation 10:1–11

### *The Angel and the Small Scroll*

10 Then I saw another powerful angel coming down from heaven
dressed in a cloud with a rainbow over his head. His face was
like the sun, and his legs were like pillars of fire. 2 The angel
was holding a small scroll open in his hand. He put his right
foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. 3 Then he shouted
loudly like the roaring of a lion. And when he shouted, the
voices of seven thunders spoke. 4 When the seven thunders
spoke, I started to write. But I heard a voice from heaven say,
"Keep hidden what the seven thunders said, and do not write
them down."

5 Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land
raised his right hand to heaven, 6 and he made a promise by the
power of the One who lives forever and ever. He is the One who
made the skies and all that is in them, the earth and all that is
in it, and the sea and all that is in it. The angel promised,
"There will be no more waiting! 7 In the days when the seventh
angel is ready to blow his trumpet, God's secret will be finished.
This secret is the Good News God told to his servants, the
prophets."

8 Then I heard the same voice from heaven again, saying to
me: "Go and take the open scroll that is in the hand of the angel
that is standing on the sea and on the land."

9 So I went to the angel and told him to give me the small
scroll. And he said to me, "Take the scroll and eat it. It will be
sour in your stomach, but in your mouth it will be sweet as
honey." 10 So I took the small scroll from the angel's hand and
ate it. In my mouth it tasted sweet as honey, but after I ate it, it
was sour in my stomach. 11 Then I was told, "You must prophesy
again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings."

# December 21

## Spiritual Bankruptcy

*The LORD is kind and shows mercy. He does not become angry quickly but is full of love.*

Psalm 145:8

God does not save us because of what we've done. Only a puny god could be bought with tithes. Only an egotistical god would be impressed with our pain. Only a temperamental god could be satisfied by sacrifices. Only a heartless god would sell salvation to the highest bidders.

And only a great God does for his children what they can't do for themselves.

God's delight is received upon surrender, not awarded upon conquest. The first step to joy is a plea for help, an acknowledgment of moral destitution, an admission of inward paucity. Those who taste God's presence have declared spiritual bankruptcy and are aware of their spiritual crisis … Their pockets are empty. Their options are gone. They have long since stopped demanding justice; they are pleading for mercy.

from *The Applause of Heaven*

### Micah 6:1—7:20

#### *The Lord's Case*

6 Now hear what the LORD says:
"Get up; plead your case in front of the mountains;
let the hills hear your story.

2 Mountains, listen to the LORD's legal case.
Foundations of the earth, listen.

The LORD has a legal case against his people,
and he will accuse Israel.”

3He says, “My people, what did I do to you?
How did I make you tired of me?
Tell me.

4I brought you from the land of Egypt
and freed you from slavery;
I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to you.

5My people, remember
the evil plans of Balak king of Moab
and what Balaam son of Beor told Balak.

Remember what happened from Acacia to Gilgal
so that you will know the LORD does what is right!”

6You say, “What can I bring with me
when I come before the LORD,
when I bow before God on high?

Should I come before him with burnt offerings,
with year-old calves?

7Will the LORD be pleased with a thousand male sheep?
Will he be pleased with ten thousand rivers of oil?

Should I give my first child for the evil I have done?
Should I give my very own child for my sin?”

8The LORD has told you, human, what is good;
he has told you what he wants from you:

to do what is right to other people,
love being kind to others,
and live humbly, obeying your God.

[9]The voice of the LORD calls to the city,
and the wise person honors him.

So pay attention to the rod of punishment;
pay attention to the One who threatens to punish.

[10]Are there still in the wicked house
wicked treasures
and the cursed false measure?

[11]Can I forgive people who cheat others
with wrong weights and scales?

[12]The rich people of the city
do cruel things.

Its people tell lies;
they do not tell the truth.

[13]As for me, I will make you sick.
I will attack you, ruining you because of your sins.

[14]You will eat, but you won't become full;
you will still be hungry and empty.

You will store up, but save nothing,
and what you store up, the sword will destroy.

[15]You will plant,
but you won't harvest.

You will step on your olives,
but you won't get any oil from them.

You will crush the grapes,
but you will not drink the new wine.

16 This is because you obey the laws of King Omri
and do all the things that Ahab's family does;
you follow their advice.

So I will let you be destroyed.
The people in your city will be laughed at,
and other nations will make fun of you.

## *The Evil That People Do*

7 Poor me! I am like a hungry man,
and all the summer fruit has been picked—

there are no grapes left to eat,
none of the early figs I love.

2 All of the faithful people are gone;
there is not one good person left in this country.

Everyone is waiting to kill someone;
everyone is trying to trap someone else.

3 With both hands they are doing evil.
Rulers ask for money,
and judges' decisions are bought for a price.

Rich people tell what they want,
and they get it.

4 Even the best of them is like a thornbush;
the most honest of them is worse than a prickly plant.

The day that your watchmen[n] warned you about has come.
Now they will be confused.

5 Don't believe your neighbor

or trust a friend.

Don’t say anything,
even to your wife.

6 A son will not honor his father,
a daughter will turn against her mother,

and a daughter-in-law will be against her mother-in-law;
a person’s enemies will be members of his own family.

## *The Lord’s Kindness*

7 Israel says, “I will look to the LORD for help.
I will wait for God to save me;
my God will hear me.

8 Enemy, don’t laugh at me.
I have fallen, but I will get up again.

I sit in the shadow of trouble now,
but the LORD will be a light for me.

9 I sinned against the LORD,
so he was angry with me,

but he will defend my case in court.
He will bring about what is right for me.

Then he will bring me out into the light,
and I will see him set things right.

10 Then my enemies will see this,
and they will be ashamed,

those who said to me,
‘Where is the LORD your God?’

I will look down on them.
They will get walked on, like mud in the street.”

## *Israel Will Return*

11 The time will come when your walls will be built again,
when your country will grow.

12 At that time your people will come back to you
from Assyria and the cities of Egypt,

and from Egypt to the Euphrates River,
and from sea to sea and mountain to mountain.

13 The earth will be ruined for the people who live in it
because of their deeds.

## *A Prayer to God*

14 So shepherd your people with your stick;
tend the flock of people who belong to you.

That flock now lives alone in the forest
in the middle of a garden land.

Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead
as in days long ago.

15 “As in the days when I brought you out of Egypt,
I will show them miracles.”

16 When the nations see those miracles,

they will no longer brag about their power.

They will put their hands over their mouths,
refusing to listen.

17 They will crawl in the dust like a snake,
like insects crawling on the ground.

They will come trembling from their holes to the LORD our God
and will turn in fear before you.

18 There is no God like you.
You forgive those who are guilty of sin;

you don't look at the sins of your people
who are left alive.

You will not stay angry forever,
because you enjoy being kind.

19 You will have mercy on us again;
you will conquer our sins.

You will throw away all our sins
into the deepest part of the sea.

20 You will be true to the people of Jacob,
and you will be kind to the people of Abraham

as you promised to our ancestors long ago.

## Psalm 145:8–16

8 The LORD is kind and shows mercy.
He does not become angry quickly but is full of love.

9 The LORD is good to everyone;
he is merciful to all he has made.

10 LORD, everything you have made will praise you;
those who belong to you will bless you.

11 They will tell about the glory of your kingdom
and will speak about your power.

12 Then everyone will know the mighty things you do
and the glory and majesty of your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom will go on and on,
and you will rule forever.

The LORD will keep all his promises;
he is loyal to all he has made.

14 The LORD helps those who have been defeated
and takes care of those who are in trouble.

15 All living things look to you for food,
and you give it to them at the right time.

16 You open your hand,
and you satisfy all living things.

## Proverbs 30:15a

15 "Greed has two daughters
named 'Give' and 'Give.'

# Revelation 11:1–19

## *The Two Witnesses*

11 I was given a measuring stick like a rod, and I was told, “Go
and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the
people worshiping there. 2But do not measure the yard outside
the temple. Leave it alone, because it has been given to those
who are not God’s people. And they will trample on the holy city
for forty-two months. 3And I will give power to my two
witnesses to prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days,
and they will be dressed in rough cloth to show their sadness.”

4These two witnesses are the two olive trees and the two
lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5And if
anyone tries to hurt them, fire comes from their mouths and
kills their enemies. And if anyone tries to hurt them in whatever
way, in that same way that person will die. 6These witnesses
have the power to stop the sky from raining during the time
they are prophesying. And they have power to make the waters
become blood, and they have power to send every kind of
trouble to the earth as many times as they want.

7When the two witnesses have finished telling their message,
the beast that comes up from the bottomless pit will fight a war
against them. He will defeat them and kill them. 8The bodies of
the two witnesses will lie in the street of the great city where
the Lord was killed. This city is named Sodom[n] and Egypt,
which has a spiritual meaning. 9Those from every race of
people, tribe, language, and nation will look at the bodies of the
two witnesses for three and one-half days, and they will refuse
to bury them. 10People who live on the earth will rejoice and be
happy because these two are dead. They will send each other
gifts, because these two prophets brought much suffering to
those who live on the earth.

11But after three and one-half days, God put the breath of life
into the two prophets again. They stood on their feet, and
everyone who saw them became very afraid. 12Then the two
prophets heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Come up
here!” And they went up into heaven in a cloud as their enemies
watched.

13In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a
tenth of the city was destroyed. Seven thousand people were
killed in the earthquake, and those who did not die were very
afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14The second trouble is finished. Pay attention: The third
trouble is coming soon.

## *The Seventh Trumpet*

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet. And there were
loud voices in heaven, saying:

"The power to rule the world now belongs to our Lord and
his Christ,
and he will rule forever and ever."

16 Then the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones
before God, bowed down on their faces and worshiped God.
17 They said:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,

because you have used your great power
and have begun to rule!

18 The people of the world were angry,
but your anger has come.

The time has come to judge the dead,
and to reward your servants the prophets

and your holy people,
all who respect you, great and small.

The time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth!"

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened. The Ark that
holds the agreement God gave to his people could be seen in his
temple. Then there were flashes of lightning, noises, thunder,
an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.

# December 22

## God’s Help Is Near

*The LORD is close to everyone who prays to him, to all who truly pray to him.*

Psalm 145:18

HEALING begins when we do something. Healing begins when we reach out. Healing starts when we take a step. God’s help is near and always available, but it is only given to those who seek it. Nothing results from apathy …

God honors radical, risk-taking faith.

When arks are built, lives are saved. When soldiers march, Jerichos tumble. When staffs are raised, seas still open. When a lunch is shared, thousands are fed. And when a garment is touched—whether by the hand of an anemic woman in Galilee or by the prayers of a beggar in Bangladesh—Jesus stops. He stops and responds.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

### Nahum 1:1—3:19

1 This is the message for the city of Nineveh.[n] This is the book
of the vision of Nahum, who was from the town of Elkosh.

#### *The Lord Is Angry with Nineveh*

2 The LORD is a jealous God who punishes;
the LORD punishes and is filled with anger.

The LORD punishes those who are against him,
and he stays angry with his enemies.

[3]The LORD does not become angry quickly,
and his power is great.
The LORD will not let the guilty go unpunished.

Where the LORD goes, there are whirlwinds and storms,
and the clouds are the dust beneath his feet.

[4]He speaks to the sea and makes it dry;
he dries up all the rivers.

The areas of Bashan and Carmel dry up,
and the flowers of Lebanon dry up.

[5]The mountains shake in front of him,
and the hills melt.

The earth trembles when he comes;
the world and all who live in it shake with fear.

[6]No one can stay alive when he is angry;
no one can survive his strong anger.

His anger is poured out like fire;
the rocks are smashed by him.

[7]The LORD is good,
giving protection in times of trouble.
He knows who trusts in him.

[8]But like a rushing flood,
he will completely destroy Nineveh;
he will chase his enemies until he kills them.

[9]The LORD will completely destroy
anyone making plans against him.
Trouble will not come a second time.

[10]Those people will be like tangled thorns
or like people drunk from their wine;
they will be burned up quickly like dry weeds.

[11]Someone has come from Nineveh
who makes evil plans against the LORD
and gives wicked advice.

[12]This is what the LORD says:

"Although Assyria is strong and has many people,
it will be defeated and brought to an end.

Although I have made you suffer, Judah,
I will make you suffer no more.

[13]Now I will free you from their control
and tear away your chains."

[14]The LORD has given you this command, Nineveh:
"You will not have descendants to carry on your name.

I will destroy the idols and metal images
that are in the temple of your gods.

I will make a grave for you,
because you are wicked."

[15]Look, there on the hills,
someone is bringing good news!
He is announcing peace!

Celebrate your feasts, people of Judah,
and give your promised sacrifices to God.

The wicked will not come to attack you again;
they have been completely destroyed.

## *Nineveh Will Be Defeated*

2 The destroyer[n] is coming to attack you, Nineveh.Guard the defenses.
Watch the road.
Get ready.
Gather all your strength!

2Destroyers have destroyed God's people
and ruined their vines,

but the LORD will bring back Jacob's greatness
like Israel's greatness.

3The shields of his soldiers are red;
the army is dressed in red.

The metal on the chariots flashes like fire
when they are ready to attack;
their horses are excited.

4The chariots race through the streets
and rush back and forth through the city squares.

They look like torches;
they run like lightning.

5He[n] calls his officers,
but they stumble on the way.

They hurry to the city wall,
and the shield is put into place.

6The river gates are thrown open,
and the palace is destroyed.

[7]It has been announced that the people of Nineveh
will be captured and carried away.

The slave girls moan like doves
and beat their breasts, because they are sad.

[8]Nineveh is like a pool,
and now its water is draining away.

“Stop! Stop!” the people yell,
but no one turns back.

[9]Take the silver!
Take the gold!

There is no end to the treasure—
piles of wealth of every kind.

[10]Nineveh is robbed, ruined, and destroyed.
The people lose their courage, and their knees knock.
Stomachs ache, and everyone’s face grows pale.

[11]Where is the lions’[n] den
and the place where they feed their young?

Where did the lion, lioness, and cubs go
without being afraid?

[12]The lion killed enough for his cubs,
enough for his mate.

He filled his cave with the animals he caught;
he filled his den with meat he had killed.

[13]“I am against you, Nineveh,”
says the LORD All-Powerful.

“I will burn up your chariots in smoke,
and the sword will kill your young lions.
I will stop you from hunting down others on the earth,

and your messengers’ voices
will no longer be heard.”

## *It Will Be Terrible for Nineveh*

3 How terrible it will be for the city that has
killed so many.
It is full of lies

and goods stolen from other countries.
It is always killing somebody.

2Hear the sound of whips
and the noise of the wheels.

Hear horses galloping
and chariots bouncing along!

3Horses are charging,
swords are shining,
spears are gleaming!

Many are dead;
their bodies are piled up—

too many to count.
People stumble over the dead bodies.

4The city was like a prostitute;
she was charming and a lover of magic.

She made nations slaves with her prostitution

and her witchcraft.

5 “I am against you, Nineveh,” says the LORD All-Powerful.
“I will pull your dress up over your face
and show the nations your nakedness
and the kingdoms your shame.

6 I will throw filthy garbage on you
and make a fool of you.
I will make people stare at you.

7 Everyone who sees you will run away and say,
‘Nineveh is in ruins. Who will cry for her?’
Nineveh, where will I find anyone to comfort you?”

8 You are no better than Thebes,[n]
who sits by the Nile River
with water all around her.
The river was her defense;
the waters were like a wall around her.

9 Cush and Egypt gave her endless strength;
Put and Libya supported her.

10 But Thebes was captured
and went into captivity.
Her small children were beaten to death
at every street corner.
Lots were thrown for her important men,
and all of her leaders were put in chains.

11 Nineveh, you will be drunk, too.

You will hide;
you will look for a place safe from the enemy.

12 All your defenses are like fig trees with ripe fruit.
When the tree is shaken, the figs fall into the mouth of the eater.

13 Look at your soldiers.
They are all women!

The gates of your land
are wide open for your enemies;
fire has burned the bars of your gates.

14 Get enough water before the long war begins.
Make your defenses strong!

Get mud,
mix clay,
make bricks!

15 There the fire will burn you up.
The sword will kill you;
like grasshoppers eating crops, the battle will completely destroy you.

Grow in number like hopping locusts;
grow in number like swarming locusts!

16 Your traders are more than the stars in the sky,
but like locusts, they strip the land and then fly away.

17 Your guards are like locusts.
Your officers are like swarms of locusts
that hang on the walls on a cold day.

When the sun comes up, they fly away,
and no one knows where they have gone.

[18]King of Assyria, your rulers are asleep;
your important men lie down to rest.

Your people have been scattered on the mountains,
and there is no one to bring them back.

[19]Nothing can heal your wound;
your injury will not heal.

Everyone who hears about you applauds,
because everyone has felt your endless cruelty.

## Psalm 145:17–21

[17]Everything the LORD does is right.
He is loyal to all he has made.

[18]The LORD is close to everyone who prays to him,
to all who truly pray to him.

[19]He gives those who respect him what they want.
He listens when they cry, and he saves them.

[20]The LORD protects everyone who loves him,
but he will destroy the wicked.

[21]I will praise the LORD.
Let everyone praise his holy name forever.

## Proverbs 30:15b–16

There are three things that are never satisfied,

really four that never say, ‘I’ve had enough!’:

16 the cemetery, the childless mother,
the land that never gets enough rain,
and fire that never says, ‘I’ve had enough!’

## Revelation 12:1–18

### *The Woman and the Dragon*

12 And then a great wonder appeared in heaven: A woman was
clothed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet, and a
crown of twelve stars was on her head. 2 She was pregnant and
cried out with pain, because she was about to give birth. 3 Then
another wonder appeared in heaven: There was a giant red
dragon with seven heads and seven crowns on each head. He
also had ten horns. 4 His tail swept a third of the stars out of the
sky and threw them down to the earth. He stood in front of the
woman who was ready to give birth so he could eat her baby as
soon as it was born. 5 Then the woman gave birth to a son who
will rule all the nations with an iron rod. And her child was
taken up to God and to his throne. 6 The woman ran away into
the desert to a place God prepared for her where she would be
taken care of for one thousand two hundred sixty days.
7 Then there was a war in heaven. Michael[n] and his angels
fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels
fought back. 8 But the dragon was not strong enough, and he
and his angels lost their place in heaven. 9 The giant dragon was
thrown down out of heaven. (He is that old snake called the
devil or Satan, who tricks the whole world.) The dragon with his
angels was thrown down to the earth.
10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying:

“The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Christ have now come.

The accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accused them day and night before our God,
has been thrown down.

[11]And our brothers and sisters defeated him
by the blood of the Lamb's death
and by the message they preached.

They did not love their lives so much
that they were afraid of death.

[12]So rejoice, you heavens
and all who live there!

But it will be terrible for the earth and the sea,
because the devil has come down to you!

He is filled with anger,
because he knows he does not have much time."

[13]When the dragon saw he had been thrown down to the earth, he hunted for the woman who had given birth to the son. [14]But the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle so she could fly to the place prepared for her in the desert. There she would be taken care of for three and one-half years, away from the snake. [15]Then the snake poured water out of its mouth like a river toward the woman so the flood would carry her away. [16]But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that came from the mouth of the dragon. [17]Then the dragon was very angry at the woman, and he went off to make war against all her other children—those who obey God's commands and who have the message Jesus taught.

[18]And the dragon[n] stood on the seashore.

# December 23

## God Entered Time

*I will praise the* LORD *all my life; I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.*

Psalm 146:2

when God entered time and became a man, he who was boundless became bound … For more than three decades, his once limitless reach would be limited to the stretch of an arm, his speed checked to the pace of human feet.

I wonder, was he ever tempted to reclaim his boundlessness? … When the rain chilled his bones, was he tempted to change the weather? When the heat parched his lips, did he give thought to popping over to the Caribbean for some refreshment?

If ever he entertained such thoughts, he never gave in to them … Not once did Christ use his supernatural powers for personal comfort. With one word he could've transformed the hard earth into a soft bed, but he didn't. With a wave of his hand, he could've boomeranged the spit of his accusers back into their faces, but he didn't. With an arch of his brow, he could've paralyzed the hand of the soldier as he braided the crown of thorns. But he didn't.

from *He Chose the Nails*

### Habakkuk 1:1—3:19

1 This is the message Habakkuk the prophet received.

#### *Habakkuk Complains*

2 LORD, how long must I ask for help
and you ignore me?

I cry out to you about violence,
but you do not save us!

3 Why do you make me see wrong things
and make me look at trouble?

People are destroying things and hurting others in front of me;
they are arguing and fighting.

4 So the teachings are weak,
and justice never comes.

Evil people gain while good people lose;
the judges no longer make fair decisions.

## *The Lord Answers*

5 "Look at the nations!
Watch them and be amazed and shocked.

I will do something in your lifetime
that you won't believe even when you are told about it.

6 I will use the Babylonians,
those cruel and wild people

who march across the earth
and take lands that don't belong to them.

7 They scare and frighten people.
They do what they want to do
and are good only to themselves.

8 Their horses are faster than leopards
and quicker than wolves at sunset.

Their horse soldiers attack quickly;
they come from places far away.

They attack quickly, like an eagle swooping down for food.
9 They all come to fight.

Nothing can stop them.
Their prisoners are as many as the grains of sand.

10 They laugh at kings
and make fun of rulers.

They laugh at all the strong, walled cities
and build dirt piles to the top of the walls to capture them.

11 Then they leave like the wind and move on.
They are guilty of worshiping their own strength."

## *Habakkuk Complains Again*

12 LORD, you live forever,
my God, my holy God.
We will not die.

LORD, you have chosen the Babylonians to punish people;
our Rock, you picked them to punish.

13 Your eyes are too good to look at evil;
you cannot stand to see those who do wrong.

So how can you put up with those evil people?
How can you be quiet when the wicked swallow up people who are better than they are?

14 You treat people like fish in the sea,

like sea animals without a leader.

15 The enemy brings them in with hooks.
He catches them in his net

and drags them in his fishnet.
So he rejoices and sings for joy.

16 The enemy offers sacrifices to his net
and burns incense to worship it,

because it lets him live like the rich
and enjoy the best food.

17 Will he keep on taking riches with his net?
Will he go on destroying people without showing mercy?

2 I will stand like a guard to watch and place myself at the tower.

I will wait to see what he will say to me;
I will wait to learn how God will answer my complaint.

## *The Lord Answers*

2 The LORD answered me:

"Write down the vision;
write it clearly on clay tablets
so whoever reads it can run to tell others.

3 It is not yet time for the message to come true,
but that time is coming soon;
the message will come true.

It may seem like a long time,
but be patient and wait for it,

because it will surely come;
it will not be delayed.

4 The evil nation is very proud of itself;
it is not living as it should.
But those who are right with God will live by faith.

5 “Just as wine can trick a person,
those who are too proud will not last,

because their desire is like a grave’s desire for death,
and like death they always want more.

They gather other nations for themselves
and collect for themselves all the countries.

6 But all the nations the Babylonians have hurt will laugh at them.
They will make fun of the Babylonians

and say, ‘How terrible it will be for the one that steals many things.
How long will that nation get rich by forcing others to pay them?’

7 “One day the people from whom you have taken money will turn against you.
They will realize what is happening and make you shake with fear.
Then they will take everything you have.

8 Because you have stolen from many nations,
those who are left will take much from you.

This is because you have killed many people,
destroying countries and cities and everyone in them.

9 “How terrible it will be for the nation that becomes rich by

doing wrong,
thinking they will live in a safe place
and escape harm.

10 Because you have made plans to destroy many people,
you have made your own houses ashamed of you.
Because of it, you will lose your lives.

11 The stones of the walls will cry out against you,
and the boards that support the roof will agree that you are wrong.

12 "How terrible it will be for the nation that kills people to build a city,
that wrongs others to start a town.

13 The LORD All-Powerful will send fire
to destroy what those people have built;
all the nations' work will be for nothing.

14 Then, just as water covers the sea,
people everywhere will know the LORD's glory.

15 "How terrible for the nation that makes its neighbors drink,
pouring from the jug of wine until they are drunk
so that it can look at their naked bodies.

16 You Babylonians will be filled with disgrace, not respect.
It's your turn to drink and fall to the ground like a drunk person.

The cup of anger from the LORD's right hand is coming around to you.
You will receive disgrace, not respect.

17 You hurt many people in Lebanon,
but now you will be hurt.

You killed many animals there,
and now you must be afraid

because of what you did
to that land, those cities, and the people who lived in them.

## *The Message About Idols*

18 "An idol does no good, because a human made it;
it is only a statue that teaches lies.

The one who made it expects his own work to help him,
but he makes idols that can't even speak!

19 How terrible it will be for the one who says to a wooden statue, 'Come to life!'
How terrible it will be for the one who says to a silent stone, 'Get up!'

It cannot tell you what to do.
It is only a statue covered with gold and silver;
there is no life in it.

20 The LORD is in his Holy Temple;
all the earth should be silent in his presence."

## *Habakkuk's Prayer*

3 This is the prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on shigionoth.

2 LORD, I have heard the news about you;
I am amazed at what you have done.

LORD, do great things once again in our time;
make those things happen again in our own days.

Even when you are angry,
remember to be kind.

3 God is coming from Teman;
the Holy One comes from Mount Paran.[n] *Selah*

His glory covers the skies,
and his praise fills the earth.

4 He is like a bright light.
Rays of light shine from his hand,
and there he hides his power.

5 Sickness goes before him,
and disease follows behind him.

6 He stands and shakes the earth.
He looks, and the nations shake with fear.

The mountains, which stood for ages, break into pieces;
the old hills fall down.
God has always done this.

7 I saw that the tents of Cushan were in trouble
and that the tents of Midian trembled.

8 LORD, were you angry at the rivers,
or were you angry at the streams?

Were you angry with the sea
when you rode your horses and chariots of victory?[n]

9 You uncovered your bow
and commanded many arrows to be brought to you. *Selah*

You split the earth with rivers.

10 The mountains saw you and shook with fear.

The rushing water flowed.
The sea made a loud noise,
and its waves rose high.

11 The sun and moon stood still in the sky;
they stopped when they saw the flash of your flying arrows
and the gleam of your shining spear.

12 In anger you marched on the earth;
in anger you punished the nations.

13 You came out to save your people,
to save your chosen one.

You crushed the leader of the wicked ones
and took everything he had, from head to toe. *Selah*

14 With the enemy's own spear you stabbed the leader of his army.
His soldiers rushed out like a storm to scatter us.

They were happy
as they were robbing the poor people in secret.

15 But you marched through the sea with your horses,
stirring the great waters.

16 I hear these things, and my body trembles;
my lips tremble when I hear the sound.

My bones feel weak,
and my legs shake.

But I will wait patiently for the day of disaster
that will come to the people who attack us.

17 Fig trees may not grow figs,
and there may be no grapes on the vines.

There may be no olives growing
and no food growing in the fields.

There may be no sheep in the pens
and no cattle in the barns.

18 But I will still be glad in the LORD;
I will rejoice in God my Savior.

19 The Lord God is my strength.
He makes me like a deer that does not stumble
so I can walk on the steep mountains.

For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

## Psalm 146:1–10

### *Praise God Who Helps the Weak*

146 Praise the LORD!
My whole being, praise the LORD.

2 I will praise the LORD all my life;
I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.

3 Do not put your trust in princes
or other people, who cannot save you.

4When people die, they are buried.
Then all of their plans come to an end.

5Happy are those who are helped by the God of Jacob.
Their hope is in the LORD their God.

6He made heaven and earth,
the sea and everything in it.
He remains loyal forever.

7He does what is fair for those who have been wronged.
He gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free.
8 The LORD gives sight to the blind.

The LORD lifts up people who are in trouble.
The LORD loves those who do right.

9The LORD protects the foreigners.
He defends the orphans and widows,
but he blocks the way of the wicked.

10The LORD will be King forever.
Jerusalem, your God is everlasting.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 30:17

17“If you make fun of your father
and refuse to obey your mother,

the birds of the valley will peck out your eyes,

and the vultures will eat them.

## Revelation 13:1–18

### *The Two Beasts*

13 Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns
and seven heads, and there was a crown on each horn. A name
against God was written on each head. 2This beast looked like a
leopard, with feet like a bear's feet and a mouth like a lion's
mouth. And the dragon gave the beast all of his power and his
throne and great authority. 3One of the heads of the beast
looked as if it had been killed by a wound, but this death wound
was healed. Then the whole world was amazed and followed the
beast. 4People worshiped the dragon because he had given his
power to the beast. And they also worshiped the beast, asking,
"Who is like the beast? Who can make war against it?"

5The beast was allowed to say proud words and words
against God, and it was allowed to use its power for forty-two
months. 6It used its mouth to speak against God, against God's
name, against the place where God lives, and against all those
who live in heaven. 7It was given power to make war against
God's holy people and to defeat them. It was given power over
every tribe, people, language, and nation. 8And all who live on
earth will worship the beast—all the people since the beginning
of the world whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of
life. The Lamb is the One who was killed.

9Anyone who has ears should listen:

10If you are to be a prisoner,
then you will be a prisoner.

If you are to be killed with the sword,
then you will be killed with the sword.

This means that God's holy people must have patience and
faith.

11Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. It
had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. 12This
beast stands before the first beast and uses the same power the
first beast has. By this power it makes everyone living on earth
worship the first beast, who had the death wound that was
healed. 13And the second beast does great miracles so that it

even makes fire come down from heaven to earth while people are watching. 14It fools those who live on earth by the miracles it has been given the power to do. It does these miracles to serve the first beast. The second beast orders people to make an idol to honor the first beast, the one that was wounded by the deadly sword but sprang to life again. 15The second beast was given power to give life to the idol of the first one so that the idol could speak. And the second beast was given power to command all who will not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16The second beast also forced all people, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to have a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. 17No one could buy or sell without this mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. 18This takes wisdom. Let the one who has understanding find the meaning of the number, which is the number of a person. Its number is 666.[n]

# December 24

## A Bouquet of Blessings

*"He will rejoice over you. You will rest in his love; he will sing and be joyful about you."*

Zephaniah 3:17

suppose you dwell in a high-rise apartment. On the window sill of your room is a solitary daisy. This morning you picked the daisy and pinned it on your lapel. But as soon as you're out the door, people start picking petals off your daisy. Someone snags your subway seat. Petal picked. You're blamed for the bad report of a coworker ... More petals. By the end of the day, you're down to one ... You're only one petal-snatching away from a blowup.

What if the scenario was altered slightly? Let's add one character. The kind man in the apartment next door runs a flower shop. Every night on the way home he stops at your place with a fresh bouquet. Because of him, your apartment has a sweet fragrance, and your step has a happy bounce. Let someone mess with your flower, and you've got a basketful to replace it!

God hand-delivers a bouquet to your door every day. Open it! Take them! Then, when rejections come, you won't be left short-petaled.

from *A Love Worth Giving*

### Zephaniah 1:1—3:20

1 This is the word of the LORD that came through Zephaniah while Josiah son of Amon was king of Judah. Zephaniah was the son of Cushi, who was the son of Gedaliah. Gedaliah was the son of Amariah, who was the son of Hezekiah.

### *The Lord's Judgment*

2 “I will sweep away everything
from the earth,” says the LORD.

3 “I will sweep away the people and animals;
I will destroy the birds in the air
and the fish of the sea.

I will ruin the evil people,
and I will remove human beings from the earth,” says the LORD.

## *The Future of Judah*

4 “I will punish Judah
and all the people living in Jerusalem.

I will remove from this place
all signs of Baal, the false priests, and the other priests.

5 I will destroy those who worship
the stars from the roofs,[n]

and those who worship and make promises
by both the LORD and the god Molech,

6 and those who turned away from the LORD,
and those who quit following the LORD and praying to him for direction.

7 Be silent before the Lord God,
because the LORD’s day for judging people is coming soon.

The LORD has prepared a sacrifice;
he has made holy his invited guests.

8 On the day of the LORD’s sacrifice,

I, the LORD, will punish the princes and the king's sons
and all those who wear foreign clothes.

9 On that day I will punish those who worship Dagon,
those who hurt others and tell lies in the temples of their gods.

10 "On that day," says the LORD,

"a cry will be heard at the Fish Gate.
A wail will come from the new area of the city,
and a loud crash will echo from the hills.

11 Cry, you people living in the market area,
because all the merchants will be dead;
all the silver traders will be gone.

12 At that time I, the LORD, will search Jerusalem with lamps.
I will punish those who are satisfied with themselves,
who think, 'The LORD won't help us or punish us.'

13 Their wealth will be stolen
and their houses destroyed.

They may build houses,
but they will not live in them.

They may plant vineyards,
but they will not drink any wine from them.

## *The Lord's Day of Judging*

14 "The LORD's day of judging is coming soon;
it is near and coming fast.

The cry will be very sad on the day of the LORD;

even soldiers will cry.

15 That day will be a day of anger,
a day of terror and trouble,

a day of destruction and ruin,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness,

16 a day of alarms and battle cries.
‘Attack the strong, walled cities!
Attack the corner towers!’

17 I will make life hard on the people;
they will walk around like the blind,
because they have sinned against the LORD.

Their blood will be poured out like dust,
and their insides will be dumped like trash.

18 On the day that God will show his anger,
neither their silver nor gold will save them.

The LORD’s anger will be like a fire
that will burn up the whole world;

suddenly he will bring an end, yes, an end
to everyone on earth.”

## *The Lord Asks People to Change*

2 Gather together, gather,
you unwanted people.

2 Do it before it’s too late,
before you are blown away like chaff,

before the LORD's terrible anger reaches you,
before the day of the LORD's anger comes to you.

3 Come to the LORD, all you who are not proud,
who obey his laws.

Do what is right. Learn to be humble.
Maybe you will escape
on the day the LORD shows his anger.

## *Philistia Will Be Punished*

4 No one will be left in the city of Gaza,
and the city of Ashkelon will be destroyed.

Ashdod will be empty by noon,
and the people of Ekron will be chased away.

5 How terrible it will be for you who live by the Mediterranean Sea,
you Philistines!

The word of the LORD is against you,
Canaan, land of the Philistines.

"I will destroy you
so that no one will be left."

6 The land by the Mediterranean Sea, in which you live,
will become pastures, fields for shepherds, and pens for sheep.

7 It will belong to the descendants of Judah who are left alive.
There they will let their sheep eat grass.

At night they will sleep

in the houses of Ashkelon.

The LORD their God will pay attention to them
and will make their life good again.

## *Moab and Ammon Will Be Punished*

8 “I have heard the insults of the country of Moab
and the threats of the people of Ammon.

They have insulted my people
and have taken their land.”

9 So the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says,
“As surely as I live,

Moab will be destroyed like Sodom,
and Ammon will be destroyed like Gomorrah[n]—

a heap of weeds, a pit of salt,
and a ruin forever.

Those of my people who are left alive will take whatever they want from them;
those who are left from my nation will take their land.”

10 This is what Moab and Ammon get for being proud,
because they insulted and made fun of the people of the LORD All-Powerful.

11 The LORD will frighten them,
because he will destroy all the gods of the earth.

Then everyone in faraway places
will worship him wherever they are.

## *Cush and Assyria Will Be Destroyed*

12 “You Cushites also
will be killed by my sword.”

13 Then the LORD will turn against the north
and destroy Assyria.

He will make Nineveh
a ruin as dry as a desert.

14 Flocks and herds will lie down there,
and all wild animals.

The owls and crows will sit
on the stone pillars.

The owl will hoot through the windows,
trash will be in the doorways,
and the wooden boards of the buildings will be gone.

15 This is the happy and safe city
that thinks there is no one else as strong as it is.

But what a ruin it will be,
a place where wild animals live.

All those who pass by will make fun
and shake their fists.

## *Jerusalem Will Be Punished*

3 How terrible for the wicked, stubborn city of
Jerusalem,
which hurts its own people.

[2]It obeys no voice;
it can’t be taught to do right.

It doesn’t trust the LORD;
it doesn’t worship its God.

[3]Its officers are like roaring lions.
Its rulers are like hungry wolves that attack in the evening,
and in the morning nothing is left of those they attacked.

[4]Its prophets are proud;
they are people who cannot be trusted.

Its priests don’t respect holy things;
they break God’s teachings.

[5]But the LORD is good, and he is there in that city.
He does no wrong.

Every morning he governs the people fairly;
every day he can be trusted.
But evil people are not ashamed of what they do.

[6]“I have destroyed nations;
their towers were ruined.

I made their streets empty
so no one goes there anymore.

Their cities are ruined;
no one lives there at all.

[7]I said, ‘Surely now Jerusalem will respect me
and will accept my teaching.’

Then the place where they lived would not be destroyed,
and I would not have to punish them.

But they were still eager
to do evil in everything they did.

8 Just wait," says the LORD.
"Someday I will stand up as a witness.

I have decided that I will gather nations
and assemble kingdoms.

I will pour out my anger on them,
all my strong anger.

My anger will be like fire
that will burn up the whole world.

## *A New Day for God's People*

9 "Then I will give the people of all nations pure speech
so that all of them will speak the name of the LORD
and worship me together.

10 People will come from where the Nile River begins;
my scattered people will come with gifts for me.

11 Then Jerusalem will not be ashamed
of the wrongs done against me,

because I will remove from this city
those who like to brag;

there will never be any more proud people
on my holy mountain in Jerusalem.

12 But I will leave in the city
the humble and those who are not proud,
and they will trust in the LORD.

13 Those who are left alive in Israel won't do wrong or tell lies;
they won't trick people with their words.

They will eat and lie down
with no one to make them afraid."

## *A Happy Song*

14 Sing, Jerusalem.
Israel, shout for joy!

Jerusalem, be happy
and rejoice with all your heart.

15 The LORD has stopped punishing you;
he has sent your enemies away.

The King of Israel, the LORD, is with you;
you will never again be afraid of being harmed.

16 On that day Jerusalem will be told,
"Don't be afraid, city of Jerusalem.
Don't give up.

17 The LORD your God is with you;
the mighty One will save you.

He will rejoice over you.
You will rest in his love;
he will sing and be joyful about you."

18 “I will take away the sadness planned for you,
which would have made you very ashamed.

19 At that time I will punish
all those who harmed you.

I will save my people who cannot walk
and gather my people who have been thrown out.

I will give them praise and honor
in every place where they were shamed.

20 At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring you back home.

I will give you honor and praise
from people everywhere

when I make things go well again for you,
as you will see with your own eyes,” says the LORD.

## Psalm 147:1–6

### *Praise God Who Helps His People*

147 Praise the LORD!

It is good to sing praises to our God;
it is good and pleasant to praise him.

2 The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem;
he brings back the captured Israelites.

3 He heals the brokenhearted
and bandages their wounds.

4 He counts the stars
and names each one.

5 Our Lord is great and very powerful.
There is no limit to what he knows.

6 The LORD defends the humble,
but he throws the wicked to the ground.

## Proverbs 30:18–19

18 "There are three things that are too hard for me,
really four I don't understand:

19 the way an eagle flies in the sky,
the way a snake slides over a rock,

the way a ship sails on the sea,
and the way a man and a woman fall in love.

## Revelation 14:1–20

### *The Song of the Saved*

14 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion.[n] With him were one hundred forty-four thousand people who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a sound from heaven like the noise of flooding water and like the sound of loud thunder. The sound I heard was like people playing harps. 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the new

song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who had been bought from the earth. [4]These are the ones who did not do sinful things with women, because they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb every place he goes. These one hundred forty-four thousand were bought from among the people of the earth as people to be offered to God and the Lamb. [5]They were not guilty of telling lies; they are without fault.

## *The Three Angels*

[6]Then I saw another angel flying high in the air. He had the eternal Good News to preach to those who live on earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. [7]He preached in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him praise, because the time has come for God to judge all people. So worship God who made the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the springs of water."

[8]Then the second angel followed the first angel and said, "Ruined, ruined is the great city of Babylon! She made all the nations drink the wine of the anger of her adultery."

[9]Then a third angel followed the first two angels, saying in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his idol and gets the beast's mark on the forehead or on the hand, [10]that one also will drink the wine of God's anger, which is prepared with all its strength in the cup of his anger. And that person will be put in pain with burning sulfur before the holy angels and the Lamb. [11]And the smoke from their burning pain will rise forever and ever. There will be no rest, day or night, for those who worship the beast and his idol or who get the mark of his name." [12]This means God's holy people must be patient. They must obey God's commands and keep their faith in Jesus.

[13]Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die from now on in the Lord."

The Spirit says, "Yes, they will rest from their hard work, and the reward of all they have done stays with them."

## *The Earth Is Harvested*

[14]Then I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and sitting on the white cloud was One who looked like a Son of Man.[n] He had a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle[n] in his hand. [15]Then another angel came out of the temple and called out in a loud voice to the One who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and harvest from the earth, because the time to harvest has come, and the fruit of the earth is ripe." [16]So the One who was sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

[17]Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. [18]And then another angel, who has

power over the fire, came from the altar. This angel called to the angel with the sharp sickle, saying, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the bunches of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.” [19]Then the angel swung his sickle over the earth. He gathered the earth’s grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s anger. [20]They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the winepress as high as horses’ bridles for a distance of about one hundred eighty miles.

# December 25

## A Faithful Father

*The LORD is pleased with those who ... trust his love.*

Psalm 147:11

TO recognize God as Lord is to acknowledge that he is sovereign and supreme in the universe. To accept him as Savior is to accept his gift of salvation offered on the Cross. To regard him as Father is to go a step further. Ideally, a father is the one in your life who provides and protects. This is exactly what God has done.

He has provided for your needs (Matthew 6:25–34).

He has protected you from harm (Psalm 139:5).

He has adopted you (Ephesians 1:5). And he has given you his name (1 John 3:1).

God has proven himself as a faithful father. Now it falls to us to be trusting children.

from *He Still Moves Stones*

## Haggai 1:1—2:23

### *It Is Time to Build the Temple*

1 The prophet Haggai spoke the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel
son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of
Jehozadak, the high priest. This message came in the second
year that Darius was king, on the first day of the sixth month:
2"This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: 'The people say the
right time has not come to rebuild the Temple of the LORD.'"
3Then Haggai the prophet spoke the word of the LORD: 4"Is it
right for you to be living in fancy houses while the Temple is
still in ruins?"
5This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "Think about what
you have done. 6You have planted much, but you harvest little.
You eat, but you do not become full. You drink, but you are still

thirsty. You put on clothes, but you are not warm enough. You earn money, but then you lose it all as if you had put it into a purse full of holes."

7This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "Think about what you have done. 8Go up to the mountains, bring back wood, and build the Temple. Then I will be pleased with it and be honored," says the LORD. 9"You look for much, but you find little. When you bring it home, I destroy it. Why?" asks the LORD All-Powerful. "Because you all work hard for your own houses while my house is still in ruins! 10Because of what you have done, the sky holds back its rain and the ground holds back its crops. 11I have called for a time without rain on the land, and on the mountains, and on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil, the plants which the earth produces, the people, the farm animals, and all the work of your hands."

12Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the rest of the people who were left alive obeyed the LORD their God and the message from Haggai the prophet, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

13Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave the LORD's message to the people, saying, "The LORD says, 'I am with you.'" 14The LORD stirred up Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the rest of the people who were left alive. So they came and worked on the Temple of their God, the LORD All-Powerful. 15They began on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year Darius was king.

## *The Beauty of the Temple*

2 On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the LORD spoke his word through Haggai the prophet, saying, 2"Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the rest of the people who are left alive. Say, 3'Do any of you remember how great the Temple was before it was destroyed? What does it look like now? Doesn't it seem like nothing to you?' 4But the LORD says, 'Zerubbabel, be brave. Also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, be brave. And all you people who live in the land, be brave,' says the LORD. 'Work, because I am with you,' says the LORD All-Powerful. 5'I made a promise to you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit is still with you. So don't be afraid.'

6"This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: 'In a short time I will once again shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. 7I will shake all the nations, and they will bring their wealth. Then I will fill this Temple with glory,' says the LORD All-Powerful. 8'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,'

says the LORD All-Powerful. 9‘The new Temple will be greater
than the one before,’ says the LORD All-Powerful. ‘And in this
place I will give peace,’ says the LORD All-Powerful.”

10On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month in the second
year Darius was king, the LORD spoke his word to Haggai the
prophet, saying, 11“This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: ‘Ask
the priests for a teaching. 12Suppose a person carries in the fold
of his clothes some meat made holy for the LORD. If that fold
touches bread, cooked food, wine, olive oil, or some other food,
will that be made holy?’”

The priests answered, “No.”

13Then Haggai said, “A person who touches a dead body will
become unclean. If he touches any of these foods, will it become
unclean, too?”

The priests answered, “Yes, it would become unclean.”

14Then Haggai answered, “The LORD says, ‘This is also true
for the people of this nation. They are unclean, and everything
they do with their hands is unclean to me. Whatever they offer
at the altar is also unclean.

15“‘Think about this from now on! Think about how it was
before you started laying stones on top of stones to build the
Temple of the LORD. 16A person used to come to a pile of grain
expecting to find twenty basketfuls, but there were only ten.
And a person used to come to the wine vat to take out fifty
jarfuls, but only twenty were there. 17I destroyed your work
with diseases, mildew, and hail, but you still did not come back
to me,’ says the LORD. 18‘It is the twenty-fourth day of the ninth
month, the day in which the people finished working on the
foundation of the Temple of the LORD. From now on, think about
these things: 19Do you have seeds for crops still in the barn?
Your vines, fig trees, pomegranates, and olive trees have not
given fruit yet. But from now on I will bless you!’”

## *The Lord Makes a Promise to Zerubbabel*

20Then the LORD spoke his word a second time to Haggai on
the twenty-fourth day of the month. He said, 21“Tell Zerubbabel,
the governor of Judah, ‘I am going to shake the heavens and the
earth. 22I will destroy the foreign kingdoms and take away the
power of the kingdoms of the nations. I will destroy the chariots
and their riders. The horses will fall with their riders, as people
kill each other with swords.’ 23The LORD All-Powerful says, ‘On
that day I will take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my
servant,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will make you important like my
signet ring, because I have chosen you!’ says the LORD All-
Powerful.”

## Psalm 147:7–11

7 Sing praises to the LORD;
praise our God with harps.

8 He fills the sky with clouds
and sends rain to the earth
and makes grass grow on the hills.

9 He gives food to cattle
and to the little birds that call.

10 He is not impressed with the strength of a horse
or with human might.

11 The LORD is pleased with those who respect him,
with those who trust his love.

## Proverbs 30:20

20 "This is the way of a woman who takes part in adultery:
She acts as if she had eaten and washed her face;
she says, 'I haven't done anything wrong.'

## Revelation 15:1–8

### *The Last Troubles*

15 Then I saw another wonder in heaven that was great and amazing. There were seven angels bringing seven disasters. These are the last disasters, because after them, God's anger is finished.

2 I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. All of
those who had won the victory over the beast and his idol and
over the number of his name were standing by the sea of glass.
They had harps that God had given them. 3 They sang the song
of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

"You do great and wonderful things,

Psalm 111:2

Lord God Almighty.

Amos 3:13

Everything the Lord does is right and true,

Psalm 145:17

King of the nations.[n]

4 Everyone will respect you, Lord,

Jeremiah 10:7

and will honor you.

Only you are holy.

All the nations will come
and worship you,

Psalm 86:9–10

because the right things you have done
are now made known."

Deuteronomy 32:4

5 After this I saw that the temple (the Tent of the Agreement)
in heaven was opened. 6 And the seven angels bringing the
seven disasters came out of the temple. They were dressed in
clean, shining linen and wore golden bands tied around their
chests. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven
angels seven golden bowls filled with the anger of God, who
lives forever and ever. 8 The temple was filled with smoke from
the glory and the power of God, and no one could enter the
temple until the seven disasters of the seven angels were
finished.

# December 26

Holiness Among Us

*"Shout and be glad, Jerusalem. I am coming, and I will live among you," says the* LORD.

Zechariah 2:10

God became a baby. He entered a world … of problems and heartaches. "The Word became human and lived among us … He was full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The operative word of the verse is *among.* He lived *among* us. He donned the costliest of robes: a human body. He made a throne out of a manger and a royal court out of some cows. He took a common name—Jesus—and made it holy. He took common people and made them the same. He could have lived over us or away from us. But he didn't. He lived *among* us.

He became a friend of the sinner and brother of the poor.

from *When Christ Comes*

## Zechariah 1:1—3:10

### *The Lord Calls His People Back*

1 In the eighth month of the second year Darius was king, the LORD spoke his word to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah,
who was the son of Iddo. The LORD said, 2"The LORD was very
angry with your ancestors. 3So tell the people: This is what the
LORD All-Powerful says: 'Return to me, and I will return to you,'
says the LORD All-Powerful. 4Don't be like your ancestors. In the
past the prophets said to them: This is what the LORD All-
Powerful says: 'Stop your evil ways and evil actions.' But they
wouldn't listen or pay attention to me, says the LORD. 5Your
ancestors are dead, and those prophets didn't live forever. 6I
commanded my words and laws to my servants the prophets,
and they preached to your ancestors, who returned to me. They
said, 'The LORD All-Powerful did as he said he would. He
punished us for the way we lived and for what we did.'"

### *The Vision of the Horses*

7It was on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month,
which is the month of Shebat, in Darius's second year as king.
The LORD spoke his word to the prophet Zechariah son of
Berekiah, who was the son of Iddo.
8During the night I had a vision. I saw a man riding a red
horse. He was standing among some myrtle trees in a ravine,
with red, brown, and white horses behind him.
9I asked, "What are these, sir?"
The angel who was talking with me answered, "I'll show you
what they are."
10Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained,
"They are the ones the LORD sent through all the earth."
11Then they spoke to the LORD's angel, who was standing
among the myrtle trees. They said, "We have gone through all
the earth, and everything is calm and quiet."
12Then the LORD's angel asked, "LORD All-Powerful, how long
will it be before you show mercy to Jerusalem and the cities of
Judah? You have been angry with them for seventy years now."
13So the LORD answered the angel who was talking with me, and
his words were comforting and good.
14Then the angel who was talking to me said to me,
"Announce this: This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: 'I have
a strong love for Jerusalem. 15And I am very angry with the
nations that feel so safe. I was only a little angry at them, but
they made things worse.'
16"So this is what the LORD says: 'I will return to Jerusalem
with mercy. My Temple will be rebuilt,' says the LORD All-
Powerful, 'and the measuring line will be used to rebuild
Jerusalem.'
17"Also announce: This is what the LORD All-Powerful says:
'My towns will be rich again. The LORD will comfort Jerusalem
again, and I will again choose Jerusalem.'"

## *The Vision of the Horns*

18Then I looked up and saw four animal horns. 19I asked the
angel who was talking with me, "What are these?"
He said, "These are the horns that scattered the people of
Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."
20Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. 21I asked, "What
are they coming to do?"
He answered, "They have come to scare and throw down the
horns. These horns scattered the people of Judah so that no one
could even lift up his head. These horns stand for the nations
that attacked the people of Judah and scattered them."

## *The Vision of the Measuring Line*

2 Then I looked up and saw a man holding a line for measuring
things. 2I asked him, “Where are you going?”

He said to me, “I am going to measure Jerusalem, to see how
wide and how long it is.”

3Then the angel who was talking with me left, and another
angel came out to meet him. 4The second angel said to him,
“Run and tell that young man, ‘Jerusalem will become a city
without walls, because there will be so many people and cattle
in it. 5I will be a wall of fire around it,’ says the LORD. ‘And I will
be the glory within it.’

6“Oh no! Oh no! Run away from Babylon, because I have
scattered you like the four winds of heaven,” says the LORD.

7“Oh no, Jerusalem! Escape, you who live right in Babylon.”
8This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: “After he has honored
me and sent me against the nations who took your possessions
—because whoever touches you hurts what is precious to me
—9I will shake my hand against them so that their slaves will
rob them.”

Then you will know that the LORD All-Powerful sent me.

10“Shout and be glad, Jerusalem. I am coming, and I will live
among you,” says the LORD. 11“At that time people from many
nations will join with the LORD and will become my people. Then
I will live among you, and you will know that the LORD All-
Powerful has sent me to you. 12The LORD will take Judah as his
own part of the holy land, and Jerusalem will be his chosen city
again. 13Be silent, everyone, in the presence of the LORD. He is
coming out of the holy place where he lives.”

## *The Vision of the High Priest*

3 Then he showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing in front
of the LORD’s angel. And Satan was standing by Joshua’s right
side to accuse him. 2The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD says no
to you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem says no to
you! This man was like a burning stick pulled from the fire.”

3Joshua was wearing dirty clothes and was standing in front
of the angel. 4The angel said to those standing in front of him,
“Take off those dirty clothes.”

Then the angel said to Joshua, “Look, I have taken away your
sin from you, and I am giving you beautiful, fine clothes.”

5Then I said, “Put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a
clean turban on his head and dressed him while the LORD’s
angel stood there.

6Then the LORD’s angel said to Joshua, 7“This is what the LORD
All-Powerful says: ‘If you do as I tell you and serve me, you will
be in charge of my Temple and my courtyards. And I will let you
be with these angels who are standing here.

8“‘Listen, Joshua, the high priest, and your friends who are

sitting in front of you. They are symbols of what will happen. I am going to bring my servant called the Branch. [9]Look, I put this stone in front of Joshua, a stone with seven sides. I will carve a message on it,' says the LORD All-Powerful. 'And in one day I will take away the sin of this land.'

[10]"The LORD All-Powerful says, 'In that day, each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your own grapevine and under your own fig tree.'"

## Psalm 147:12–20

[12]Jerusalem, praise the LORD;
Jerusalem, praise your God.

[13]He makes your city gates strong
and blesses your children inside.

[14]He brings peace to your country
and fills you with the finest grain.

[15]He gives a command to the earth,
and it quickly obeys him.

[16]He spreads the snow like wool
and scatters the frost like ashes.

[17]He throws down hail like rocks.
No one can stand the cold he sends.

[18]Then he gives a command, and it melts.
He sends the breezes, and the waters flow.

[19]He gave his word to Jacob,
his laws and demands to Israel.

20 He didn't do this for any other nation.
They don't know his laws.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 30:21–23

21 "There are three things that make the earth tremble,
really four it cannot stand:

22 a servant who becomes a king,
a foolish person who has plenty to eat,

23 a hated woman who gets married,
and a maid who replaces her mistress.

## Revelation 16:1–21

### *The Bowls of God's Anger*

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of God's anger on the earth."

2 The first angel left and poured out his bowl on the land. Then ugly and painful sores came upon all those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his idol.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 Then I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"Holy One, you are the One who is and who was.
You are right to decide to punish these evil people.

6 They have poured out the blood of your holy people and
your prophets.
So now you have given them blood to drink as they
deserve.”

7 And I heard a voice coming from the altar saying:

“Yes, Lord God Almighty,
the way you punish evil people is right and fair.”

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and he
was given power to burn the people with fire. 9 They were
burned by the great heat, and they cursed the name of God,
who had control over these disasters. But the people refused to
change their hearts and lives and give glory to God.
10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the
beast, and darkness covered its kingdom. People gnawed their
tongues because of the pain. 11 They also cursed the God of
heaven because of their pain and the sores they had, but they
refused to change their hearts and turn away from the evil
things they did.
12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river
Euphrates so that the water in the river was dried up to prepare
the way for the kings from the east to come. 13 Then I saw three
evil spirits that looked like frogs coming out of the mouth of the
dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of
the false prophet. 14 These evil spirits are the spirits of demons,
which have power to do miracles. They go out to the kings of
the whole world to gather them together for the battle on the
great day of God Almighty.
15 “Listen! I will come as a thief comes! Blessed are those
who stay awake and keep their clothes on so that they will not
walk around naked and have people see their shame.”
16 Then the evil spirits gathered the kings together to the
place that is called Armageddon in the Hebrew language.
17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. Then a
loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is
finished!” 18 Then there were flashes of lightning, noises,
thunder, and a big earthquake—the worst earthquake that has
ever happened since people have been on earth. 19 The great
city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations were
destroyed. And God remembered the sins of Babylon the Great,
so he gave that city the cup filled with the wine of his terrible
anger. 20 Then every island ran away, and mountains
disappeared. 21 Giant hailstones, each weighing about a hundred
pounds, fell from the sky upon people. People cursed God for
the disaster of the hail, because this disaster was so terrible.

# December 27

## A Tiny Seed, a Tiny Deed

*"The people should not think that small beginnings are unimportant."*

Zechariah 4:10

Against a towering giant, a brook pebble seems futile. But God used it to topple Goliath. Compared to the tithes of the wealthy, a widow's coins seem puny. But Jesus used them to inspire us …

Moses had a walking stick.
David had a sling.
Samson had a jawbone.
Rahab had a string.
Mary had some perfume.
Dorcas had a needle.
All were used by God.
What do you have?

God inhabits the tiny seed, empowers the tiny deed … Don't discount the smallness of your deeds.

from *Cure for the Common Life*

### Zechariah 4:1—6:15

#### *The Vision of the Lampstand*

4 Then the angel who was talking with me returned and woke
me up as if I had been asleep. 2He asked me, "What do you
see?"

I said, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top.
And there are seven lamps and also seven places for wicks.
3There are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and
the other on the left."

4I asked the angel who talked with me, "Sir, what are these?"

5The angel said, "Don't you know what they are?"

"No, sir," I said.

6Then he told me, “This is the word of the LORD to
Zerubbabel: ‘You will not succeed by your own strength or by
your own power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD All-Powerful.
7“Who are you, big mountain? In front of Zerubbabel you will
become flat land, and he will bring out the topmost stone,
shouting, ‘It’s beautiful! It’s beautiful!’”
8Then the LORD spoke his word to me again, saying,
9“Zerubbabel has laid the foundation of this Temple, and he will
complete it. Then you will know that the LORD All-Powerful has
sent me to you.
10“The people should not think that small beginnings are
unimportant. They will be happy when they see Zerubbabel with
tools, building the Temple.
“(These are the seven eyes of the LORD, which look back and
forth across the earth.)”
11Then I asked the angel, “What are the two olive trees on
the right and left of the lampstand?”
12I also asked him, “What are the two olive branches beside
the two gold pipes, from which the olive oil flows to the lamps?”
13He answered, “Don’t you know what they are?”
“No, sir,” I said.
14So he said, “They are symbols of the two who have been
appointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.”

## *The Vision of the Flying Scroll*

5 I looked up again and saw a flying scroll.
2The angel asked me, “What do you see?”
I answered, “I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen
feet wide.”
3And he said to me, “This is the curse that will go all over the
land. One side says every thief will be taken away. The other
side says everyone who makes false promises will be taken
away. 4The LORD All-Powerful says, ‘I will send it to the houses of
thieves and to those who use my name to make false promises.
The scroll will stay in that person’s house and destroy it with its
wood and stones.’”

## *The Vision of the Woman*

5Then the angel who was talking with me came forward and
said to me, “Look up and see what is going out.”
6“What is it?” I asked.
He answered, “It is a measuring basket going out.” He also
said, “It is a symbol of the people’s sins in all the land.”
7Then the lid made of lead was raised, and there was a

woman sitting inside the basket. [8]The angel said, “The woman stands for wickedness.” Then he pushed her back into the basket and put the lid back down.

[9]Then I looked up and saw two women going out with the wind in their wings. Their wings were like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and the sky.

[10]I asked the angel who was talking with me, “Where are they taking the basket?”

[11]“They are going to Babylonia to build a temple for it,” he answered. “When the temple is ready, they will set the basket there in its place.”

## *The Vision of the Four Chariots*

6 I looked up again and saw four chariots going out between two mountains, mountains of bronze. [2]Red horses pulled the first chariot. Black horses pulled the second chariot. [3]White horses pulled the third chariot, and strong, spotted horses pulled the fourth chariot. [4]I asked the angel who was talking with me, “What are these, sir?”

[5]He said, “These are the four spirits of heaven. They have just come from the presence of the Lord of the whole world. [6]The chariot pulled by the black horses will go to the land of the north. The white horses will go to the land of the west, and the spotted horses will go to the land of the south.”

[7]When the powerful horses went out, they were eager to go through all the earth. So he said, “Go through all the earth,” and they did.

[8]Then he called to me, “Look, the horses that went north have caused my spirit to rest in the land of the north.”

## *A Crown for Joshua*

[9]The LORD spoke his word to me, saying, [10]“Take silver and gold from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who were captives in Babylon. Go that same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah, who came from Babylon. [11]Make the silver and gold into a crown, and put it on the head of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. [12]Tell him this is what the LORD All-Powerful says: ‘A man whose name is the Branch will branch out from where he is, and he will build the Temple of the LORD. [13]One man[n] will build the Temple of the LORD, and the other[n] will receive honor. One man will sit on his throne and rule, and the other will be a priest on his throne. And these two men will work together in peace.’ [14]The crown will be kept in the Temple of the LORD to remind Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Josiah son of Zephaniah. [15]People living far away will come and build the

Temple of the LORD. Then you will know the LORD All-Powerful has sent me to you. This will happen if you completely obey the LORD your God."

## Psalm 148:1–6

### *The World Should Praise the Lord*

148 Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the skies.
Praise him high above the earth.

2 Praise him, all you angels.
Praise him, all you armies of heaven.

3 Praise him, sun and moon.
Praise him, all you shining stars.

4 Praise him, highest heavens
and you waters above the sky.

5 Let them praise the LORD,
because they were created by his command.

6 He put them in place forever and ever;
he made a law that will never change.

## Proverbs 30:24–28

24 "There are four things on earth that are small,
but they are very wise:

25 Ants are not very strong,
but they store up food in the summer.

26 Rock badgers are not very powerful,
but they can live among the rocks.

27 Locusts have no king,
but they all go forward in formation.

28 Lizards can be caught in the hand,
but they are found even in kings' palaces.

## Revelation 17:1–18

### *The Woman on the Animal*

17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came
and spoke to me. He said, "Come, and I will show you the
punishment that will be given to the great prostitute, the one
sitting over many waters. 2 The kings of the earth sinned
sexually with her, and the people of the earth became drunk
from the wine of her sexual sin."

3 Then the angel carried me away by the Spirit to the desert.
There I saw a woman sitting on a red beast. It was covered with
names against God written on it, and it had seven heads and ten
horns. 4 The woman was dressed in purple and red and was
shining with the gold, precious jewels, and pearls she was
wearing. She had a golden cup in her hand, a cup filled with evil
things and the uncleanness of her sexual sin. 5 On her forehead
a title was written that was secret. This is what was written:

the great babylon
mother of prostitutes
and of the evil things of the earth

6 Then I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of
God's holy people and with the blood of those who were killed
because of their faith in Jesus.

When I saw the woman, I was very amazed. 7 Then the angel
said to me, "Why are you amazed? I will tell you the secret of
this woman and the beast she rides—the one with seven heads
and ten horns. 8 The beast you saw was once alive but is not
alive now. But soon it will come up out of the bottomless pit and
go away to be destroyed. There are people who live on earth

whose names have not been written in the book of life since the beginning of the world. They will be amazed when they see the beast, because he was once alive, is not alive now, but will come again.

9“You need a wise mind to understand this. The seven heads on the beast are seven mountains where the woman sits. 10And they are seven kings. Five of the kings have already been destroyed, one of the kings lives now, and another has not yet come. When he comes, he must stay a short time. 11The beast that was once alive, but is not alive now, is also an eighth king. He belongs to the first seven kings, and he will go away to be destroyed.

12“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet begun to rule, but they will receive power to rule with the beast for one hour. 13All ten of these kings have the same purpose, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. 14They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. He will defeat them with his called, chosen, and faithful followers.”

15Then the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, races, nations, and languages. 16The ten horns and the beast you saw will hate the prostitute. They will take everything she has and leave her naked. They will eat her body and burn her with fire. 17God made the ten horns want to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until what God has said comes about. 18The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

# December 28

## The Reward of Christianity

*Praise the LORD, because he alone is great. He is more wonderful than heaven and earth.*

Psalm 148:13

The reward of Christianity is Christ. Do you journey to the Grand Canyon for the souvenir T-shirt or the snow globe with the snowflakes that fall when you shake it? No. The reward of the Grand Canyon is the Grand Canyon. The wide-eyed realization that you are part of something ancient, splendid, powerful, and greater than you.

The cache of Christianity is Christ. Not money in the bank or a car in the garage or a healthy body or a better self-image. Secondary and tertiary fruits perhaps. But the Fort Knox of faith is Christ. Fellowship with him. Walking with him. Pondering him. Exploring him. The heart-stopping realization that in him you are part of something ancient, endless, unstoppable, and unfathomable. And that he, who can dig the Grand Canyon with his pinkie, thinks you're worth his death on Roman timber. Christ is the reward of Christianity.

from *Next Door Savior*

### Zechariah 7:1—9:17

#### *The People Should Show Mercy*

7 In the fourth year Darius was king, on the fourth day of the
ninth month, which is called Kislev, the LORD spoke his word to
Zechariah. 2The city of Bethel sent Sharezer, Regem-Melech,
and their men to ask the LORD a question. 3They went to the
prophets and priests who were at the Temple of the LORD All-
Powerful. The men said, "For years in the fifth month of each
year we have shown our sadness and fasted. Should we
continue to do this?"

4The LORD All-Powerful spoke his word to me, saying, 5"Tell
the priests and the people in the land: 'For seventy years you
fasted and cried in the fifth and seventh months, but that was
not really for me. 6And when you ate and drank, it was really for
yourselves. 7The LORD used the earlier prophets to say the same
thing, when Jerusalem and the surrounding towns were at
peace and wealthy, and people lived in the southern area and
the western hills.'"

8And the LORD spoke his word to Zechariah again, saying,
9"This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: 'Do what is right and
true. Be kind and merciful to each other. 10Don't hurt widows
and orphans, foreigners or the poor; don't even think of doing
evil to somebody else.'

11"But they refused to pay attention; they were stubborn and
did not want to listen anymore. 12They made their hearts as
hard as rock and would not listen to the teachings of the LORD
All-Powerful. And they would not hear the words he sent by his
Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD All-Powerful
became very angry.

13"'When I called to them, they would not listen. So when
they called to me, I would not listen,' says the LORD All-Powerful.
14'I scattered them like a hurricane to other countries they did
not know. This good land was left so ruined behind them that no
one could live there. They had made the desired land a ruin.'"

## *The Lord Will Bless Jerusalem*

8 The LORD All-Powerful spoke his word, saying, 2This is what
the LORD All-Powerful says: "I have a very strong love for
Jerusalem. My strong love for her is like a fire burning in me."

3This is what the LORD says: "I will return to Jerusalem and
live in it. Then it will be called the City of Truth, and the
mountain of the LORD All-Powerful will be called the Holy
Mountain."

4This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "Old men and old
women will again sit along Jerusalem's streets, each carrying a
cane because of age. 5And the streets will be filled with boys
and girls playing."

6This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "Those who are left
alive then may think it is too difficult to happen, but it is not too
difficult for me," says the LORD All-Powerful. 7This is what the
LORD All-Powerful says: "I will save my people from countries in
the east and west. 8I will bring them back, and they will live in
Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be their good and
loyal God."

9This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "Work hard, you
who are hearing these words today. The prophets spoke these
words when the foundation was laid for the house of the LORD

All-Powerful, for the building of the Temple. [10]Before that time
there was no money to hire people or animals. People could not
safely come and go because of the enemies; I had turned
everyone against his neighbor. [11]But I will not do to these
people who are left what I did in the past," says the LORD All-
Powerful.
[12]"They will plant their seeds in peace, their grapevines will
have fruit, the ground will give good crops, and the sky will
send rain. I will give all this to the people who are left alive.
[13]Judah and Israel, your names have been used as curses in
other nations. But I will save you, and you will become a
blessing. So don't be afraid; work hard."
[14]This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "When your
ancestors made me angry, I planned to punish you. I did not
change my mind," says the LORD All-Powerful. [15]"But now I will
do something different. I am planning to do good to Jerusalem
and Judah. So don't be afraid. [16]These are the things you should
do: Tell each other the truth. In the courts judge with truth and
complete fairness. [17]Do not make plans to hurt your neighbors,
and don't love false promises. I hate all these things," says the
LORD.
[18]The LORD All-Powerful spoke his word to me again. [19]This is
what the LORD All-Powerful says: "The special days when you
fast in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will become
good, joyful, happy feasts in Judah. But you must love truth and
peace."
[20]This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "Many people from
many cities will still come to Jerusalem. [21]People from one city
will go and say to those from another city, 'We are going to pray
to the LORD and to ask the LORD All-Powerful for help. Come and
go with us.' [22]Many people and powerful nations will come to
worship the LORD All-Powerful in Jerusalem and to pray to the
LORD for help."
[23]This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: "At that time, ten
men from different countries will come and take hold of a
Judean by his coat. They will say to him, 'Let us go with you,
because we have heard that God is with you.'"

## *Punishment on Israel's Enemies*

[9] This message is the word of the LORD.
The message is against the land of Hadrach
and the city of Damascus.

The tribes of Israel and all people

belong to the LORD.

2The message is also against the city of Hamath, on the border,
and against Tyre and Sidon, with their skill.

3Tyre has built a strong wall for herself.
She has piled up silver like dust
and gold like the mud in the streets.

4But the Lord will take away all she has
and destroy her power on the sea.
That city will be destroyed by fire.

5The city of Ashkelon will see it and be afraid.
The people of Gaza will shake with fear,
and the people of Ekron will lose hope.

No king will be left in Gaza,
and no one will live in Ashkelon anymore.

6Foreigners will live in Ashdod,
and I will destroy the pride of the Philistines.

7I will stop them from drinking blood
and from eating forbidden food.

Those left alive will belong to God.
They will be leaders in Judah,
and Ekron will become like the Jebusites.

8I will protect my Temple
from armies who would come or go.

No one will hurt my people again,
because now I am watching them.

## *The King Is Coming*

[9]Rejoice greatly, people of Jerusalem!
Shout for joy, people of Jerusalem!

Your king is coming to you.
He does what is right, and he saves.
He is gentle and riding on a donkey,
on the colt of a donkey.

[10]I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the horses from Jerusalem.
The bows used in war will be broken.

The king will talk to the nations about peace.
His kingdom will go from sea to sea,
and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

[11]As for you, because of the blood of the agreement with you
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

[12]You prisoners who have hope,
return to your place of safety.

Today I am telling you
that I will give you back twice as much as before.

[13]I will use Judah like a bow
and Ephraim like the arrows.

Jerusalem, I will use your men
to fight the men of Greece.
I will use you like a warrior's sword.

[14]Then the LORD will appear above them,
and his arrows will shoot like lightning.

The Lord God will blow the trumpet,
and he will march in the storms of the south.

15 The LORD All-Powerful will protect them;
they will destroy the enemy with slingshots.

They will drink and shout like drunks.
They will be filled like a bowl
used for sprinkling blood at the corners of the altar.

16 On that day the LORD their God will save them
as if his people were sheep.

They will shine in his land
like jewels in a crown.

17 They will be so pretty and beautiful.
The young men will grow strong on the grain
and the young women on new wine.

## Psalm 148:7–14

7 Praise the LORD from the earth,
you large sea animals and all the oceans,

8 lightning and hail, snow and mist,
and stormy winds that obey him,

9 mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

10 wild animals and all cattle,
crawling animals and birds,

11 kings of the earth and all nations,
princes and all rulers of the earth,

12 young men and women,
old people and children.

13 Praise the LORD,
because he alone is great.
He is more wonderful than heaven and earth.

14 God has given his people a king.
He should be praised by all who belong to him;
he should be praised by the Israelites, the people closest to his heart.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 30:29–31

29 "There are three things that strut proudly,
really four that walk as if they were important:

30 a lion, the proudest animal,
which is strong and runs from nothing,

31 a rooster, a male goat,
and a king when his army is around him.

## Revelation 18:1–24

### *Babylon Is Destroyed*

18 After the vision of these things, I saw another angel coming down from heaven. This angel had great power, and his glory

made the earth bright. [2]He shouted in a powerful voice:

“Ruined, ruined is the great city of Babylon!
She has become a home for demons

and a prison for every evil spirit,
and a prison for every unclean bird and unclean beast.

[3]She has been ruined, because all the peoples of the earth
have drunk the wine of the desire of her sexual sin.

She has been ruined also because the kings of the earth
have sinned sexually with her,

and the merchants of the earth
have grown rich from the great wealth of her luxury.”

[4]Then I heard another voice from heaven saying:

“Come out of that city, my people,
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive the disasters that will come to her.

[5]Her sins have piled up as high as the sky,
and God has not forgotten the wrongs she has done.

[6]Give that city the same as she gave to others.
Pay her back twice as much as she did.

Prepare wine for her that is twice as strong
as the wine she prepared for others.

[7]She gave herself much glory and rich living.
Give her that much suffering and sadness.

She says to herself, ‘I am a queen sitting on my throne.
I am not a widow; I will never be sad.’

8So these disasters will come to her in one day:
death, and crying, and great hunger,

and she will be destroyed by fire,
because the Lord God who judges her is powerful.”

9The kings of the earth who sinned sexually with her and shared her wealth will see the smoke from her burning. Then they will cry and be sad because of her death. 10They will be afraid of her suffering and stand far away and say:

“Terrible! How terrible for you, great city,
powerful city of Babylon,

because your punishment has come in one hour!”

11And the merchants of the earth will cry and be sad about her, because now there is no one to buy their cargoes—
12cargoes of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, red cloth; all kinds of citron wood and all kinds of things made from ivory, expensive wood, bronze, iron, and marble;
13cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, carriages, slaves, and human lives.
14The merchants will say,

“Babylon, the good things you wanted are gone from you.

All your rich and fancy things have disappeared.
You will never have them again.”

15The merchants who became rich from selling to her will be afraid of her suffering and will stand far away. They will cry and be sad 16and say:

“Terrible! How terrible for the great city!
She was dressed in fine linen, purple and red cloth,
and she was shining with gold, precious jewels, and

pearls!

17 All these riches have been destroyed in one hour!”
Every sea captain, every passenger, the sailors, and all those who earn their living from the sea stood far away from Babylon.
18 As they saw the smoke from her burning, they cried out loudly, “There was never a city like this great city!” 19 And they threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and being sad. They said:

“Terrible! How terrible for the great city!

All the people who had ships on the sea
became rich because of her wealth!

But she has been destroyed in one hour!

20 Be happy because of this, heaven!
Be happy, God’s holy people and apostles and prophets!

God has punished her because of what she did to you.”

21 Then a powerful angel picked up a large stone, like one used for grinding grain, and threw it into the sea. He said:

“In the same way, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down,
and it will never be found again.

22 The music of people playing harps and other instruments, flutes, and trumpets,
will never be heard in you again.

No workman doing any job
will ever be found in you again.

The sound of grinding grain
will never be heard in you again.

[23]The light of a lamp
will never shine in you again,

and the voices of a bridegroom and bride
will never be heard in you again.

Your merchants were the world’s great people,
and all the nations were tricked by your magic.

[24]You are guilty of the death of the prophets and God’s holy people
and all who have been killed on earth.”

## December 29

# God Loves Humility

*He saves the humble.*

Psalm 149:4

With the same intensity that he hates arrogance, God loves humility. The Jesus who said, "I am gentle and humble in spirit" (Matthew 11:29) loves those who are gentle and humble in spirit. "Though the LORD is supreme, he takes care of those who are humble" (Psalm 138:6). God says, "I live with people who are … humble" (Isaiah 57:15). He also says, "These are the people I am pleased with: those who are not proud or stubborn" (Isaiah 66:2). And to the humble, God gives great treasures:

He gives honor: "If you want to be honored, you must be humble" (Proverbs 15:33).

He gives wisdom: "It is wise to be humble" (Proverbs 11:2).

He gives direction: "He shows those who are humble how to do right" (Psalm 25:9).

And most significantly, he gives grace: "He gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

from *Traveling Light*

## Zechariah 10:1—12:9

### *The Lord's Promises*

10 Ask the LORD for rain during the springtime
rains.
The LORD is the one who makes the clouds.

He sends the showers
and gives everyone green fields.

[2]Idols tell lies;
fortune-tellers see false visions

and tell about false dreams.
The comfort they give is worth nothing.

So the people are like lost sheep.
They are abused, because there is no shepherd.

[3]The LORD says, “I am angry at my shepherds,
and I will punish the leaders.

I, the LORD All-Powerful, care
for my flock, the people of Judah.
I will make them like my proud war horses.

[4]From Judah will come the cornerstone,
and the tent peg,
the battle bow,
and every ruler.

[5]Together they will be like soldiers
marching to battle through muddy streets.

The LORD is with them,
so they will fight and defeat the horsemen.

[6]“I will strengthen the people of Judah
and save the people of Joseph.

I will bring them back,
because I care about them.

It will be as though
I had never left them,

because I am the LORD their God,

and I will answer them.

7 The people of Ephraim will be strong like soldiers;
they will be glad as when they have drunk wine.

Their children will see it and rejoice;
they will be happy in the LORD.

8 I will call my people
and gather them together.

I will save them,
and they will grow in number as they grew in number before.

9 I have scattered them among the nations,
but in those faraway places, they will remember me.
They and their children will live and return.

10 I will bring them back from the land of Egypt
and gather them from Assyria.

I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon
until there isn't enough room for them all.

11 They will come through the sea of trouble.
The waves of the sea will be calm,
and the Nile River will dry up.

I will defeat Assyria's pride
and destroy Egypt's power over other countries.

12 I will make my people strong,
and they will live as I say," says the LORD.

11 Lebanon, open your gates so fire may burn your cedar

trees.[n]

[2]Cry, pine trees, because the cedar has fallen,
because the tall trees are ruined.

Cry, oaks in Bashan,
because the mighty forest has been cut down.

[3]Listen to the shepherds crying
because their rich pastures are destroyed.

Listen to the lions roaring
because the lovely land of the Jordan River is ruined.

## *The Two Shepherds*

[4]This is what the LORD my God says: "Feed the flock that are about to be killed. [5]Their buyers kill them and are not punished. Those who sell them say, 'Praise the LORD, I am rich.' Even the shepherds don't feel sorry for their sheep. [6]I don't feel sorry anymore for the people of this country," says the LORD. "I will let everyone be under the power of his neighbor and king. They will bring trouble to the country, and I will not save anyone from them."

[7]So I fed the flock about to be killed, particularly the weakest ones. Then I took two sticks; I called one Pleasant and the other Union, and I fed the flock. [8]In one month I got rid of three shepherds. The flock did not pay attention to me, and I got impatient with them. [9]I said, "I will no longer take care of you like a shepherd. Let those that are dying die, and let those that are to be destroyed be destroyed. Let those that are left eat each other."

[10]Then I broke the stick named Pleasant to break the agreement God made with all the nations. [11]That day it was broken. The weak ones in the flock who were watching me knew this message was from the LORD.

[12]Then I said, "If you want to pay me, pay me. If not, then don't." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.

[13]The LORD said to me, "Throw the money to the potter." That is how little they thought I was worth.[n] So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the LORD.

[14]Then I broke the second stick, named Union, to break the

brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

15 Then the LORD said to me, “Get the things used by a foolish
shepherd again, 16 because I am going to get a new shepherd for
the country. He will not care for the dying sheep, or look for the
young ones, or heal the injured ones, or feed the healthy. But he
will eat the best sheep and tear off their hoofs.

17 “How terrible it will be for the useless shepherd
who abandoned the flock.

A sword will strike his arm and his right eye.
His arm will lose all its strength,
and his right eye will go blind.”

## *Jerusalem Will Be Saved*

12 This message is the word of the LORD to Israel. This is what
the LORD says, who stretched out the skies, and laid the
foundations of the earth, and put the human spirit within: 2 “I
will make Jerusalem like a cup of poison to the nations around
her. They will come and attack Jerusalem and Judah. 3 One day
all the nations on earth will come together to attack Jerusalem,
but I will make it like a heavy rock; anyone who tries to move it
will get hurt. 4 At that time I will confuse every horse and cause
its rider to go crazy,” says the LORD. “I will watch over Judah,
but I will blind all the horses of the enemies. 5 Then the leaders
of Judah will say to themselves, ‘The people of Jerusalem are
strong, because the LORD All-Powerful is their God.’

6 “At that time I will make the leaders of Judah like a fire
burning a stack of wood or like a fire burning straw. They will
destroy all the people around them left and right. But the
people of Jerusalem will remain safe.

7 “The LORD will save the homes of Judah first so that the
honor given to David’s family and to the people of Jerusalem
won’t be greater than the honor given to Judah. 8 At that time
the LORD will protect the people in Jerusalem. Then even the
weakest of them will be strong like David. And the family of
David will be like God, like an angel of the LORD in front of them.
9 At that time I will go to destroy all the nations that attack
Jerusalem.

## Psalm 149:1–5

## *Praise the God of Israel*

149 Praise the LORD!
Sing a new song to the LORD;
sing his praise in the meeting of his people.

2Let the Israelites be happy because of God, their Maker.
Let the people of Jerusalem rejoice because of their King.

3They should praise him with dancing.
They should sing praises to him with tambourines and harps.

4The LORD is pleased with his people;
he saves the humble.

5Let those who worship him rejoice in his glory.
Let them sing for joy even in bed!

## Proverbs 30:32–33

32"If you have been foolish and proud,
or if you have planned evil, shut your mouth.

33Just as stirring milk makes butter,
and twisting noses makes them bleed,
so stirring up anger causes trouble."

## Revelation 19:1–21

## *People in Heaven Praise God*

19 After this vision and announcement I heard what sounded
like a great many people in heaven saying:

"Hallelujah![n]

Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God,
2 because his judgments are true and right.

He has punished the prostitute
who made the earth evil with her sexual sin.

He has paid her back for the death of his servants."

3Again they said:

"Hallelujah!

She is burning, and her smoke will rise forever and ever."

4Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures
bowed down and worshiped God, who sits on the throne. They
said:

"Amen, Hallelujah!"

5Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

"Praise our God, all you who serve him
and all you who honor him, both small and great!"

6Then I heard what sounded like a great many people, like
the noise of flooding water, and like the noise of loud thunder.
The people were saying:

"Hallelujah!
Our Lord God, the Almighty, rules.

7 Let us rejoice and be happy
and give God glory,

because the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and the Lamb's bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear."

(The fine linen means the good things done by God's holy people.)

9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who have been invited to the wedding meal of the Lamb!" And the angel said, "These are the true words of God."

10 Then I bowed down at the angel's feet to worship him, but he said to me, "Do not worship me! I am a servant like you and your brothers and sisters who have the message of Jesus. Worship God, because the message about Jesus is the spirit that gives all prophecy."

## *The Rider on the White Horse*

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there before me was a white horse. The rider on the horse is called Faithful and True, and he is right when he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like burning fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him, which no one but himself knows. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven, dressed in fine linen, white and clean, were following him on white horses. 15 Out of the rider's mouth comes a sharp sword that he will use to defeat the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will crush out the wine in the winepress of the terrible anger of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his upper leg was written this name: king of kings and lord of lords.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he called with a loud voice to all the birds flying in the sky: "Come and gather together for the great feast of God 18 so that you can eat the bodies of kings, generals, mighty people, horses and their riders, and the bodies of all people—free, slave, small, and great."

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth. Their armies were gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured and with him the false prophet who did the miracles for the beast. The false prophet had used these miracles to trick those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his idol. The false

prophet and the beast were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. [21]And their armies were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds ate the bodies until they were full.

# December 30

# The Worshipful Heart

*God is honored by all who worship him. Praise the* LORD*!*

Psalm 149:9

worship. In two thousand years we haven't worked out the kinks. We still struggle for the right words in prayer. We still fumble over Scripture. We don't know when to kneel. We don't know when to stand. We don't know how to pray.

Worship is a daunting task.

For that reason, God gave us the Psalms—a praise book for God's people … This collection of hymns and petitions are strung together by one thread—a heart hungry for God.

Some are defiant. Others are reverent. Some are to be sung. Others are to be prayed. Some are intensely personal. Others are written as if the whole world would use them …

The very variety should remind us that worship is personal. No secret formula exists. What moves you may stymie another. Each worships differently. But each should worship.

from *The Inspirational Study Bible*

## Zechariah 12:10—14:21

### *Crying for the One They Stabbed*

10 "I will pour out on David's family and the people in
Jerusalem a spirit of kindness and mercy. They will look at me,
the one they have stabbed, and they will cry like someone
crying over the death of an only child. They will be as sad as
someone who has lost a firstborn son. 11 At that time there will
be much crying in Jerusalem, like the crying for Hadad Rimmon
in the plain of Megiddo. 12 The land will cry, each family by
itself: the family of David by itself and their wives by
themselves, the family of Nathan by itself and their wives by
themselves, 13 the family of Levi by itself and their wives by

themselves, the family of Shimei by itself and their wives by themselves, [14]and all the rest of the families by themselves and their wives by themselves.
[13] "At that time a fountain will be open for David's descendants and for the people of Jerusalem to cleanse them of their sin and uncleanness."

[2]The LORD All-Powerful says, "At that time I will get rid of the names of the idols from the land; no one will remember them anymore. I will also remove the prophets and unclean spirits from the land. [3]If a person continues to prophesy, his own father and mother, the ones who gave birth to him, will tell him, 'You have told lies using the LORD's name, so you must die.' When he prophesies, his own father and mother who gave birth to him will stab him.

[4]"At that time the prophets will be ashamed of their visions and prophecies. They won't wear the prophet's clothes made of hair to trick people. [5]Each of them will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer and have been a farmer since I was young.' [6]But someone will ask, 'What are the deep cuts on your body?' And each will answer, 'I was hurt at my friend's house.'

## *The Shepherd Is Killed*

[7]"Sword, hit the shepherd.
Attack the man who is my friend,"
says the LORD All-Powerful.

"Kill the shepherd,
and the sheep will scatter,
and I will punish the little ones."

[8]The LORD says, "Two-thirds of the people
through all the land will die. They will be gone,
and one-third will be left.

[9]The third that is left I will test with fire,
purifying them like silver,
testing them like gold.

Then they will call on me,
and I will answer them.

I will say, ‘You are my people,’
and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’”

## *The Day of Punishment*

14 The LORD’s day of judging is coming when the wealth you
have taken will be divided among you.
2I will bring all the nations together to fight Jerusalem. They
will capture the city and rob the houses and attack the women.
Half the people will be taken away as captives, but the rest of
the people won’t be taken from the city.
3Then the LORD will go to war against those nations; he will
fight as in a day of battle. 4On that day he will stand on the
Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives will
split in two, forming a deep valley that runs east and west. Half
the mountain will move toward the north, and half will move
toward the south. 5You will run through this mountain valley to
the other side, just as you ran from the earthquake when Uzziah
was king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come and all the
holy ones with him.
6On that day there will be no light, cold, or frost. 7There will
be no other day like it, and the LORD knows when it will come.
There will be no day or night; even at evening it will still be
light.
8At that time fresh water will flow from Jerusalem. Half of it
will flow east to the Dead Sea, and half will flow west to the
Mediterranean Sea. It will flow summer and winter.
9Then the LORD will be king over the whole world. At that
time there will be only one LORD, and his name will be the only
name.
10All the land south of Jerusalem from Geba to Rimmon will
be turned into a plain. Jerusalem will be raised up, but it will
stay in the same place. The city will reach from the Benjamin
Gate and to the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the
Tower of Hananel to the king’s winepresses. 11People will live
there, and it will never be destroyed again. Jerusalem will be
safe.
12But the LORD will bring a terrible disease on the nations
that fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh will rot away while
they are still standing up. Their eyes will rot in their sockets,
and their tongues will rot in their mouths. 13At that time the
LORD will cause panic. Everybody will grab his neighbor, and
they will attack each other. 14The people of Judah will fight in
Jerusalem. And the wealth of the nations around them will be
collected—much gold, silver, and clothes. 15A similar disease
will strike the horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and all the
animals in the camps.
16All of those left alive of the people who came to fight

Jerusalem will come back to Jerusalem year after year to worship the King, the LORD All-Powerful, and to celebrate the Feast of Shelters. 17Anyone from the nations who does not go to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD All-Powerful, will not have rain fall on his land. 18If the Egyptians do not go to Jerusalem, they will not have rain. Then the LORD will send them the same terrible disease he sent the other nations that did not celebrate the Feast of Shelters. 19This will be the punishment for Egypt and any nation which does not go to celebrate the Feast of Shelters.

20At that time the horses' bells will have written on them: holy to the lord. The cooking pots in the Temple of the Lord will be like the holy altar bowls. 21Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD All-Powerful, and everyone who offers sacrifices will be able to take food from them and cook in them. At that time there will not be any buyers or sellers in the Temple of the LORD All-Powerful.

## Psalm 149:6–9

6Let them shout his praise
with their two-edged swords in their hands.

7They will punish the nations
and defeat the people.

8They will put those kings in chains
and those important men in iron bands.

9They will punish them as God has written.
God is honored by all who worship him.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 31:1–9

## *Wise Words of King Lemuel*

31 These are the words of King Lemuel, the message his mother
taught him:

2 “My son, I gave birth to you.
You are the son I prayed for.

3 Don’t waste your strength on women
or your time on those who ruin kings.

4 “Kings should not drink wine, Lemuel,
and rulers should not desire beer.

5 If they drink, they might forget the law
and keep the needy from getting their rights.

6 Give beer to people who are dying
and wine to those who are sad.

7 Let them drink and forget their need
and remember their misery no more.

8 “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves;
defend the rights of all those who have nothing.

9 Speak up and judge fairly,
and defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

# Revelation 20:1–15

## *The Thousand Years*

20 I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to
the bottomless pit and a large chain in his hand. 2 The angel

grabbed the dragon, that old snake who is the devil and Satan, and tied him up for a thousand years. 3Then he threw him into the bottomless pit, closed it, and locked it over him. The angel did this so he could not trick the people of the earth anymore until the thousand years were ended. After a thousand years he must be set free for a short time.

4Then I saw some thrones and people sitting on them who had been given the power to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been killed because they were faithful to the message of Jesus and the message from God. They had not worshiped the beast or his idol, and they had not received the mark of the beast on their foreheads or on their hands. They came back to life and ruled with Christ for a thousand years. 5(The others that were dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first raising of the dead. 6Blessed and holy are those who share in this first raising of the dead. The second death has no power over them. They will be priests for God and for Christ and will rule with him for a thousand years.

7When the thousand years are over, Satan will be set free from his prison. 8Then he will go out to trick the nations in all the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. There are so many people they will be like sand on the seashore. 9And Satan's army marched across the earth and gathered around the camp of God's people and the city God loves. But fire came down from heaven and burned them up. 10And Satan, who tricked them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur with the beast and the false prophet. There they will be punished day and night forever and ever.

## *People of the World Are Judged*

11Then I saw a great white throne and the One who was sitting on it. Earth and sky ran away from him and disappeared. 12And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. Then books were opened, and the book of life was opened. The dead were judged by what they had done, which was written in the books. 13The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades[n] gave up the dead who were in them. Each person was judged by what he had done. 14And Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

# December 31

## Our Middle C

*"I the LORD do not change."*

Malachi 3:6

When Lloyd Douglas, author of *The Robe* and other novels, attended college, he lived in a boardinghouse. A retired, wheelchair-bound music professor resided on the first floor. Each morning Douglas would stick his head in the door of the teacher's apartment and ask the same question, "Well, what's the good news?" The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of the wheelchair, and say, "That's middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat. The piano across the hall is out of tune, but, my friend, that is middle C."

You and I need a middle C. Haven't you had enough change in your life? Relationships change. Health changes. The weather changes. But the Yahweh who ruled the earth last night is the same Yahweh who rules it today. Same convictions. Same plan. Same mood. Same love. He never changes.

from *Traveling Light*

### Malachi 1:1—4:6

1 This message is the word of the LORD given to Israel through Malachi.

#### *God Loves Israel*

2 The LORD said, "I have loved you."
But you ask, "How have you loved us?"
The LORD said, "Esau and Jacob were brothers. I loved Jacob,
3 but I hated Esau. I destroyed his mountain country and left his land to the wild dogs of the desert."
4 The people of Edom might say, "We were destroyed, but we

will go back and rebuild the ruins."

But the LORD All-Powerful says, "If they rebuild them, I will destroy them. People will say, 'Edom is a wicked country. The LORD is always angry with the Edomites.' 5You will see these things with your own eyes. And you will say, 'The LORD is great, even outside the borders of Israel!'"

## *The Priests Don't Respect God*

6The LORD All-Powerful says, "A son honors his father, and a servant honors his master." I am a father, so why don't you honor me? I am a master, so why don't you respect me? You priests do not respect me.

"But you ask, 'How have we shown you disrespect?'

7"You have shown it by bringing unclean food to my altar.

"But you ask, 'What makes it unclean?'

"It is unclean because you don't respect the altar of the LORD. 8When you bring blind animals as sacrifices, that is wrong. When you bring crippled and sick animals, that is wrong. Try giving them to your governor. Would he be pleased with you? He wouldn't accept you," says the LORD All-Powerful.

9"Now ask God to be kind to you, but he won't accept you with such offerings," says the LORD All-Powerful.

10"I wish one of you would close the Temple doors so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you and will not accept your gifts," says the LORD All-Powerful. 11"From the east to the west I will be honored among the nations. Everywhere they will bring incense and clean offerings to me, because I will be honored among the nations," says the LORD All-Powerful.

12"But you don't honor me. You say about the Lord's altar, 'It is unclean, and the food has no worth.' 13You say, 'We are tired of doing this,' and you sniff at it in disgust," says the LORD All-Powerful.

"And you bring hurt, crippled, and sick animals as gifts. You bring them as gifts, but I won't accept them from you," says the LORD. 14"The person who cheats will be cursed. He has a male animal in his flock and promises to offer it, but then he offers to the Lord an animal that has something wrong with it. I am a great king," says the LORD All-Powerful, "and I am feared by all the nations.

## *Rules for Priests*

2 "Priests, this command is for you. 2Listen to me. Pay attention to what I say. Honor my name," says the LORD All-Powerful. "If you don't, I will send a curse on you and on your blessings. I have already cursed them, because you don't pay attention to

what I say.
3 “I will punish your descendants. I will smear your faces with
the animal insides left from your feasts, and you will be thrown
away with it. 4 Then you will know that I am giving you this
command so my agreement with Levi will continue,” says the
LORD All-Powerful. 5 “My agreement for priests was with the
tribe of Levi. I promised them life and peace so they would
honor me. And they did honor me and fear me. 6 They taught the
true teachings and spoke no lies. With peace and honesty they
did what I said they should do, and they kept many people from
sinning.
7 “A priest should teach what he knows, and people should
learn the teachings from him, because he is the messenger of
the LORD All-Powerful. 8 But you priests have stopped obeying
me. With your teachings you have caused many people to do
wrong. You have broken the agreement with the tribe of Levi!”
says the LORD All-Powerful. 9 “You have not been careful to do
what I say, but instead you take sides in court cases. So I have
caused you to be hated and disgraced in front of everybody.”

## *Judah Was Not Loyal to God*

10 We all have the same father; the same God made us. So
why do people break their promises to each other and show no
respect for the agreement our ancestors made with God? 11 The
people of Judah have broken their promises. They have done
something God hates in Israel and Jerusalem: The people of
Judah did not respect the Temple that the LORD loves, and the
men of Judah married women who worship foreign gods.
12 Whoever does this might bring offerings to the LORD All-
Powerful, but the LORD will still cut that person off from the
community of Israel.
13 This is another thing you do. You cover the LORD’s altar
with your tears. You cry and moan, because he does not accept
your offerings and is not pleased with what you bring. 14 You
ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD sees how you treated the
wife you married when you were young. You broke your promise
to her, even though she was your partner and you had an
agreement with her. 15 God made husbands and wives to become
one body and one spirit for his purpose—so they would have
children who are true to God.
So be careful, and do not break your promise to the wife you
married when you were young.
16 The LORD God of Israel says, “I hate divorce. And I hate
people who do cruel things as easily as they put on clothes,”
says the LORD All-Powerful.
So be careful. And do not break your trust.

## *The Special Day of Judging*

17 You have tired the LORD with your words.
You ask, “How have we tired him?”
You did it by saying, “The LORD thinks anyone who does evil is
good, and he is pleased with them.” Or you asked, “Where is the
God who is fair?”
3 The LORD All-Powerful says, “I will send my messenger, who
will prepare the way for me. Suddenly, the Lord you are looking
for will come to his Temple; the messenger of the agreement,
whom you want, will come.” 2 No one can live through that time;
no one can survive when he comes. He will be like a purifying
fire and like laundry soap. 3 Like someone who heats and
purifies silver, he will purify the Levites and make them pure
like gold and silver. Then they will bring offerings to the LORD in
the right way. 4 And the LORD will accept the offerings from
Judah and Jerusalem, as it was in the past. 5 The LORD All-
Powerful says, “Then I will come to you and judge you. I will be
quick to testify against those who take part in evil magic,
adultery, and lying under oath, those who cheat workers of their
pay and who cheat widows and orphans, those who are unfair to
foreigners, and those who do not respect me.

## *Stealing from God*

6 “I the LORD do not change. So you descendants of Jacob have
not been destroyed. 7 Since the time of your ancestors, you have
disobeyed my rules and have not kept them. Return to me, and I
will return to you,” says the LORD All-Powerful.
“But you ask, ‘How can we return?’
8 “Should a person rob God? But you are robbing me.
“You ask, ‘How have we robbed you?’
“You have robbed me in your offerings and the tenth of your
crops. 9 So a curse is on you, because the whole nation has
robbed me. 10 Bring to the storehouse a full tenth of what you
earn so there will be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the
LORD All-Powerful. “I will open the windows of heaven for you
and pour out all the blessings you need. 11 I will stop the insects
so they won’t eat your crops. The grapes won’t fall from your
vines before they are ready to pick,” says the LORD All-Powerful.
12 “All the nations will call you blessed, because you will have a
pleasant country,” says the LORD All-Powerful.

## *The Lord’s Promise of Mercy*

13 The LORD says, “You have said terrible things about me.
“But you ask, ‘What have we said about you?’
14 “You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God. It did no good to

obey his laws and to show the LORD All-Powerful that we were sorry for what we did. 15So we say that proud people are happy. Evil people succeed. They challenge God and get away with it.'"

16Then those who honored the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened and heard them. The names of those who honored the LORD and respected him were written in his presence in a book to be remembered.

17The LORD All-Powerful says, "They belong to me; on that day they will be my very own. As a parent shows mercy to his child who serves him, I will show mercy to my people. 18You will again see the difference between good and evil people, between those who serve God and those who don't.

### *The Day of the Lord's Judging*

4 "There is a day coming that will burn like a hot furnace, and all the proud and evil people will be like straw. On that day they will be completely burned up so that not a root or branch will be left," says the LORD All-Powerful. 2"But for you who honor me, goodness will shine on you like the sun, with healing in its rays. You will jump around, like well-fed calves. 3Then you will crush the wicked like ashes under your feet on the day I will do this," says the LORD All-Powerful.

4"Remember the teaching of Moses my servant, those laws and rules I gave to him on Mount Sinai for all the Israelites.

5"But I will send you Elijah the prophet before that great and terrifying day of the LORD's judging. 6Elijah will help parents love their children and children love their parents. Otherwise, I will come and put a curse on the land."

## Psalm 150:1–6

### *Praise the Lord with Music*

150 Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his Temple;
praise him in his mighty heaven.

2Praise him for his strength;
praise him for his greatness.

[3]Praise him with trumpet blasts;
praise him with harps and lyres.

[4]Praise him with tambourines and dancing;
praise him with stringed instruments and flutes.

[5]Praise him with loud cymbals;
praise him with crashing cymbals.

[6]Let everything that breathes praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD!

## Proverbs 31:10–31

### *The Good Wife*

[10]It is hard to find a good wife,
because she is worth more than rubies.

[11]Her husband trusts her completely.
With her, he has everything he needs.

[12]She does him good and not harm
for as long as she lives.

[13]She looks for wool and flax
and likes to work with her hands.

[14]She is like a trader's ship,
bringing food from far away.

15 She gets up while it is still dark
and prepares food for her family
and feeds her servant girls.

16 She inspects a field and buys it.
With money she earned, she plants a vineyard.

17 She does her work with energy,
and her arms are strong.

18 She knows that what she makes is good.
Her lamp burns late into the night.

19 She makes thread with her hands
and weaves her own cloth.

20 She welcomes the poor
and helps the needy.

21 She does not worry about her family when it snows,
because they all have fine clothes to keep them warm.

22 She makes coverings for herself;
her clothes are made of linen and other expensive material.

23 Her husband is known at the city meetings,
where he makes decisions as one of the leaders of the land.

24 She makes linen clothes and sells them
and provides belts to the merchants.

25 She is strong and is respected by the people.
She looks forward to the future with joy.

26 She speaks wise words
and teaches others to be kind.

27 She watches over her family
and never wastes her time.

28 Her children speak well of her.
Her husband also praises her,

29 saying, “There are many fine women,
but you are better than all of them.”

30 Charm can fool you, and beauty can trick you,
but a woman who respects the LORD should be praised.

31 Give her the reward she has earned;
she should be praised in public for what she has done.

## Revelation 21:1—22:21

### *The New Jerusalem*

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven
and the first earth had disappeared, and there was no sea
anymore. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem,[n] coming
down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride
dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the
throne, saying, “Now God’s presence is with people, and he will
live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be
with them and will be their God.[n] 4 He will wipe away every tear
from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness,
crying, or pain, because all the old ways are gone.”

5 The One who was sitting on the throne said, “Look! I am
making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this, because
these words are true and can be trusted.”

6 The One on the throne said to me, “It is finished. I am the
Alpha and the Omega,[n] the Beginning and the End. I will give
free water from the spring of the water of life to anyone who is
thirsty. 7 Those who win the victory will receive this, and I will

be their God, and they will be my children. [8]But cowards, those who refuse to believe, who do evil things, who kill, who sin sexually, who do evil magic, who worship idols, and who tell lies —all these will have a place in the lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

[9]Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last troubles came to me, saying, "Come with me, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." [10]And the angel carried me away by the Spirit to a very large and high mountain. He showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. [11]It was shining with the glory of God and was bright like a very expensive jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. [12]The city had a great high wall with twelve gates with twelve angels at the gates, and on each gate was written the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. [13]There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. [14]The walls of the city were built on twelve foundation stones, and on the stones were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

[15]The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod made of gold to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. [16]The city was built in a square, and its length was equal to its width. The angel measured the city with the rod. The city was 1,500 miles long, 1,500 miles wide, and 1,500 miles high. [17]The angel also measured the wall. It was 216 feet high, by human measurements, which the angel was using. [18]The wall was made of jasper, and the city was made of pure gold, as pure as glass. [19]The foundation stones of the city walls were decorated with every kind of jewel. The first foundation was jasper, the second was sapphire, the third was chalcedony, the fourth was emerald, [20]the fifth was onyx, the sixth was carnelian, the seventh was chrysolite, the eighth was beryl, the ninth was topaz, the tenth was chrysoprase, the eleventh was jacinth, and the twelfth was amethyst. [21]The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate having been made from a single pearl. And the street of the city was made of pure gold as clear as glass.

[22]I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the city's temple. [23]The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God is its light, and the Lamb is the city's lamp. [24]By its light the people of the world will walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. [25]The city's gates will never be shut on any day, because there is no night there. [26]The glory and the honor of the nations will be brought into it. [27]Nothing unclean and no one who does shameful things or tells lies will ever go into it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter the city.

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life. It

was shining like crystal and was flowing from the throne of God
and of the Lamb 2down the middle of the street of the city. The
tree of life was on each side of the river. It produces fruit twelve
times a year, once each month. The leaves of the tree are for the
healing of all the nations. 3Nothing that God judges guilty will
be in that city. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there,
and God's servants will worship him. 4They will see his face,
and his name will be written on their foreheads. 5There will
never be night again. They will not need the light of a lamp or
the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light.
And they will rule as kings forever and ever.

6The angel said to me, "These words can be trusted and are
true." The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his
angel to show his servants the things that must happen soon.

7"Listen! I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who obeys the
words of prophecy in this book."

8I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I
heard and saw them, I bowed down to worship at the feet of the
angel who showed these things to me. 9But the angel said to
me, "Do not worship me! I am a servant like you, your brothers
the prophets, and all those who obey the words in this book.
Worship God!"

10Then the angel told me, "Do not keep secret the words of
prophecy in this book, because the time is near for all this to
happen. 11Let whoever is doing evil continue to do evil. Let
whoever is unclean continue to be unclean. Let whoever is
doing right continue to do right. Let whoever is holy continue to
be holy."

12"Listen! I am coming soon! I will bring my reward with me,
and I will repay each one of you for what you have done. 13I am
the Alpha and the Omega,[n] the First and the Last, the
Beginning and the End.

14"Blessed are those who wash their robes[n] so that they will
receive the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life and may go
through the gates into the city. 15Outside the city are the evil
people, those who do evil magic, who sin sexually, who murder,
who worship idols, and who love lies and tell lies.

16"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to tell you these things for the
churches. I am the descendant from the family of David, and I
am the bright morning star."

17The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let the one who
hears this say, "Come!" Let whoever is thirsty come; whoever
wishes may have the water of life as a free gift.

18I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of
this book: If anyone adds anything to these words, God will add
to that person the disasters written about in this book. 19And if
anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God
will take away that one's share of the tree of life and of the holy

city, which are written about in this book.
[20]Jesus, the One who says these things are true, says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
[21]The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

# Acknowledgements

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*n***Genesis 2:12 bdellium and onyx** Bdellium is an expensive, sweet-smelling resin like myrrh, and onyx is a gem.

*n***Genesis 2:20 Adam** This is the name of the first man. It also means "humans," including men and women.

*n***Matthew 1:2 father** “Father” in Jewish lists of ancestors can sometimes mean grandfather or more distant relative.

*n***Matthew 1:7 Asa** Some Greek copies read “Asaph,” another name for Asa (see 1 Chronicles 3:10).

*n***Matthew 1:11 Jehoiachin** The Greek reads “Jeconiah,” another name for Jehoiachin (see 2 Kings 24:6 and 1 Chronicles 3:16).

*n***Matthew 1:18 engaged** For the Jewish people an engagement was a lasting agreement, which could only be broken by a divorce. If a bride-to-be was unfaithful, it was considered adultery, and she could be put to death.

*n*__Matthew 1:21 Jesus__ The name “Jesus” means “salvation.”

*n***Matthew 1:23 “The virgin … Immanuel”** Quotation from Isaiah 7:14.

*n***Genesis 3:20 Eve** This name sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “alive.”

*n***Genesis 4:1 Cain** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “I have given birth.”

*n***Genesis 4:16 Nod** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “wander.”

*n***Genesis 4:25 Seth** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “to give.”

*n***Matthew 2:15 “I called … Egypt.”** Quotation from Hosea 11:1.

*n***Matthew 2:23 Nazarene** A person from the town of Nazareth. Matthew may be referring to Isaiah 11:1, where the Hebrew word translated “branch” sounds like “Nazarene.”

*n***Genesis 5:29 Noah** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “rest.”

*n***Matthew 3:10 The ax ... fire.** This means that God is ready to punish his people who do not obey him.

*n***Matthew 3:12 He will ... out.** This means that Jesus will come to separate good people from bad people, saving the good and punishing the bad.

*n***Genesis 8:3–4 Ararat** The ancient land of Urartu, an area in Eastern Turkey.

*n***Matthew 4:4 ‘A person … says.’** Quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3.

*n*__Matthew 4:7 ‘Do … God.’__ Quotation from Deuteronomy 6:16.

*n*__Matthew 4:10 ‘You … him.’__ Quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13.

*n***Matthew 4:24 epileptics** People with a disease that causes them sometimes to lose control of their bodies and maybe faint, shake strongly, or not be able to move.

*n***Matthew 4:25 Ten** Towns In Greek, called “Decapolis.” It was an area east of Lake Galilee that once had ten main towns.

*n***Genesis 10:4 Kittim** His descendants were the people of Cyprus.

*n***Genesis 10:6 Mizraim** This is another name for Egypt.

*n***Genesis 10:25 Peleg** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “divided.”

*n* **Matthew 5:21 ‘You … anyone.’** Quotation from Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17.

*n***Matthew 5:22 sister** Some Greek copies continue, “without a reason.”

*n***Genesis 11:9 Babel** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “confused.”

*n* **Matthew 5:27 ‘You … adultery.’** Quotation from Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18.

*n***Matthew 5:31 ‘Anyone ... divorce paper.’** Quotation from Deuteronomy 24:1.

*n* **Matthew 5:33 ‘Don’t … Lord.’** This refers to Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21.

*n***Matthew 5:38 'An eye ... tooth.'** Quotation from Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21.

*n***Matthew 5:43 ‘Love your neighbor’** Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

*n*__Matthew 5:44 you__ Some Greek copies continue, “Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you.” Compare Luke 6:28.

*n* **Matthew 6:13 The ... Amen.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Matthew 6:16 fast** The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

*n***Genesis 15:17 passed ... animals** This showed that God sealed the agreement between himself and Abram.

*n***Genesis 16:11 Ishmael** The Hebrew words for “Ishmael” and “has heard” sound similar.

*n*__Genesis 16:14 Beer Lahai Roi__ This means “the well of the Living One who sees me.”

*n*__Genesis 17:5 Abram__ This name means “honored father.”

*n***Genesis 17:5 Abraham** The end of the Hebrew word for “Abraham” sounds like the beginning of the Hebrew word for “many.”

*n***Genesis 17:15 Sarai** An Aramaic name meaning “princess.”

*n***Genesis 17:15 Sarah** A Hebrew name meaning “princess.”

*n***Genesis 17:19 Isaac** The Hebrew words for “he laughed” (v. 17) and “Isaac” sound the same.

*n***Genesis 19:22 Zoar** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “little.”

*n***Matthew 8:4 show ... priest** The Law of Moses said a priest must say when a Jewish person with a skin disease was well.

*n***Matthew 8:4 Moses commanded** Read about this in Leviticus 14:1–32.

*n***Genesis 21:6 laugh** The Hebrew words for “he laughed” and “Isaac” sound the same.

*n***Genesis 21:31 Beersheba** This name means “well of the promise” or “well of seven.”

*n***Matthew 8:28 Gadarene** From Gadara, an area southeast of Lake Galilee. The exact location is uncertain and some Greek copies read “Gergesene”; others read “Gerasene.”

*n***Genesis 24:2 Put ... leg** This showed that a person would keep the promise.

*n***Matthew 9:3 blasphemy** Saying things against God or not showing respect for God.

*n***Matthew 9:13 ‘I want … sacrifices.’** Quotation from Hosea 6:6.

*n*__Matthew 9:14 John__ John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Matthew 3, Luke 3).

*n***Matthew 9:14 fast** The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

*n***Genesis 25:25 Esau** This name may mean “hairy.”

*n***Genesis 25:26 Jacob** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “heel.” “Grabbing someone’s heel” is a Hebrew saying for tricking someone.

*n***Genesis 25:30 Edom** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “red.”

*n***Genesis 25:31 rights ... son** Usually the firstborn son had a high rank in the family. The firstborn son usually became the new head of the family.

*n***Genesis 26:33 Shibah** This name sounds like the Hebrew words for “seven” and “promise.”

*n***Matthew 9:37–38 “There are … harvest.”** As a farmer sends workers to harvest the grain, Jesus sends his followers to bring people to God.

*n***Genesis 27:36 Jacob** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “heel.” “Grabbing someone’s heel” is a Hebrew saying for tricking someone.

*n***Genesis 28:19 Bethel** This name means “house of God.”

*n***Matthew 10:14 shake ... feet** A warning. It showed that they had rejected these people.

*n***Matthew 10:15 Sodom and Gomorrah** Two cities that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

*n***Genesis 29:32 Reuben** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “he has seen my troubles.”

*n***Genesis 29:33 Simeon** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “has heard.”

*n***Genesis 29:34 Levi** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “be close to.”

*n***Genesis 29:35 Judah** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “praise.”

*n***Genesis 30:6 Dan** This name means “he has judged.”

*n***Genesis 30:8 Naphtali** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “my struggle.”

*n***Genesis 30:11 Gad** This name may mean “lucky.”

*n***Genesis 30:13 Asher** This name may mean “happy.”

*n***Genesis 30:14 mandrake** A plant which was believed to cause a woman to become pregnant.

*n***Genesis 30:18 Issachar** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “paid for.”

*n***Genesis 30:20 Zebulun** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “honor.”

*n***Genesis 30:24 Joseph** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “he adds.”

*n***Genesis 31:49 Mizpah** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “watch.”

*n***Genesis 32:2 Mahanaim** This name means “two camps.”

*n***Genesis 32:28 Israel** This name means “he wrestles with God.”

*n***Genesis 32:30 Peniel** This name means “the face of God.”

*n***Matthew 11:7 reed** It means that John was not ordinary or weak like grass blown by the wind.

*n***Matthew 11:21 Tyre and Sidon** Towns where wicked people lived.

*n***Matthew 11:21, 23 Korazin ... Bethsaida ... Capernaum** Towns by Lake Galilee where Jesus preached to the people.

*n***Matthew 11:23 Sodom** A city that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

*n***Genesis 33:17 Succoth** This name means “shelters.”

*n***Matthew 12:7 ‘I … sacrifices.’** Quotation from Hosea 6:6.

*n***Matthew 12:10 Is it right ... day?** It was against Jewish Law to work on the Sabbath day.

*n***Genesis 35:18 Benjamin** This name means “right-hand son” or “favorite son.”

*n***Genesis 35:21 Israel** Also called Jacob.

*n***Matthew 12:41 Nineveh** The city where Jonah preached to warn the people. Read Jonah 3.

*n***Matthew 12:42 Queen of the South** The Queen of Sheba. She traveled a thousand miles to learn God’s wisdom from Solomon. Read 1 Kings 10:1–13.

*n*__Matthew 12:47 Someone … you.”__ Some Greek copies do not have verse 47.

*n***Genesis 37:3 Israel** Also called Jacob.

*n***Genesis 38:8 Go ... wife** It was a custom in Israel that if a man died without children, one of his brothers would marry the widow. If a child was born, it would be considered the dead man's child.

*n***Genesis 38:18 seal ... cord** A seal was used like a rubber stamp, and people ran a string through it to tie around the neck. They wrote a contract, folded it, put wax or clay on the contract, and pressed the seal onto it as a signature.

*n***Genesis 38:29 Perez** This name means “breaking out.”

*n***Matthew 13:22 produce fruit** To produce fruit means to have in your life the good things God wants.

*n***Genesis 41:51 Manasseh** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “made me forget.”

*n***Genesis 41:52 Ephraim** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “given me children.”

*n***Genesis 42:5 Israel** Also called Jacob.

*n***Genesis 43:6 Israel** Also called Jacob.

*n***Genesis 45:28 Israel** Also called Jacob.

*n***Genesis 46:1 Israel** Also called Jacob.

*n***Matthew 15:4 ‘Honor ... mother.’** Quotation from Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16.

*n*__Matthew 15:4 ‘Anyone … death.’__ Quotation from Exodus 21:17.

*n*__Matthew 15:14 leaders__ Some Greek copies continue, “of blind people.”

*n*__Genesis 47:28 Jacob__ Also called Israel.

*n***Genesis 47:29 put ... leg** This showed that a person would keep a promise.

*n***Genesis 48:2 Jacob** Also called Israel.

*n* **Matthew 16:2–3 answered** Some Greek copies do not have the rest of verse 2 and verse 3.

*n***Matthew 16:4 sign of Jonah** Jonah's three days in the fish are like Jesus' three days in the tomb. The story about Jonah is in the Book of Jonah.

*n***Matthew 16:18 Peter** The Greek name “Peter,” like the Aramaic name “Cephas,” means “rock.”

*n***Matthew 16:23 Satan** Name for the devil, meaning “the enemy.” Jesus means that Peter was talking like Satan.

*n***Exodus 1:1 Jacob** Also called Israel.

*n***Exodus 2:10 Moses** The name “Moses” sounds like the Hebrew word for “to pull out.”

*n***Exodus 2:18 Reuel** He was also called Jethro.

*n***Exodus 2:22 Gershom** This name sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “a stranger there.”

*n***Matthew 17:3 Moses and Elijah** Two of the most important Jewish leaders in the past. God had given Moses the Law, and Elijah was an important prophet.

*n***Matthew 17:15 epilepsy** A disease that causes a person sometimes to lose control of his body and maybe faint, shake strongly, or not be able to move.

*n***Matthew 17:21 That ... fasting.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Exodus 3:14 I … I AM** The Hebrew words are like the name “Yahweh.” This Hebrew name for God, usually called “LORD,” shows that God always lives and is always with his people.

*n* **Matthew 18:11 The ... people.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Matthew 18:15 against you** Some Greek copies do not have “against you.”

*n*__Matthew 18:16 ‘Every … witnesses.’__ Quotation from Deuteronomy 19:15.

*n***Matthew 19:4 ‘he made … female’** Quotation from Genesis 1:27 or 5:2.

*n***Matthew 19:5 ‘So … body.’** Quotation from Genesis 2:24.

*n***Matthew 19:9 adultery** Some Greek copies continue, “And anyone who marries a divorced woman is guilty of adultery.” Compare Matthew 5:32.

*n***Matthew 19:12 But … marriage.** This may also mean, “The person who can accept this teaching about not marrying should accept it.”

*n***Matthew 19:13 put his hands on them** Showing that Jesus gave special blessings to these children.

*n***Matthew 19:19 'You ... mother.'** Quotation from Exodus 20:12–16; Deuteronomy 5:16–20.

*n***Matthew 19:19 ‘love … yourself’** Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

*n***Matthew 19:29 mother** Some Greek copies continue, “or wife.”

*n***Matthew 20:2 coin** A Roman denarius. One coin was the average pay for one day's work.

*n***Matthew 20:22 drink ... drink** Jesus used the idea of drinking from a cup to ask if they could accept the same terrible things that would happen to him.

*n*__Matthew 21:9 Praise__ Literally, “Hosanna,” a Hebrew word used at first in praying to God for help. At this time it was probably a shout of joy used in praising God or his Messiah.

*n*__Matthew 21:13 ‘My Temple … prayer.’__ Quotation from Isaiah 56:7.

*n***Matthew 21:13 ‘hideout for robbers’** Quotation from Jeremiah 7:11.

*n*__Matthew 21:15 Praise__ Literally, “Hosanna,” a Hebrew word used at first in praying to God for help. At this time it was probably a shout of joy used in praising God or his Messiah.

*n***Matthew 21:16 'You ... praises.'** Quotation from the Septuagint (Greek) version of Psalm 8:2.

*n*__Exodus 15:23 Marah__ This name means “bitter.”

*n***Exodus 16:36 ephah** An ephah was a measure that equaled twenty quarts.

*n***Matthew 21:44 The … crushed.** Some Greek copies do not have verse 44.

*n***Exodus 17:7 Massah** This name is the Hebrew word for “testing.”

*n***Exodus 17:7 Meribah** This name is the Hebrew word for “quarrel.”

*n***Exodus 18:3 Gershom** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “a stranger there.”

*n***Exodus 18:4 Eliezer** This name sounds like the Hebrew words “My God is my help.”

*n***Matthew 22:16 Herodians** A political group that followed Herod and his family.

*n***Matthew 22:19 coin** A Roman denarius. One coin was the average pay for one day's work.

*n***Matthew 22:32 ‘I am … Jacob.’** Quotation from Exodus 3:6.

*n***Matthew 22:37 ‘Love … mind.’** Quotation from Deuteronomy 6:5.

*n***Matthew 22:39 ‘Love … yourself.’** Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

*n***Matthew 23:5 boxes** Small leather boxes containing four important Scriptures. Some Jews tied these to their foreheads and left arms, probably to show they were very religious.

*n* **Matthew 23:14 How ... punishment.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n*__Exodus 23:19 Holy Tent__ Literally, “house of the Lord your God.” See Exodus 25:9.

*n***Matthew 23:23 mint, dill, and cumin** Small plants grown in gardens and used for spices. Only very religious people would be careful enough to give a tenth of these plants.

*n***Matthew 23:24 You ... camel!** Meaning, “You worry about the smallest mistakes but commit the biggest sin.”

*n***Matthew 23:35 Abel ... Zechariah** In the order of the books of the Hebrew Old Testament, the first and last men to be murdered.

*n***Matthew 23:39 ‘God … Lord.’** Quotation from Psalm 118:26.

*n***Matthew 24:15** ‘a blasphemous object that brings destruction’ Mentioned in Daniel 9:27; 12:11 (see also Daniel 11:31).

*n*__Matthew 24:17 roofs__ In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n***Matthew 24:36 not even the Son** Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n* **Matthew 24:41 mill** Two large, round, flat rocks used for grinding grain to make flour.

*n***Matthew 26:28 new** Some Greek copies do not have this word. Compare Luke 22:20.

*n* **Matthew 26:29 fruit of the vine** Product of the grapevine; this may also be translated “wine.”

*n***Matthew 26:39 cup** Jesus is talking about the terrible things that will happen to him. Accepting these things will be very hard, like drinking a cup of something bitter.

*n*__Matthew 27:9–10 “They … commanded me.”__ See Zechariah 11:12–13 and Jeremiah 32:6–9.

*n***Matthew 27:16–17 Barabbas** Some Greek copies read “Jesus Barabbas.”

*n*__Matthew 27:24 washed his hands__ He did this as a sign to show that he wanted no part in what the people did.

*n***Leviticus 1:16 crop** A small bag inside a bird’s throat. When a bird eats, its food goes into this part first. There, the food is made soft before it goes into the stomach.

*n***Matthew 27:34 gall** Probably a drink of wine mixed with drugs to help a person feel less pain.

*n***Matthew 27:35 clothes** Some Greek copies continue, “So what God said through the prophet came true, ‘They divided my clothes among them, and they threw lots for my clothing.’” See Psalm 22:18.

*n***Matthew 27:51 curtain in the Temple** A curtain divided the Most Holy Place from the other part of the Temple. That was the special building in Jerusalem where God commanded the Jewish people to worship him.

*n***Psalm 23:5 pour oil ... head** This can mean that God gave him great wealth and blessed him.

*n*__Mark 1:16 Simon__ Simon’s other name was Peter.

*n***Mark 1:1 the Son of God** Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n*__Mark 1:29 Simon__ Simon’s other name was Peter.

*n***Mark 1:44 Moses ... well** Read about this in Leviticus 14:1–32.

*n*__Mark 2:18 John__ John the Baptist, who preached to the Jewish people about Christ's coming (Mark 1:4–8).

*n***Mark 2:18 fasted** The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

*n***Mark 3:6 Herodians** A political group that followed Herod and his family.

*n***Mark 3:14 and called them apostles** Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n*__Mark 3:32 brothers__ Some Greek copies continue, “and sisters.”

*n* **Leviticus 15:16, 32 semen** A man’s body fluid by which he can make a woman pregnant.

*n***Mark 4:19 producing fruit** To produce fruit means to have in your life the good things God wants.

*n***Mark 5:1 Gerasene** From Gerasa, an area southeast of Lake Galilee. The exact location is uncertain and some Greek copies read “Gergesene”; others read “Gadarene.”

*n***Mark 5:9 Legion** Means very many. A legion was about five thousand men in the Roman army.

*n*__Mark 5:20 Ten__ Towns In Greek, called “Decapolis.” It was an area east of Lake Galilee that once had ten main towns.

*n***Leviticus 22:4 semen** A man's body fluid by which he can make a woman pregnant.

*n***Mark 6:11 Shake ... feet** A warning. It showed that they were rejecting these people.

*n***Mark 6:11 them** Some Greek copies continue, “I tell you the truth, on the Judgment Day it will be better for the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah than for the people of that town.” See Matthew 10:15.

*n***Mark 6:14 Some people said** Some Greek copies read “He said.”

*n***Mark 6:15 Elijah** A great prophet who spoke for God and who lived hundreds of years before Christ. See 1 Kings 17.

*n***Mark 6:22 When ... Herodias** Some Greek copies read “When his daughter Herodias.”

*n***Leviticus 25:10 Jubilee** This word comes from the Hebrew word for a horn of a male sheep.

*n***Leviticus 26:19 sky ... bronze** This means the sky will give no rain and the earth will produce no crops.

*n*__Mark 7:4 pots__ Some Greek copies continue, “and dining couches.”

*n*__Mark 7:8 teachings__ Some Greek copies continue, “You wash pitchers and jugs and do many other such things.”

*n*__Mark 7:10 ‘Honor … mother.’__ Quotation from Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16.

*n*__Mark 7:10 ‘Anyone … death.’__ Quotation from Exodus 21:17.

*n***Mark 7:16 Let ... listen.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Mark 7:24 Tyre** Some Greek copies continue, “and Sidon.”

*n***Mark 7:31 Ten** Towns In Greek, called “Decapolis.” It was an area east of Lake Galilee that once had ten main towns.

*n***Mark 8:26 town** Some Greek copies continue, “Don’t even go and tell anyone in the town.”

*n***Mark 8:28 Elijah** A man who spoke for God and who lived hundreds of years before Christ. See 1 Kings 17.

*n*__Mark 8:33 Satan__ Name for the devil meaning “the enemy.” Jesus means that Peter was talking like Satan.

*n***Numbers 8:10 put ... them** This showed that the people had a part in giving the Levites their special work.

*n***Mark 9:4 Elijah and Moses** Two of the most important Jewish leaders in the past. God had given Moses the Law, and Elijah was an important prophet.

*n*__Mark 9:29 prayer__ Some Greek copies continue, “and fasting.”

*n***Numbers 10:29 Reuel the Midianite** Also called Jethro.

*n***Mark 9:44, 46 In … out.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Numbers 11:3 Taberah** This name means “burning.”

*n***Numbers 11:34 Kibroth Hattaavah** This name in Hebrew means “graves of wanting.”

*n***Mark 10:4 “Moses … away.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 24:1.

*n***Mark 10:6 ‘he made … female’** Quotation from Genesis 1:27.

*n***Mark 10:7 and ... wife** Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n***Mark 10:7–8 ‘So … body.’** Quotation from Genesis 2:24.

*n*__Mark 10:19 ‘You … mother.’__ Quotation from Exodus 20:12–16; Deuteronomy 5:16–20.

*n***Mark 10:24 hard** Some Greek copies continue, “for those who trust in riches.”

*n***Numbers 13:24 Eshcol** This name in Hebrew means “bunch.”

*n***Mark 10:38 Can you ... through?** Jesus was asking if they could suffer the same terrible things that would happen to him.

*n***Mark 11:10 Praise** Literally, “Hosanna,” a Hebrew word used at first in praying to God for help, but at this time it was probably a shout of joy used in praising God or his Messiah.

*n*__Mark 11:17 ‘My Temple … nations.’__ Quotation from Isaiah 56:7.

*n***Mark 11:17 ‘hideout for robbers’** Quotation from Jeremiah 7:11.

*n***Mark 11:19 his followers** Some Greek copies mention only Jesus here.

*n***Numbers 18:19 agreement of salt** The meaning is not clear, but Leviticus 2:13 says, “Salt stands for your agreement with God that will last forever.”

*n***Mark 11:26 But ... sins.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Numbers 20:13 Meribah** This name in Hebrew means “argument.”

*n***Mark 12:13 Herodians** A political group that followed Herod and his family.

*n***Mark 12:26 burning bush** Read Exodus 3:1–12 in the Old Testament.

*n***Mark 12:26 ‘I am … Jacob.’** Quotation from Exodus 3:6.

*n***Numbers 21:3 Hormah** This name in Hebrew means “completely destroyed.”

*n***Mark 12:29–30 ‘Listen … strength.’** Quotation from Deuteronomy 6:4–5.

*n*__Mark 12:31 ‘Love … yourself.’__ Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

*n***Mark 13:14 ‘a blasphemous object that brings destruction’** Mentioned in Daniel 9:27; 12:11 (cf. Daniel 11:31).

*n***Mark 13:15 roofs** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*__Mark 13:33 ready__ Some Greek copies continue, “and pray.”

*n***Mark 14:24 new** Some Greek copies do not have this word. Compare Luke 22:20.

*n***Mark 14:25 fruit of the vine** Product of the grapevine; this may also be translated “wine.”

*n***Mark 14:36 Abba** Name that a Jewish child called his father.

*n***Mark 14:36 cup** Jesus is talking about the terrible things that will happen to him. Accepting these things will be very hard, like drinking a cup of something bitter.

*n***Mark 14:68 And the rooster crowed.** Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n***Mark 15:28 And … criminals.”** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text, which quotes from Isaiah 53:12.

*n***Mark 15:38 curtain in the Temple** A curtain divided the Most Holy Place from the other part of the Temple. That was the special building in Jerusalem where God commanded the Jewish people to worship him.

*n***Mark 15:39 when Jesus died** Some Greek copies read “when Jesus cried out and died.”

*n***Mark 16:17 languages** This can also be translated “tongues.”

*n***Luke 1:3 excellent** This word was used to show respect to an important person like a king or ruler.

*n*__Luke 1:5 Abijah's group__ The Jewish priests were divided into twenty-four groups. See 1 Chronicles 24.

*n***Luke 1:25 ashamed** The Jewish people thought it was a disgrace for women not to have children.

*n***Luke 2:2 registration** Census. A counting of all the people and the things they own.

*n***Luke 2:5 engaged** For the Jewish people, an engagement was a lasting agreement. It could only be broken by divorce.

*n***Luke 2:14 and ... God** Some Greek copies read “and on earth let there be peace and goodwill among people.”

*n***Luke 2:22 pure** The Law of Moses said that forty days after a Jewish woman gave birth to a son, she must be cleansed by a ceremony at the Temple. Read Leviticus 12:2–8.

*n*__Luke 2:23 “Every … Lord.”__ Quotation from Exodus 13:2.

*n***Luke 2:24 “You … pigeons.”** Quotation from Leviticus 12:8.

*n***Deuteronomy 15:17 awl** A tool like a big needle with a handle at one end.

*n***Luke 3:9 The ax ... fire.** This means that God is ready to punish his people who do not obey him.

*n***Luke 3:17 He will ... out.** This means that Jesus will come to separate good people from bad people, saving the good and punishing the bad.

*n***Luke 3:23 son** “Son” in Jewish lists of ancestors can sometimes mean grandson or more distant relative.

*n*__Luke 3:32 Salmon__ Some Greek copies read “Sala.”

*n*__Luke 4:4 ‘A person … alone.’__ Quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3.

*n*__Luke 4:8 ‘You … him.’__ Quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13.

*n***Luke 4:12 ‘Do … God.’** Quotation from Deuteronomy 6:16.

*n***Luke 4:38 Simon** Simon’s other name was Peter.

*n***Luke 4:44 Judea** Some Greek copies read “Galilee.”

*n***Deuteronomy 22:8 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*__Luke 5:3 Simon__ Simon’s other name was Peter.

*n***Luke 5:14 show ... priest** The Law of Moses said a priest must say when a Jewish person with a skin disease was well.

*n*__Luke 5:14 Moses commanded__ Read about this in Leviticus 14:1–32.

*n***Luke 5:33 fast** The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

*n***Deuteronomy 28:23 sky ... iron** This means the sky will give no rain and the earth will produce no crops.

*n***Luke 7:24 reed** It means that John was not ordinary or weak like grass blown by the wind.

*n*__Luke 7:41 coins__ Roman denarii. One coin was the average pay for one day's work.

*n***Joshua 2:6 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*__Luke 8:26 Gerasene__ From Gerasa, an area southeast of Lake Galilee. The exact location is uncertain and some Greek copies read “Gadarene”; others read “Gergesene.”

*n***Luke 8:30 Legion** Means very many. A legion was about five thousand men in the Roman army.

*n***Luke 8:31 eternal darkness** Literally, “the abyss,” something like a pit or a hole that has no end.

*n***Luke 8:43 years** Some Greek copies continue, “and she had spent all the money she had on doctors.”

*n***Luke 9:5 shake ... feet** A warning. It showed that they had rejected these people.

*n***Luke 9:19 Elijah** A man who spoke for God and who lived hundreds of years before Christ. See 1 Kings 17.

*n***Luke 9:30 Moses and Elijah** Two of the most important Jewish leaders in the past. God had given Moses the Law, and Elijah was an important prophet.

*n*__Luke 9:54 people__ Some Greek copies continue “as Elijah did.”

*n***Luke 9:55–56 And ... them."** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n*__Luke 10:1, 17 seventy-two__ Some Greek copies read “seventy.”

*n***Luke 10:11 dirt ... you** A warning. It showed that they had rejected these people.

*n***Luke 10:12 Sodom** City that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

*n***Luke 10:13 Tyre and Sidon** Towns where wicked people lived.

*n***Luke 10:13, 15 Korazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum** Towns by Lake Galilee where Jesus preached to the people.

*n*__Luke 10:27 “Love … mind.”__ Quotation from Deuteronomy 6:5.

*n*Luke 10:27 **“Love … yourself.”** Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

*n***Luke 10:32 Levite** Levites were members of the tribe of Levi who helped the Jewish priests with their work in the Temple. Read 1 Chronicles 23:24–32.

*n***Luke 10:33 Samaritan** Samaritans were people from Samaria. These people were part Jewish, but the Jews did not accept them as true Jews. Samaritans and Jews disliked each other.

*n***Luke 10:34 olive oil and wine** Oil and wine were used like medicine to soften and clean wounds.

*n*__Luke 10:35 coins__ Roman denarii. One coin was the average pay for one day's work.

*n* **Luke 11:2–4 ‘Father … tempted.’** Some Greek copies include phrases from Matthew’s version of this prayer (Matthew 6:9–13).

*n*__Luke 11:11 for__ Some Greek copies include the phrase “for bread, which of you would give them a stone, or if they ask for … ”

*n***Luke 11:29 sign of Jonah** Jonah’s three days in the fish are like Jesus’ three days in the tomb. See Matthew 12:40.

*n***Luke 11:31 Queen of the South** The Queen of Sheba. She traveled a thousand miles to learn God’s wisdom from Solomon. Read 1 Kings 10:1–3.

*n***Luke 11:38 wash his hands** This was a Jewish religious custom that the Pharisees thought was very important.

*n***Luke 11:51 Abel ... Zechariah** In the Hebrew Old Testament, the first and last men to be murdered.

*n***Luke 12:50 I ... baptism** Jesus was talking about the suffering he would soon go through.

*n***Luke 13:1 Pilate** Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to A.D. 36.

*n*__Luke 13:35 ‘God … Lord.’__ Quotation from Psalm 118:26.

*n***Judges 1:17 Hormah** Hormah sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “to destroy completely.”

*n***Judges 2:5 Bokim** This name means “crying.”

*n*__Judges 2:16 judges__ They were not judges in courts of law, but leaders of the people in times of emergency.

*n***Luke 14:2 dropsy** A sickness that causes the body to swell larger and larger.

*n*__Luke 14:5 child__ Some Greek copies read “donkey.”

*n***Luke 15:8 silver coins** Roman denarii. One coin was the average pay for one day's work.

*n***Judges 8:24 Ishmaelites** Another name for the Midianites. See Genesis 37:25–28.

*n*__Judges 8:29 Gideon__ Also called Jerub-Baal.

*n***Luke 15:21 son** Some Greek copies continue, “but let me be like one of your servants” (see verse 19).

*n***Judges 9:16, 24 Gideon** Also called Jerub-Baal.

*n***Judges 9:45 salt** The salt would keep crops from growing there.

*n***Judges 9:57 Gideon** Also called Jerub-Baal.

*n*__Luke 16:16 John__ John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Matthew 3, Luke 3).

*n***Luke 17:14 show ... priests** The Law of Moses said a priest must say when a person with a skin disease became well.

*n***Judges 14:15 fourth** The Hebrew word is “seventh.” Some old translations say “fourth,” which fits the order of events better.

*n***Luke 17:21 within** Or “among.”

*n*__Luke 17:29 Sodom__ City that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

*n*__Luke 17:32 Lot’s wife__ A story about what happened to Lot’s wife is found in Genesis 19:15–17, 26.

*n***Luke 17:36 Two ... left.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Judges 15:17 Ramath Lehi** This name means “Jawbone Hill.”

*n***Judges 16:13 loom** A machine for making cloth from thread.

*n***Judges 16:27 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n***Luke 18:12 fast** The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

*n***Luke 18:20 ‘You … mother.’** Quotation from Exodus 20:12–16; Deuteronomy 5:16–20.

*n***Judges 17:7; 18:3 Levite** The Levites were the only ones God had appointed as priests.

*n***Judges 18:12 Mahaneh Dan** This name means “the camp of Dan.”

*n***Judges 20:1 Dan ... Beersheba** Dan was the city farthest north in Israel. Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

*n*__Luke 19:13 coin__ A Greek “mina.” One mina was enough money to pay a person for working three months.

*n***Ruth 1:1 judges** They were not judges in courts of law, but leaders of the people in times of emergency.

*n***Ruth 1:20 Naomi** This name means “happy” or “pleasant.”

*n***Ruth 1:20 Mara** This name means “bitter” or “sad.”

*n***Ruth 2:20 close relatives** In Bible times the closest relative could marry a widow without children so she could have children. He would care for this family, but they and their property would not belong to him. They would belong to the dead husband.

*n*Luke 19:46 **‘My Temple … prayer.’** Quotation from Isaiah 56:7.

*n***Luke 19:46 ‘hideout for robbers’** Quotation from Jeremiah 7:11.

*n***Ruth 3:2 close relatives** In Bible times the closest relative could marry a widow without children so she could have children. He would care for this family, but they and their property would not belong to him. They would belong to the dead husband.

*n***Ruth 3:4 lift ... feet** This showed Ruth was asking him to be her husband.

*n***Ruth 3:9 Spread ... me** By this, Ruth was asking Boaz to marry her.

*n***Ruth 4:12 Perez** One of Boaz’s ancestors.

*n* **1 Samuel 1:11 cut ... razor** People who made special promises not to cut their hair or to drink wine or beer were called Nazirites. These people gave a specific time in their lives, or sometimes their entire lives, to the Lord. See Numbers 6:1–5.

*n* **1 Samuel 1:20 Samuel** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “God heard.”

*n* **1 Samuel 3:20 Dan to Beersheba** Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

*n***Luke 20:37 burning bush** Read Exodus 3:1–12 in the Old Testament.

*n*__Luke 20:37 ‘the God of … Jacob’__ These words are taken from Exodus 3:6.

*n***Luke 20:43 until ... control** Literally, “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

*n*1 Samuel 4:21 **Ichabod** This name means “no glory.”

*n***Luke 21:1 money box** A special box in the Jewish place of worship where people put their gifts to God.

*n*1 Samuel 7:12 **Ebenezer** This name means “stone of help.”

*n* **1 Samuel 9:25 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer. See Deuteronomy 22:8.

*n***Luke 22:18 fruit of the vine** Product of the grapevine; this may also be translated “wine.”

*n***Luke 22:19b–20 body** Some Greek copies do not have the rest of verse 19 or verse 20.

*n***Luke 22:37 ‘He … criminal.’** Quotation from Isaiah 53:12.

*n***Luke 22:42 cup** Jesus is talking about the painful things that will happen to him. Accepting these things will be hard, like drinking a cup of something bitter.

*n*1 Samuel 12:11 **Gideon** Also called Jerub-Baal.

*n* **1 Samuel 12:17 time ... harvest** This was a dry time in the summer when no rains fell.

*n* **1 Samuel 13:1 Saul ... years** This is how the verse is worded in some early Greek copies.

*n***The Hebrew is not clear here. 1 Samuel 13:5 three thousand** Some Greek copies say three thousand. The Hebrew copies say thirty thousand.

*n***Luke 23:1 Pilate** Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to A.D. 36.

*n***Luke 23:17 Every ... people.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Luke 23:31 If ... come?** Literally, “If they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry?”

*n*__Luke 23:34 Jesus ... doing."__ Some Greek copies do not have this first part of verse 34.

*n*__Luke 23:43 paradise__ Another word for heaven.

*n***Luke 23:45 curtain in the Temple** A curtain divided the Most Holy Place from the other part of the Temple, the special building in Jerusalem where God commanded the Jewish people to worship him.

*n***1 Samuel 21:4 holy bread** This was the bread that showed the people were in the presence of God. Normally only the priests ate this bread.

*n* **1 Samuel 23:24 Maon** Some early Greek copies say “Maon.” The Hebrew copies say “Paran.”

*n*__John 1:1 Word__ The Greek word is “logos,” meaning any kind of communication; it could be translated “message.” Here, it means Christ, because Christ was the way God told people about himself.

*n***John 1:5 overpowered** This can also be translated, “understood.”

*n***John 1:6 John** John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Matthew 3, Luke 3).

*n***John 1:18 But … Father** This could be translated, “But the only God is very close to the Father.” Also, some Greek copies read “But the only Son is very close to the Father.”

*n***John 1:19 John** John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Matthew 3, Luke 3).

*n***John 1:21 Elijah** A prophet who spoke for God. He lived hundreds of years before Christ and was expected to return before Christ (Malachi 4:5–6).

*n*__John 1:21 Prophet__ They probably meant the prophet that God told Moses he would send (Deuteronomy 18:15–19).

*n***John 1:29 Lamb of God** Name for Jesus. Jesus is like the lambs that were offered for a sacrifice to God.

*n*__John 1:34 the Son of God__ Some Greek copies read “God’s Chosen One.”

*n* **1 Samuel 25:1 Maon** Some early Greek copies say “Maon.” The Hebrew copies say “Paran.”

*n***John 1:35 John** John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Matthew 3, Luke 3).

*n***John 1:36 Lamb of God** Name for Jesus. Jesus is like the lambs that were offered for a sacrifice to God.

*n***John 1:42 Peter** The Greek name “Peter,” like the Aramaic name “Cephas,” means “rock.”

*n***John 1:51 ‘angels … down’** These words are from Genesis 28:12.

*n*__John 2:6 washing ceremony__ The Jewish people washed themselves in special ways before eating, before worshiping in the Temple, and at other special times.

*n***John 2:17 “My … me.”** Quotation from Psalm 69:9.

*n*__John 3:13 the Son of Man__ Some Greek copies continue, “who is in heaven.”

*n***John 3:14 Moses ... desert** When the Israelites were dying from snakebites, God told Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole. The people who looked at the snake were healed (Numbers 21:4–9).

*n***John 3:25 religious washing** The Jewish people washed themselves in special ways before eating, before worshiping in the Temple, and at other special times.

*n***John 4:9 Jewish people ... Samaritans.** This can also be translated “Jewish people don’t use things that Samaritans have used.”

*n*2 **Samuel 3:10 Dan to Beersheba** Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

*n*2 **Samuel 5:20 Baal Perazim** This name means “the Lord breaks through.”

*n*2 Samuel 6:2 **Baalah in Judah** Another name for Kiriath Jearim.

*n***John 5:2 Bethesda** Some Greek copies read “Bethzatha” or “Bethsaida,” different names for the pool of Bethesda.

*n***John 5:2 Hebrew language** Or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

*n***John 5:3–4 and ... had** Some Greek copies do not contain all or most of the bracketed text.

*n*2 Samuel 8:18 **Kerethites and Pelethites** These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king's safety, a kind of palace guard.

*n***John 6:14 Prophet** They probably meant the prophet that God told Moses he would send (Deuteronomy 18:15–19).

*n*2 **Samuel 11:2 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*2 **Samuel 11:21 Jerub-Besheth** Another name for Gideon.

*n*2 **Samuel 12:25 Jedidiah** This name means “loved by the LORD.”

*n***John 6:31 ‘He gave … eat.’** Quotation from Psalm 78:24.

*n***John 6:45 ‘They … God.’** Quotation from Isaiah 54:13.

*n*2 **Samuel 13:37 Talmai** He was Absalom’s grandfather.

*n* **2 Samuel 15:2 city gate** People came here to conduct business. Public meetings and court cases were also held here.

*n*2 **Samuel 15:18 Kerethites and Pelethites** These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king's safety, a kind of palace guard.

*n*__John 7:8 yet__ Some Greek copies do not have this word.

*n*__John 7:19 law__ Moses gave God’s people the Law that God gave him on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:29–32).

*n*2 Samuel 16:22 roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n***2 Samuel 17:11 Dan to Beersheba** Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

*n***John 7:40 Prophet** They probably meant the prophet God told Moses he would send (Deuteronomy 18:15–19).

*n***John 7:50 Nicodemus ... group.** The story about Nicodemus going and talking to Jesus is in John 3:1–21.

*n* **2 Samuel 19:8 city gate** People came here to conduct business. Public meetings and court cases were also held here.

*n*2 Samuel 20:7 **Kerethites and Pelethites** These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king's safety, a kind of palace guard.

*n***2 Samuel 21:8 Mephibosheth** This is not Jonathan’s son but another man with the same name.

*n*2 **Samuel 21:19 Goliath** In 1 Chronicles 20:5 he is called Lahmi, brother of Goliath.

*n***John 8:39 If … do** Some Greek copies read “If you are really Abraham’s children, you will do.”

*n*2 **Samuel 23:8 Three** These were David's most powerful soldiers. See 1 Chronicles 11:11.

*n***2 Samuel 24:2 Dan to Beersheba** Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

*n* **1 Kings 1:38 Kerethites and Pelethites** These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king's safety, a kind of palace guard.

*n***1 Kings 1:50 corners of the altar** If a person were innocent of a crime, he could run into the Holy Place where the altar was. If he held on to the corners of the altar, which looked like horns, he would be safe.

*n***1 Kings 2:28 corners of the altar** If a person were innocent of a crime, he could run into the Holy Place where the altar was. If he held on to the corners of the altar, which looked like horns, he would be safe.

*n***John 9:39 blind** Jesus is talking about people who are spiritually blind, not physically blind.

*n* **1 Kings 4:25 Dan to Beersheba** Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

*n***John 10:34 ‘I … gods.’** Quotation from Psalm 82:6.

*n* **1 Kings 8:9 stone tablets** They were the two tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments.

*n*__John 11:24 resurrection__ Being raised from the dead to live again.

*n*1 Kings 9:13 Cabul This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “worthless.”

*n***John 12:13 Praise** Literally, “Hosanna,” a Hebrew word used at first in praying to God for help, but at this time it was probably a shout of joy used in praising God or his Messiah.

*n*1 Kings 14:31 **Abijam** A negative name for Abijah. See 2 Chronicles 13.

*n* **1 Kings 16:34 the Lord ... happen** When Joshua destroyed Jericho, he said whoever rebuilt the city would lose his oldest and youngest sons. See Joshua 6:26.

*n***John 13:18 ‘The man … me.’** Quotation from Psalm 41:9.

*n***John 13:23 sitting** Literally, “lying.” The people of that time ate lying down and leaning on one arm.

*n***John 13:32 If ... him** Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n***John 14:4 You ... going.** Some Greek copies read “You know where I am going and the way to the place I am going.”

*n***John 14:16 Helper** “Counselor” or “Comforter.” Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit.

*n***John 15:25 ‘They … reason.’** These words could be from Psalm 35:19 or Psalm 69:4.

*n***John 15:26 Helper** “Counselor” or “Comforter.” Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit.

*n*2 **Kings 2:9 Leave ... spirit** By law, the first son in a family would inherit a double share of his father's possessions. Elisha is asking to inherit a share of his master's power as his follower. He is not asking for twice as much power as Elijah had.

*n*__John 16:7 Helper__ “Counselor” or “Comforter.” Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit.

*n***2 Kings 4:10 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n***2 Kings 5:18 temple of Rimmon** The place where the Aramean people worshiped the god Rimmon.

*n***John 18:11 cup** Jesus is talking about the painful things that will happen to him. Accepting these things will be very hard, like drinking a cup of something bitter.

*n***John 18:28 unclean** Going into the Roman palace would make them unfit to eat the Passover Feast, according to their Law.

*n***2 Kings 9:31 Zimri** He was the man who killed Elah and the family of Baasha.
Read 1 Kings 16:8–12.

*n*__John 19:13 Hebrew language__ Or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

*n***2 Kings 11:4 Carites** This was probably a special unit of the army that was responsible for the king's safety, a kind of palace guard similar to the Kerethites and the Pelethites.

*n***John 19:17 Hebrew language** Or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

*n*__John 19:28 “I am thirsty.”__ Read Psalms 22:15; 69:21.

*n***John 19:31 broken** The breaking of their bones would make them die sooner.

*n***John 19:36 “Not one … broken.”** Quotation from Psalm 34:20. The idea is from Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12.

*n***John 19:37 “They … stabbed.”** Quotation from Zechariah 12:10.

*n*2 Kings 14:6 **“Parents … sins.”** See Deuteronomy 24:16

*n*2 **Kings 14:21 Uzziah** Also called Azariah.

*n*__John 20:16 Hebrew language__ Or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

*n*2 **Kings 15:8, 23, 27 Uzziah** Also called Azariah.

*n*2 **Kings 15:29 Tiglath-Pileser** Also called Pul.

*n***John 21:1 Lake Galilee** Literally, “Sea of Tiberias.”

*n***Acts 2:4 languages** This can also be translated “tongues.”

*n*2 Kings 23:12 roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*2 Kings 23:13 Mount of Olives Literally, “The Mountain of Ruin.”

*n***2 Kings 24:18 Jeremiah** This is not the prophet Jeremiah, but a different man with the same name.

*n***Acts 2:30 God … was** See 2 Samuel 7:13; Psalm 132:11.

*n***Acts 2:35 until ... control** Literally, “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

*n***Acts 2:42 breaking bread** This may mean a meal as in verse 46, or the Lord's Supper, the special meal Jesus told his followers to eat to remember him (Luke 22:14–20).

*n***Acts 3:14 murderer** Barabbas, the man the crowd asked Pilate to set free instead of Jesus (Luke 23:18).

*n***Acts 3:22–23 ‘The Lord … people.’** Quotation from Deuteronomy 18:15, 19.

*n*__Acts 3:25 ‘Through … blessed.’__ Quotation from Genesis 22:18; 26:4.

*n*1 Chronicles 1:7 **Kittim** His descendants were the people of Cyprus.

*n***1 Chronicles 1:8 Mizraim** This is another name for Egypt.

*n* **1 Chronicles 1:19 Peleg** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “divided.”

*n*1 **Chronicles 2:1 Israel** Another name for Jacob.

*n***Acts 4:11 stone** A symbol meaning Jesus.

*n*1 Chronicles 4:9 Jabez This name in Hebrew sounds like the word for “pain.”

*n* **1 Chronicles 6:67 cities of safety** A person who had accidentally killed someone could go to one of the six cities of safety to receive protection and a fair trial.

*n* **1 Chronicles 7:23 Beriah** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “trouble.”

*n***Acts 5:37 registration** Census. A counting of all the people and the things they own.

*n***Acts 6:5 Philip** Not the apostle named Philip.

*n***Acts 6:6 laid their hands** The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

*n***Acts 6:9 Free Men** Jewish people who had been slaves or whose fathers had been slaves, but were now free.

*n* **1 Chronicles 11:11 Three** Or maybe “Thirty.” These were David’s most powerful soldiers. See 2 Samuel 23:8.

*n***Acts 7:3 ‘Leave … you.’** Quotation from Genesis 12:1.

*n***Acts 7:6–7 ‘Your descendants … place.’** Quotation from Genesis 15:13–14 and Exodus 3:12.

*n***Acts 7:8 twelve ancestors** Important ancestors of the people of Israel; the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel.

*n* **1 Chronicles 14:11 Baal Perazim** This name means “the Lord breaks through.”

*n***Acts 7:27–28 ‘Who … yesterday?’** Quotation from Exodus 2:14.

*n***Acts 7:32 ‘I am … Jacob.’** Quotation from Exodus 3:6.

*n***Acts 7:33–34 ‘Take … Egypt.’** Quotation from Exodus 3:5–10.

*n***Acts 7:35 ‘Who … judge?’** Quotation from Exodus 2:14.

*n***Acts 7:37 ‘God … people.’** Quotation from Deuteronomy 18:15.

*n*__Acts 7:40 ‘Make … him.’__ Quotation from Exodus 32:1.

*n***Acts 7:46 Jacob** Some Greek copies read “the house of Jacob.” This means the people of Israel.

*n* **1 Chronicles 18:17 Kerethites and Pelethites** These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king’s safety, a kind of palace guard.

*n***1 Chronicles 20:2 their king** Or, “Milcom,” the god of the Ammonite people.

*n***Acts 8:37 Philip ... God."** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n* **1 Chronicles 21:2 Beersheba to Dan** Beersheba was the city farthest south in Israel. Dan was the city farthest north. So this means all the people of Israel.

*n* **1 Chronicles 22:9 Solomon** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “peace.”

*n***Acts 9:11 Judas** This is not either of the apostles named Judas.

*n***Psalm 78:51 Ham** The people in Egypt were descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons. See Genesis 10:6.

*n***1 Chronicles 27:6 Thirty** These were David's most powerful soldiers. See 2 Samuel 23:24.

*n***Acts 10:9 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n***Acts 10:37 John** John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Luke 3).

*n***Acts 10:46 languages** This can also be translated “tongues.”

*n***Acts 11:20 Greeks** Some Greek copies read “Hellenists,” non-Greeks who spoke Greek.

*n***2 Chronicles 3:6 Parvaim** There was much gold there. It may have been in the country of Ophir.

*n*2 **Chronicles 5:10 stone tablets** They were the two stone tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments.

*n***Acts 13:2 fasting** The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done sometimes to show sadness and disappointment.

*n***Acts 13:3 laid their hands on** The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

*n***Acts 13:18 And … them** Some Greek copies read “And he cared for them.”

*n***Acts 13:24 John** John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Luke 3).

*n***Acts 13:51 shook ... feet** A warning. It showed that they had rejected these people.

*n***Acts 14:12 “Zeus”** The Greeks believed in many false gods, of whom Zeus was most important.

*n***Acts 14:12 “Hermes”** The Greeks believed he was a messenger for the other gods.

*n***Acts 14:23 fasting** The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done sometimes to show sadness and disappointment.

*n***Acts 15:34 but ... there** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Acts 16:11 Neapolis** City in Macedonia. It was the first city Paul visited on the continent of Europe.

*n***Acts 16:12 Roman colony** A town begun by Romans with Roman laws, customs, and privileges.

*n*2 **Chronicles 18:1 agreement ... through marriage** Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram married Athaliah, Ahab's daughter. See 2 Chronicles 21:6.

*n*__Acts 16:16 spirit__ This was a spirit from the devil, which caused her to say she had special knowledge.

*n***Acts 16:27 kill himself** He thought the leaders would kill him for letting the prisoners escape.

*n***Acts 16:37 Roman citizens** Roman law said that Roman citizens must not be beaten before they had a trial.

*n*2 **Chronicles 20:26 Beracah** This name means “blessing” or “praise.”

*n***Acts 17:18 Epicurean and Stoic philosophers** Philosophers were those who searched for truth. Epicureans believed that pleasures, especially pleasures of the mind, were the goal of life. Stoics believed that life should be without feelings of joy or grief.

*n***Acts 17:19 Areopagus** A council or group of important leaders in Athens. They were like judges.

*n***Acts 18:2 Claudius** The emperor (ruler) of Rome, A.D. 41–54.

*n***Acts 18:6 shook ... clothes** This was a warning to show that Paul was finished talking to the people in that city.

*n***Acts 18:18 cut ... hair** Jews did this to show that the time of a special promise to God was finished.

*n***Acts 18:25 John** John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Luke 3).

*n*2 **Chronicles 25:4 “Parents … sins.”** See Deuteronomy 24:16.

*n*2 **Chronicles 26:1 Uzziah** Also called Azariah.

*n***Acts 19:6 laid his hands on them** The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

*n***Acts 19:6 languages** This can also be translated “tongues.”

*n***Acts 19:19 fifty thousand silver coins** Probably drachmas. One coin was enough to pay a worker for one day's labor.

*n***Acts 19:24 Artemis** A Greek goddess that the people of Asia Minor worshiped.

*n***Acts 19:35 holy stone** Probably a meteorite or stone that the people thought looked like Artemis.

*n***Acts 20:7 first day of the week** Sunday, which for Jews began at sunset on our Saturday. But if in this part of Asia a different system of time was used, then the meeting was on our Sunday night.

*n***Acts 20:7 break bread** Probably the Lord’s Supper, the special meal that Jesus told his followers to eat to remember him (Luke 22:14–20).

*n***Proverbs 21:9 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*2 **Chronicles 30:5 Beersheba to Dan** Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

*n***2 Chronicles 32:24 sign** See Isaiah 38:1–8. It tells the story about the sign and how the Lord gave Hezekiah fifteen more years to live.

*n*2 **Chronicles 32:31 God … heart** See 2 Kings 20:12–19.

*n***Acts 20:28 of God** Some Greek copies read “of the Lord.”

*n*2 **Chronicles 36:21 Sabbath rest** The law said that every seventh year the land was not to be farmed. See Leviticus 25:1–7.

*n***Acts 21:8 helpers** The seven men chosen for a special work described in Acts 6:1–6. Sometimes they are called “deacons.”

*n***Acts 21:24 cleansing ceremony** The special things Jews did to end the Nazirite promise.

*n***Acts 21:24 shave their heads** Jews did this to show that their promise was finished.

*n***Acts 22:2 Hebrew language** Or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

*n***Acts 22:3 Gamaliel** A very important teacher of the Pharisees, a Jewish religious group (Acts 5:34).

*n***Acts 22:23 threw off their coats** This showed that the people were very angry with Paul.

*n***Acts 22:23 threw dust into the air** This showed even greater anger.

*n***Acts 22:25 Roman citizen** Roman law said that Roman citizens must not be beaten before they had a trial.

*n***Acts 23:2 Ananias** This is not the same man named Ananias in Acts 22:12.

*n***Acts 23:5 ‘You … people.’** Quotation from Exodus 22:28.

*n***Ezra 7:1 After these things** There is a time period of about sixty years between chapters six and seven.

*n***Acts 24:6–8 And ... you.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n***Nehemiah 1:1 twentieth year** This is probably referring to the twentieth year King Artaxerxes I ruled Persia.

*n***Acts 25:21 emperor** The ruler of the Roman Empire, which was almost all the known world.

*n***Nehemiah 3:16 Nehemiah** This is a different Nehemiah than the one who wrote this book.

*n***Acts 26:14 Hebrew language** Or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

*n***Acts 27:1 emperor** The ruler of the Roman Empire, which was almost all the known world.

*n***Acts 27:9 Day of Cleansing** An important Jewish holy day in the fall of the year. This was the time of year that bad storms arose on the sea.

*n***Acts 27:17 Syrtis** Shallow area in the sea near the Libyan coast.

*n***Nehemiah 8:16 roofs** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n***Acts 27:27 Adriatic Sea** The sea between Greece and Italy, including the central Mediterranean.

*n***Act 28:4 Justice** The people thought there was a god named Justice who would punish bad people.

*n***Acts 28:8 dysentery** A sickness like diarrhea.

*n***Acts 28:10–11 twin gods** Statues of Castor and Pollux, gods in old Greek tales.

*n***Acts 28:15 Market of Appius** A town about twenty-seven miles from Rome.

*n***Acts 28:15 Three Inns** A town about thirty miles from Rome.

*n***Acts 28:29 After ... other.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n*__Romans 1:17 “But those ... faith.”__ Quotation from Habakkuk 2:4.

*n***Romans 2:24 “Those … you.”** Quotation from Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:20.

*n***Romans 4:1, 13 Abraham** Most respected ancestor of the Jews. Every Jew hoped to see Abraham.

*n***Romans 4:3 “Abraham … God.”** Quotation from Genesis 15:6.

*n***Romans 4:17 “I … nations.”** Quotation from Genesis 17:5.

*n*__Romans 4:18 “Your … count.”__ Quotation from Genesis 15:5.

*n***Romans 4:22 “God … God.”** Quotation from Genesis 15:6.

*n*__Romans 5:1 we have__ Some Greek copies read “let us have.”

*n***Romans 5:2 through our faith** Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n*__Job 1:6 Satan__ Or “the accuser.”

*n***Romans 7:7 “You … things.”** Quotation from Exodus 20:17.

*n***Job 4:19 clay houses** This is probably talking about people’s bodies.

*n***Romans 8:1 guilty** Some Greek copies continue, “those who do not live in the power of their sinful selves, but in the power of the Spirit.”

*n***Romans 8:2 you** Some Greek copies read “me.”

*n*__Romans 8:11 through__ Some Greek copies read “because of.”

*n***Romans 8:15 “Father”** Literally, “Abba, Father.” Jewish children called their fathers “Abba.”

*n***Romans 8:28 We ... him.** Some Greek copies read “We know that everything works together for good for those who love God.”

*n*__Romans 8:29 firstborn__ Here this probably means that Christ was the first in God's family to share God's glory.

*n***Romans 9:5 born ... forever!** This can also mean “born. May God, who rules over all things, be praised forever!”

*n*__Romans 9:6 God's people__ Literally, "Israel," the people God chose to bring his blessings to the world.

*n***Romans 9:7 Abraham** Most respected ancestor of the Jews. Every Jew hoped to see Abraham.

*n***Romans 9:7 “The descendants … Isaac.”** Quotation from Genesis 21:12.

*n***Romans 9:9 “At … son.”** Quotation from Genesis 18:10, 14.

*n***Romans 9:11–12 “The older … younger.”** Quotation from Genesis 25:23.

*n***Romans 9:13 “I … Esau.”** Quotation from Malachi 1:2–3.

*n***Romans 9:15 “I … mercy.”** Quotation from Exodus 33:19.

*n***Romans 9:17 “I … earth.”** Quotation from Exodus 9:16.

*n***Job 9:9 Bear ... Pleiades** Names of well-known groups of stars.

*n***Romans 9:29 Sodom and Gomorrah** Two cities that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

*n***Romans 10:5 “A person … them.”** Quotation from Leviticus 18:5.

*n***Romans 10:6–8 But … heart."** Quotations from Deuteronomy 9:4; 30:12–14; Psalm 107:26.

*n***Romans 10:11 “Anyone … disappointed.”** Quotation from Isaiah 28:16.

*n***Romans 10:13 “Anyone … saved.”** Quotation from Joel 2:32.

*n***Romans 10:15 “How … news.”** Quotation from Isaiah 52:7.

*n***Romans 10:16 “Lord, … them?”** Quotation from Isaiah 53:1.

*n***Romans 11:3 “they … too”** Quotation from 1 Kings 19:10, 14.

*n***Romans 11:4 “But … Baal.”** Quotation from 1 Kings 19:18.

*n***Romans 11:26 Jacob** Father of the twelve family groups of Israel, the people God chose to be his people.

*n*__Romans 11:31 can__ Some Greek copies read “can now.”

*n***Romans 12:19 “I … them.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 32:35.

*n***Romans 13:9 “You … things.”** Quotation from Exodus 20:13–15, 17.

*n***Romans 13:9 “Love … yourself.”** Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

*n***Romans 13:12 “night”** This is used as a symbol of the sinful world we live in. This world will soon end.

*n***Romans 13:12 “day”** This is used as a symbol of the good time that is coming, when we will be with God.

*n***Romans 14:2 all ... food** The Jewish law said there were some foods Jews should not eat. When Jews became Christians, some of them did not understand they could now eat all foods.

*n***Romans 15:3 “When … me.”** Quotation from Psalm 69:9.

*n***Romans 15:12 Jesse** Jesse was the father of David, king of Israel. Jesus was from their family.

*n*__Romans 16:1 helper__ Literally, “deaconess.” This might mean the same as one of the special women helpers in 1 Timothy 3:11.

*n***Romans 16:24 The ... Amen.** Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text.

*n* **1 Corinthians 1:17 cross** Paul uses the cross as a picture of the Good News, the story of Christ's death and rising from the dead for people's sins. The cross, or Christ's death, was God's way to save people.

*n* **1 Corinthians 1:31 “If … Lord.”** Quotation from Jeremiah 9:24.

*n*1 **Corinthians 2:1 God’s secret** Some Greek copies read “God’s message.”

*n* **1 Corinthians 3:13 Day of Judgment** The day Christ will come to judge all people and take his people home to live with him.

*n*1 Corinthians 3:19 **“He … traps.”** Quotation from Job 5:13.

*n*1 Corinthians 3:20 **“The Lord … wind.”** Quotation from Psalm 94:11.

*n*1 Corinthians 5:5 sinful self Literally, “flesh.” This could also mean his body.

*n* **1 Corinthians 5:12–13 “You … you.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7.

*n***Job 40:15 Behemoth** A large land animal, exact identity unknown.

*n*1 Corinthians 6:16 **“The two … body.”** Quotation from Genesis 2:24.

*n*__Job 41:1 Leviathan__ A sea creature, exact identity unknown.

*n*1 **Corinthians 7:15 us** Some Greek copies read “you.”

*n***1 Corinthians 8:10 idol's temple** Building where a god is worshiped.

*n* **1 Corinthians 9:9 “When an ox … eating.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 25:4.

*n*1 Corinthians 10:7 **“They ... sexually.”** Quotation from Exodus 32:6.

*n* **1 Corinthians 10:16 cup of blessing** The cup of the fruit of the vine that Christians thank God for and drink at the Lord's Supper.

*n* **1 Corinthians 10:26 “because ... it”** Quotation from Psalms 24:1; 50:12; 89:11.

*n*1 Corinthians 11:3 the man This could also mean “her husband.”

*n***Song of Songs 1:7 veil** This was the way a prostitute usually dressed.

*n* **1 Corinthians 11:20 Lord's Supper** The meal Jesus told his followers to eat to remember him (Luke 22:14–20).

*n*1 Corinthians 11:24 it is Some Greek copies read “it is broken.”

*n***Song of Songs 3:7 couch** Something like a bed carried by slaves on which the king lay or sat while traveling.

*n* **1 Corinthians 12:10, 28 languages** This can also be translated “tongues.”

*n* **1 Corinthians 13:1 languages** This can also be translated “tongues.”

*n* **1 Corinthians 13:3 give ... burned** Other Greek copies read “hand over my body in order that I may brag.”

*n* **1 Corinthians 14:2 languages** This can also be translated “tongues.”

*n* **1 Corinthians 14:16 amen** To say amen means to agree with the things that were said.

*n* **1 Corinthians 14:26 language** This can also be translated “tongue.”

*n* **1 Corinthians 14:38 Those … God.** Some Greek copies read “Those who are ignorant of this will stay ignorant.”

*n*1 Corinthians 15:27 God put ... control. From Psalm 8:6.

*n*1 Corinthians 15:32 **“Let us … die.”** Quotation from Isaiah 22:13; 56:12.

*n***Psalm 105:23 Jacob** Also called Israel.

*n***Psalm 105:23 Egypt** Literally, “the land of Ham.” Also in verse 27. The people in Egypt were descendants of Ham, one of Noah’s sons. See Genesis 10:6.

*n*1 Corinthians 15:45 **“The first … person.”** Quotation from Genesis 2:7.

*n* **1 Corinthians 15:49 so we will** Some Greek copies read “so let us.”

*n***Isaiah 7:2 Israel** Literally, “Ephraim.” Isaiah often uses “Ephraim” to mean all of Israel.

*n***Isaiah 7:3 Shear-Jashub** This name means “a part of the people will come back.”

*n*__Isaiah 7:14 virgin__ The Hebrew word means “a young woman.” Often this meant a girl who was not married and had not yet had sexual relations with anyone.

*n*__Isaiah 7:14 Immanuel__ This name means “God is with us.”

*n***Isaiah 8:3 Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz** This name means “there will soon be looting and stealing.”

*n*1 Corinthians 16:24 My … Jesus. Some Greek copies add “Amen.”

*n*2 **Corinthians 1:12 honest** Some Greek copies read “holy.”

*n*__Isaiah 11:1 Jesse__ King David’s father.

*n***Psalm 106:22 Egypt** Literally, “the land of Ham.” The people in Egypt were descendants of Ham, one of Noah’s sons. See Genesis 10:6.

*n***2 Corinthians 3:3 stone tablets** Meaning the Law of Moses that was written on stone tablets (Exodus 24:12; 25:16).

*n***Isaiah 15:3 roofs** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*2 **Corinthians 4:13 “I … spoke.”** Quotation from Psalm 116:10.

*n* **2 Corinthians 6:16 “I … people.”** Quotation from Leviticus 26:11–12; Jeremiah 32:38; Ezekiel 37:27.

*n***Isaiah 21:1 Desert by the Sea** Probably Babylon.

*n***Isaiah 21:11 Dumah** Another name for Edom.

*n***Isaiah 22:1 Valley of Vision** This probably means a valley near Jerusalem.

*n***Isaiah 22:1 roofs** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*2 **Corinthians 8:7 in … us** Some Greek copies read “in your love for us.”

*n*2 **Corinthians 8:15 “The person … little.”** Quotation from Exodus 16:18.

*n*2 Corinthians 10:17 “If … Lord.” Quotation from Jeremiah 9:24.

*n*2 **Corinthians 11:14 angel of light** Messenger from God. The devil fools people so thatthey think he is from God.

*n***Isaiah 30:33 Topheth Gehenna; the Valley of Hinnom.** Here people burned the bodies of criminals and animals, along with garbage.

*n***Proverbs 25:24 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*2 Corinthians 11:22 Hebrews A name for the Jews that some Jews were very proud of.

*n* **2 Corinthians 12:1 revelations** Revelation is making known a truth that was hidden.

*n*2 **Corinthians 12:3–4 paradise** Another word for heaven.

*n*2 Corinthians 12:7 **painful physical problem** Literally, “thorn in the flesh.”

*n* **2 Corinthians 13:1 “Every ... witnesses.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 19:15.

*n***Isaiah 38:12 loom** A machine for making cloth from thread.

*n***Galatians 1:2 those ... family** The Greek text says “brothers.”

*n***Galatians 1:2 Galatia** Probably the same country where Paul preached and began churches on his first missionary trip. Read the Book of Acts, chapters 13 and 14.

*n***Isaiah 41:25 someone ... north** This probably means Cyrus, a king of Persia.

*n*Galatians 3:6 **“Abraham ... God.”** Quotation from Genesis 15:6.

*n*Galatians 3:8 **“All … you.”** Quotation from Genesis 12:3 and 18:18.

*n*Galatians 3:10 **“Anyone … Law.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 27:26.

*n*Galatians 3:11 **“Those … faith.”** Quotation from Habakkuk 2:4.

*n***Galatians 3:12 “A person … them.”** Quotation from Leviticus 18:5.

*n* **Galatians 3:13 displayed on a tree** Deuteronomy 21:22–23 says that when a person was killed for doing wrong, the body was hung on a tree to show shame. Paul means that the cross of Jesus was like that.

*n***Galatians 3:19 mediator** A person who helps one person talk to or give something to another person.

*n***Galatians 4:6 “Father”** Literally, “Abba, Father.” Jewish children called their fathers “Abba.”

*n***Isaiah 44:28 Cyrus** A king of Persia who ruled from about 550–530 B.C.

*n***Galatians 4:17 Those people** They are the false teachers who were bothering the believers in Galatia (Galatians 1:7).

*n***Galatians 4:24 Mount Sinai** Mountain in Arabia where God gave his Law to Moses (Exodus 19 and 20).

*n*__Galatians 4:30 “Throw ... all.”__ Quotation from Genesis 21:10.

*n***Galatians 5:12 castrate** To cut off part of the male sex organ. Paul uses this word because it is similar to “circumcision.” Paul wanted to show that he is very upset with the false teachers.

*n*__Galatians 5:14 “Love … yourself.”__ Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

*n*__Isaiah 48:15 him__ This probably refers to Cyrus king of Persia.

*n***Galatians 6:12 cross of Christ** Paul uses the cross as a picture of the Good News, the story of Christ's death and rising from the dead to pay for our sins. The cross, or Christ's death, was God's way to save us.

*n***Galatians 6:17 that show** Many times Paul was beaten and whipped by people who were against him because he was teaching about Christ. The scars were from these beatings.

*n*__Ephesians 1:1 in Ephesus__ Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n***Ephesians 2:11 “uncircumcised”** People not having the mark of circumcision as the Jews had.

*n* **Ephesians 2:12 agreements** The agreements that God gave to his people in the Old Testament.

*n***Ephesians 2:20 most important stone** Literally, “cornerstone.” The first and most important stone in a building.

*n***Ephesians 4:25 Tell … body.** Quotation from Zechariah 8:16.

*n***Ephesians 5:31 “So … body.”** Quotation from Genesis 2:24.

*n*__Ephesians 6:2 “Honor ... mother.”__ Quotation from Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16.

*n***Ephesians 6:3 “Then … earth.”** Quotation from Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16.

*n***Isaiah 66:3 dogs ... pigs** God did not want his people to offer dogs and pigs as sacrifices because they were unclean animals.

*n***Philippians 3:2 cut** The word in Greek is like the word “circumcise,” but it means “to cut completely off.”

*n***Philippians 4:3 book of life** God's book that has the names of all God's chosen people (Revelation 3:5; 21:27).

*n***Colossians 1:2 Father** Some Greek copies continue, “and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

*n*__Colossians 1:7 for us__ Some Greek copies read “for you.”

*n*__Colossians 1:12 you__ Some Greek copies read “us.”

*n*__Colossians 1:14 sins__ Some Greek copies continue, “with his blood.”

*n*__Colossians 3:4 your__ Some Greek copies read “our.”

*n***Colossians 3:6 These ... angry** Some Greek copies continue, “against the people who do not obey God.”

*n***Colossians 3:11 Scythians** The Scythians were known as very wild and cruel people.

*n***Colossians 3:15 body** The spiritual body of Christ, meaning the church or his people.

*n***Colossians 4:8 so ... are** Some Greek copies read “so he may know how you are.”

*n*1 Thessalonians 2:7 But ... you Some Greek copies read “But we were like infants among you.”

*n* **1 Thessalonians 2:14 Judea** The Jewish land where Jesus lived and taught and where the church first began.

*n***Jeremiah 19:13 roofs** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n* **1 Thessalonians 4:4 learn ... body** This might also mean “learn to live with your own wife.”

*n*1 **Thessalonians 4:16 archangel** The leader among God's angels or messengers.

*n* **2 Thessalonians 2:3 turning away** Or “the rebellion.”

*n*2 **Thessalonians 2:3 Man of Evil** Some Greek copies read “Man of Sin.”

*n* **2 Thessalonians 2:13 God ... beginning** Some Greek copies read “God chose you as the firstfruits of the harvest.”

*n***Jeremiah 32:29 roofs** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n***Jeremiah 34:18 They ... pieces.** This showed that the men were willing to be killed, like this animal, if they did not keep their agreement.

*n* **1 Timothy 3:11 women** This might mean the wives of the deacons, or it might mean women who serve in the same way as deacons.

*n* **1 Timothy 3:16 He** Some Greek copies read “God.”

*n***Jeremiah 35:3 Jeremiah** Not the prophet Jeremiah, but a different man with the same name.

*n* **1 Timothy 4:10 struggle** Some Greek copies read “suffer.”

*n* **1 Timothy 4:14 laid their hands on** The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

*n*1 Timothy 5:18 “When … eating.” Quotation from Deuteronomy 25:4.

*n*1 **Timothy 5:18 “A worker … pay.”** Quotation from Luke 10:7.

*n* **1 Timothy 5:22 lay your hands on** The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

*n***Jeremiah 41:5 shaved ... themselves** The men did this to show they were sad about the Temple in Jerusalem being destroyed.

*n*2 **Timothy 1:6 laid my hands on** The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

*n***2 Timothy 1:12 day** The day Christ will come to judge all people and take his people to live with him.

*n*2 **Timothy 2:19 “The Lord … him.”** Quotation from Numbers 16:5.

*n***2 Timothy 4:8 day** The day Christ will come to judge all people and take his people to live with him.

*n***Jeremiah 47:5 sad and ... yourselves** The people did these things to show their sadness.

*n***Jeremiah 48:2 Madmen** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “be silenced.”

*n***Jeremiah 48:37 Every head ... waist.** The people did these things to show their sadness for those who had died.

*n***Jeremiah 48:38 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*2 **Timothy 4:13 parchment** A writing paper made from the skins of sheep.

*n***Jeremiah 52:1 Jeremiah** This is not the prophet Jeremiah but a different man with the same name.

*n***Lamentations 1:1 she** In this poem the city of Jerusalem is described as a woman.

*n***Hebrews 1:6 “Let … him.”** These words are found in Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, and in a Hebrew copy among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

*n***Hebrews 1:13 until ... control** Literally, “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

*n***Hebrews 2:7 You ... honor.** Some Greek copies continue, “You put them in charge of everything you made.” See Psalm 8:6.

*n***Hebrews 2:16 Abraham** Most respected ancestor of the Jews. Every Jew hoped to see Abraham.

*n***Hebrews 3:11 rest** A place of rest God promised to give his people.

*n***Hebrews 3:13 “today”** This word is taken from verse 7. It means that it is important to do these things now.

*n***Ezekiel 8:14 Tammuz** Tammuz was a god in Babylon. Every year people thought this god died when the plants died. After they cried for him, they believed he came back to life, and the plants lived again.

*n***Hebrews 4:2 because ... faith** Some Greek copies read “because they did not share the faith of those who heard it.”

*n***Hebrews 4:4 “And … works.”** Quotation from Genesis 2:2.

*n***Hebrews 4:8 Joshua** After Moses died, Joshua became leader of the Jewish people and led them into the land that God promised to give them.

*n***Hebrews 4:9 rest** Literally, “sabbath rest,” meaning a sharing in the rest that God began after he created the world.

*n*__Hebrews 5:4 Aaron__ Moses’ brother and the first Jewish high priest.

*n***Hebrews 5:6 Melchizedek** A priest and king who lived in the time of Abraham. (Read Genesis 14:17–24.)

*n***Hebrews 6:2 baptisms** The word here may refer to Christian baptism, or it may refer to the Jewish ceremonial washings.

*n***Hebrews 6:2 laying on of hands** The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

*n***Hebrews 6:14 “I … descendants.”** Quotation from Genesis 22:17.

*n***Hebrews 6:20 Melchizedek** A priest and king who lived in the time of Abraham. (Read Genesis 14:17–24.)

*n***Hebrews 7:1, 15 Melchizedek** A priest and king who lived in the time of Abraham. (Read Genesis 14:17–24.)

*n***Hebrews 7:3 No ... was** Literally, “Melchizedek was without father, without mother, without genealogy.”

*n***Hebrews 7:11 The ... law** This refers to the people of Israel who were given the Law of Moses.

*n* **Hebrews 7:22 agreement** God gives a contract or agreement to his people. For the Jews, this agreement was the Law of Moses. But now God has given a better agreement to his people through Christ.

*n* **Ezekiel 16:4 cord** The umbilical cord that gives the unborn baby food and air from its mother.

*n***Hebrews 8:5 “Be … mountain.”** Quotation from Exodus 25:40.

*n***Hebrews 8:7 first agreement** The contract God gave the Jewish people when he gave them the Law of Moses.

*n***Hebrews 8:8 But ... says** Some Greek copies read “But God found something wrong and says to his people.”

*n***Hebrews 9:1 first agreement** The contract God gave the Jewish people when he gave them the Law of Moses.

*n***Hebrews 9:11 good … have** Some Greek copies read “good things that are to come.”

*n***Hebrews 9:14 Spirit** This refers to the Holy Spirit, to Christ's own spirit, or to the spiritual and eternal nature of his sacrifice.

*n***Hebrews 9:16 will** A legal document that shows how a person's money and property are to be distributed at the time of death. This is the same word in Greek as "agreement" in verse 15.

*n***Hebrews 9:20 “This … obey.”** Quotation from Exodus 24:8.

*n***Hebrews 10:16 agreement** God gives a contract or agreement to his people. For the Jews, this agreement was the Law of Moses. But now God has given a better agreement to his people through Christ.

*n***Hebrews 10:25 day** The day Christ will come to judge all people and take his people to live with him.

*n***Hebrews 10:30 “I … them.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 32:35.

*n***Hebrews 10:30 “The Lord … people.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 32:36; Psalm 135:14.

*n***Ezekiel 23:4 Oholah ... Jerusalem** Throughout this chapter Samaria is used in place of Oholah, and Jerusalem is used in place of Oholibah.

*n***Hebrews 11:10 city** The spiritual “city” where God’s people live with him. Also called “the heavenly Jerusalem.” (See Hebrews 12:22.)

*n* **Hebrews 11:11 It ... promised.** Some Greek copies refer to Sarah's faith, rather than Abraham's.

*n***Hebrews 11:18 “The descendants … Isaac.”** Quotation from Genesis 21:12.

*n***Hebrews 11:37 they were cut in half** Some Greek copies also include, “they were tested.”

*n***Ezekiel 27:9 caulk** Something like tar put between the boards of a ship to make it waterproof.

*n***Hebrews 12:20 “If … stones.”** Quotation from Exodus 19:12–13.

*n***Hebrews 12:21 “I … fear.”** Quotation from Deuteronomy 9:19.

*n***Hebrews 12:22 Mount Zion** Another name for Jerusalem, here meaning the spiritual city of God's people.

*n***Hebrews 12:23 firstborn** The first son born in a Jewish family was given the most important place in the family and received special blessings. All of God's children are like that.

*n***Hebrews 12:24 sprinkled blood** The blood of Jesus' death.

*n***Hebrews 12:24 Abel** The son of Adam and Eve, who was killed by his brother Cain (Genesis 4:8).

*n***Hebrews 12:26 “Once … heavens.”** Quotation from Haggai 2:6, 21.

*n***James 2:8 “Love … yourself.”** Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

*n***James 2:11 "You ... adultery."** Quotation from Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18.

*n***James 2:11 “You … anyone.”** Quotation from Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17.

*n***James 2:23 “Abraham … God.”** Quotation from Genesis 15:6.

*n***James 2:23 God's friend** These words about Abraham are found in 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8.

*n***Ezekiel 37:9 wind** This Hebrew word could also mean “breath” or “spirit.”

*n***James 4:5 “The Spirit … alone.”** These words may be from Exodus 20:5.

*n***James 5:14 pour oil on the person** Oil was used in the name of the Lord as a sign that the person was now set apart for God’s special attention and care.

*n* **1 Peter 1:16 “You must be ... holy.”** Quotation from Leviticus 11:45; 19:2; 20:7.

*n* **1 Peter 1:22 with all your heart** Some Greek copies read “with a pure heart.”

*n***1 Peter 2:4 "stone"** The most important stone in God's spiritual temple or house (his people).

*n*__Ezekiel 45:11 homer__ The Hebrew word means “donkey-load.” It measured about five dry bushels or one hundred seventy-five liquid quarts. So an ephah was about one-half bushel, and a bath was about eighteen quarts.

*n***Ezekiel 45:12 shekel** In Ezekiel's time a shekel weighed about two-fifths of an ounce.

*n* **1 Peter 4:18 “If … lost!”** Quotation from Proverbs 11:31 in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament.

*n***Daniel 3:5 zithers** Musical instruments with thirty to forty strings.

*n***Daniel 4:18 Belteshazzar** Another name for Daniel.

*n***Daniel 4:29 roof** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n*2 **Peter 2:4 caves** Some Greek copies read “chains.”

*n*2 **Peter 2:6 Sodom and Gomorrah** Two cities God destroyed because the people were so evil.

*n*2 **Peter 2:11 before** Some Greek copies read “from.”

*n*2 **Peter 2:22 “A dog … up.”** Quotation from Proverbs 26:11.

*n* **2 Peter 3:10 and … exposed** Some Greek copies read “and everything in it will be burned up.”

*n*1 **John 1:1 Word** The Greek word is “logos,” meaning any kind of communication. Here, it means Christ, who was the way God told people about himself.

*n*1 John 1:4 so ... joy Some Greek copies read “so you may be full of joy.”

*n*1 John 1:5 **light** Here, it is used as a symbol of God’s goodness or truth.

*n*1 John 2:9 light Here, it is used as a symbol of God’s goodness or truth.

*n* **1 John 2:20 gift** This might mean the Holy Spirit, or it might mean teaching or truth as in verse 24.

*n*1 John 2:20 you ... truth Some Greek copies read “so you know all things.”

*n***Hosea 1:6 Lo-Ruhamah** This name in Hebrew means “not pitied.”

*n***Hosea 1:9 Lo-Ammi** This name in Hebrew means “not my people.”

*n*__Hosea 1:11 Jezreel__ This name in Hebrew means “God plants.”

*n***Hosea 2:2 mother** Refers to the nation of Israel here.

*n***Hosea 2:5 lovers** Refers to the nations surrounding Israel, who led Israel to worship false gods.

*n***Hosea 2:7 husband** Refers to God here.

*n***Hosea 2:16 baal** Another Hebrew word for husband, but it was the same word as the false god Baal.

*n***Hosea 2:22 Jezreel** This name in Hebrew means “God plants.”

*n* **1 John 3:15 Everyone ... murderer** If one person hates a brother or sister, then in the heart that person has killed that brother or sister. Jesus taught about this sin to his followers (Matthew 5:21–26).

*n***Hosea 3:1 raisin cakes** This food was eaten in the feasts that honored false gods.

*n***Hosea 4:5 mother** Refers to the nation of Israel here.

*n***Hosea 4:15 Gilgal ... Beth Aven** Cities in Israel where people worshiped false gods.

*n***Hosea 6:9 Shechem** A city of safety where people could go for protection.

*n*1 John 5:6 water This probably means the water of Jesus' baptism.

*n*1 John 5:6 blood** This probably means the blood of Jesus' death.

*n* **1 John 5:7–8 So … witnesses** A few very late Greek copies and the Latin Vulgate continue, “in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three witnesses agree. 8And there are three witnesses on earth:”

*n***2 John 1 Elder** “Elder” means an older person. It can also mean a special leader in the church (as in Titus 1:5).

*n***2 John 1 lady** This might mean a woman, or in this letter it might mean a church. If it is a church, then “her children” would be the people of the church.

*n*2 **John 1 truth** The truth or “Good News” about Jesus Christ that joins all believers together.

*n*2 **John 8 you** Some Greek copies read “we.”

*n***2 John 13 sister** Sister of the “lady” in verse 1. This might be another woman or another church.

*n*__Hosea 9:6 Memphis__ A city in Egypt famous for its tombs.

*n***Hosea 9:9 Gibeah** The sins of the people of Gibeah caused a civil war. See Judges 19–21.

*n* **Hosea 10:9 Gibeah** The sins of the people of Gibeah caused a civil war. See Judges 19–21.

*n***3 John 1 Elder** “Elder” means an older person. It can also mean a special leader in the church (as in Titus 1:5).

*n*3 **John 1 truth** The truth or “Good News” about Jesus Christ that joins all believers together.

*n***Hosea 11:8 Admah ... Zeboiim** Two other cities destroyed when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

*n*__Jude 5 the Lord__ Some Greek copies read “Jesus.”

*n***Jude 7 Sodom and Gomorrah** Two cities God destroyed because they were so evil.

*n***Jude 9 archangel** The leader among God’s angels or messengers.

*n***Revelation 1:1 revelation** Making known truth that has been hidden.

*n***Revelation 1:8 Alpha and the Omega** The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This means “the beginning and the end.”

*n***Revelation 1:9 Patmos** A small island in the Aegean Sea, near the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

*n***Revelation 1:13 “like … Man”** “Son of Man” is a name Jesus called himself.

*n***Joel 1:4 cutting ... locusts** These are different names for an insect like a large grasshopper. The locust can quickly destroy trees, plants, and crops, and in this destruction, Joel sees a warning. God will cause this type of destruction when he punishes his people.

*n***Joel 2:25 swarming ... locusts** These are different names for an insect like a large grasshopper. The locust can quickly destroy trees, plants, and crops, and in this destruction, Joel sees a warning. God will cause this type of destruction when he punishes his people.

*n***Joel 3:14 Valley of Decision** This is like the name “Valley Where the Lord Judges” in 3:2 and 3:12.

*n***Revelation 2:6, 15 Nicolaitans** This is the name of a religious group that followed false beliefs and ideas.

*n***Amos 1:12 Teman ... Bozrah** Since Teman was in northern Edom and Bozrah was in southern Edom, this means the whole country will be destroyed.

*n***Revelation 3:12 Jerusalem** This name is used to mean the spiritual city God built for his people. See Revelation 21–22.

*n***Revelation 3:14 Amen** Used here as a name for Jesus; it means to agree fully that something is true.

*n***Amos 4:1 Bashan** Amos compares the rich, lazy women of Samaria to well-fed cows from Bashan, a place known for its rich animal pastures.

*n***Amos 6:13 Lo Debar ... Karnaim** These were two not especially significant cities that the Israelites had captured in war.

*n*__Revelation 5:5 Lion__ Here refers to Christ.

*n***Amos 8:2 end** The Hebrew word for “end” sounds like the Hebrew word for “summer fruit.”

*n***Amos 8:14 Dan ... Beersheba** Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south.

*n***Revelation 6:8 Hades** The unseen world of the dead.

*n***Obadiah 1 Edom** The Edomites were the people who came from Esau, Jacob's twin brother. They were enemies of the Israelites.

*n***Obadiah 18 people of Jacob ... Joseph** The people who came from Jacob and Joseph, or the Israelites.

*n***Obadiah 18 people of Esau** The people who came from Esau, or the Edomites.

*n***Revelation 7:14 washed their robes** This means they believed in Jesus so that their sins could be forgiven by Christ's blood.

*n***Revelation 8:11 Wormwood** Name of a very bitter plant; used here to give the idea of bitter sorrow.

*n*__Micah 1:10 Gath__ This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “tell.”

*n***Micah 1:10 Acco** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “cry.”

*n***Micah 1:10 Beth Ophrah** This name means “house of dust.”

*n*__Micah 1:11 Shaphir__ This name means “beautiful.”

*n*__Micah 1:11 Zaanan__ This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “come out.”

*n***Micah 1:11 Beth Ezel** This name means “house by the side of another,” suggesting help or support.

*n***Micah 1:12 Maroth** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “sad” or “miserable.”

*n***Micah 1:13 Lachish** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “horses.”

*n***Micah 1:14 Moresheth** This may be a play on the word “engaged,” referring to a farewell gift to a bride.

*n***Micah 1:14 Aczib** This name means “lie” or “trick.”

*n***Micah 1:15 Mareshah** This name sounds like the Hebrew word for a person who captures other cities and lands.

*n***Revelation 9:3 scorpions** A scorpion is an insect that stings with a bad poison.

*n***Revelation 9:11 Abaddon, Apollyon** Both names mean “Destroyer.”

*n***Micah 4:8 watchtower ... flocks** This probably means a part of Jerusalem. The leaders would be like shepherds in a tower watching their sheep.

*n***Micah 7:4 watchmen** Another name for prophets. The prophets were like guards who stood on a city's wall and watched for trouble coming from far away.

*n***Revelation 11:8 Sodom** City that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

*n***Nahum 1:1 Nineveh** The capital city of the country of Assyria. Nahum uses Nineveh to stand for all of Assyria.

*n***Nahum 2:1 destroyer** The Babylonians, the Scythians, and the Medes destroyed Nineveh.

*n***Nahum 2:5 He** This probably means the king of Assyria.

*n***Nahum 2:11 lions'** The symbol of Assyria was the lion.

*n***Nahum 3:8 Thebes** A great city in Egypt.

*n*__Revelation 12:7 Michael__ The archangel—leader among God's angels or messengers (Jude 9).

*n*__Revelation 12:18 the dragon__ Some Greek copies read “I.”

*n***Habakkuk 3:3 Teman ... Paran** God is seen as again coming from the direction of Mount Sinai. He came from Sinai when he rescued his people from Egypt.

*n***Habakkuk 3:8 sea ... victory** This is probably talking about the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

*n*__Revelation 13:18 666__ Some Greek copies read “616.”

*n***Zaphaniah 1:5 roofs** In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

*n***Zaphaniah 2:9 Sodom ... Gomorrah** Two cities God destroyed because the people were so evil.

*n***Revelation 14:1 Mount Zion** Another name for Jerusalem; here meaning the spiritual city of God's people.

*n***Revelation 14:14 Son of Man** “Son of Man” is a name Jesus called himself.

*n* **Revelation 14:14 sickle** A farming tool with a curved blade. It was used to harvest grain.

*n*__Revelation 15:3 King ... nations__ Some Greek copies read “King of the ages.”

*n***Zechariah 6:13 One man** This probably refers to Zerubbabel.

*n***Zechariah 6:13 other** This probably refers to Joshua.

*n***Zechariah 11:1 trees** In this poem, trees, bushes, and animals stand for leaders of countries around Judah.

*n***Zechariah 11:13 worth** This was a small amount. It was about the price paid for a slave.

*n***Revelation 19:1 Hallelujah** This means “praise God!”

*n***Revelation 20:13 Hades** The place of the dead.

*n***Revelation 21:2 new Jerusalem** The spiritual city where God's people live with him.

*n***Revelation 21:3 and … God** Some Greek copies do not have this phrase.

*n***Revelation 21:6 Alpha and the Omega** The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This means “the beginning and the end.”

*n***Revelation 22:13 Alpha and the Omega** The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This means “the beginning and the end.”

*n***Revelation 22:14 wash their robes** This means they believed and obeyed Jesus so that their sins could be forgiven by Christ's blood. The "washing" may refer to baptism (Acts 22:16).