

March, April, May

# Just For Today

**TCT**

A Daily Approach to Prayer & Scripture



Dear Partner,

As a TCT Partner we consider you a part of our extended family. And we thank you for your financial gifts, prayers, and testimonies that encourage us as we work together to reach the world with the Good News of Jesus.

We pray you will find strength and encouragement for your everyday walk with the Lord through the daily readings of this devotional.

We both want to thank you for standing with us and being a partner with TCT.

May God richly bless your life.

*Garth, Tina  
and Julie*

THURSDAY MARCH 1

“Whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.” Jn 5:19 NRS

## YOU ARE A TRANSLATOR

Jesus acted as a translator. He got His message from the Father, then translated it to those around Him. He heard a voice others were missing. And because He could hear it, He acted differently. Remember when everyone was troubled about the blind man? Jesus wasn't. Somehow He knew that this situation would reveal God's power (See Jn 9:3). Remember when everyone was distraught about Lazarus' illness? Jesus wasn't. Rather than hurry to His friend's bedside, He said, “This sickness will not end in death...it is for God's glory” (Jn 11:4 NIV). How could a relationship be more intimate? Jesus had unbroken communion with His Father. How did He do it? He rose in the predawn hours to pray. He communed with His Father through the night while others slept. He turned from the incessant demands and expectations of others to be sure that His agenda lined up with God's agenda. Do you suppose the Father desires the same for you? Absolutely. Paul says that you have been “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Ro 8:29 NRS). Such a lifestyle is promised, but it's not guaranteed. It comes at a price. Are you prepared to pay that price? John writes: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1Jn 1:3 NIV). Only when you have spent time in God's presence, when you have “seen and heard,” will you be able to talk about Jesus in a way that compels others to listen.

FRIDAY MARCH 2

“Lord, through all the generations you have been our home!”

Ps 90:1 NLT

## AT HOME IN GOD'S PRESENCE

At the end of a hard day it feels good to come home to a place you know—a place where you can kick off your shoes, run around in your bathrobe and not worry about what anybody thinks. And reverently speaking, God's presence can become equally comfortable to you too. With time, you can learn to go there for strength, for protection, and for guidance. God wants you to be at home in His presence and aware of His nearness at all times. We think of God as a deity to discuss instead of a place to dwell, but God wants us to see Him as the One in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Ac 17:28 NIV). When God led the children of Israel through the wilderness, He didn't just show up once a day and then disappear. No, the pillar of fire was present with them all night and the cloud of smoke was present with them all day. God never leaves us. Jesus promised, “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20 NIV). The Psalmist said, “The one thing I ask of the Lord—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (Ps 27:4 NLT). “That's nice,” you say. “I'd love to live in God's house too, but I'm stuck in the real world.” No, just the opposite; you are just one decision away from your Father's presence. You don't need to change your address—just your perception. Wherever you go today, whatever you face today, remind yourself, “He is with me!”

SATURDAY MARCH 3

“All these men of war...were of one mind to make David king.” 1Ch 12:38 NKJV

### MIGHTY MEN AND WOMEN OF GOD (1)

David’s “mighty men” established his rule in Israel. Likewise, you are called to submit to the Lordship of Christ and demonstrate to the world what it’s like to live according to the rules—and benefits—of His kingdom. Jesus would not have taught you to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth,” if it’s a prayer God wouldn’t answer (See Mt 6:10). And He answers it through people like you. So, are you interested in becoming a mighty man or woman of God? Then let’s look at King David’s army. First: They were balanced! “They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left” (1Ch 12:2). When you go to extremes and get out of balance, you hurt God’s kingdom rather than help it. For example, there are nine “gifts” of the Spirit and nine “fruits” of the Spirit listed in Scripture. The gifts are skill sets needed to get the job done. The fruits are Christ-like qualities that help us work together. And you must have both! Notice how God designed the garments of the high priest. On the hem at the bottom of his robe were bells and pomegranates—gifts and fruits. Why? Because the bells would clang harshly against one another. So God placed pomegranates in between to keep it from happening. Getting the idea? If you’re joyful at church but cantankerous at home, you’re out of balance. If you can talk to Christians but you’ve nothing to say to non-Christians, you’re out of balance. Spiritually speaking, you’re supposed to be ambidextrous!

SUNDAY MARCH 4

“All these men of war...were of one mind to make David king.” 1Ch 12:38 NKJV

### MIGHTY MEN AND WOMEN OF GOD (2)

Here’s a second quality found in David’s “mighty men”: They understood the situation and had wisdom to deal with it. “The sons of Issachar...had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (v. 32 NKJV). You are not called to avoid the world, or denounce it, but to engage it and say, “Here’s God’s solution to your problem.” Jesus promised: “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict” (Lk 21:15 NIV). When you walk with the Lord you won’t just see what’s happening around you, He will tell you what to do about it. Furthermore, when you are going the wrong way He will redirect you onto the right path. “They tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them” (Ac 16:7 NKJV). That night God gave Paul a vision directing him to go to Macedonia and preach. God even gave Paul a warning that the ship he was on was heading into a storm that would result in great loss. Unfortunately, nobody would listen to him (See Ac 27:9-11). God not only told Joseph how to prepare for seven years of recession, but how to prosper and come out of it stronger. A lot of us have discovered that if we simply follow the advice of people and don’t consult God, it can cost us dearly. Stop compartmentalizing your Christianity or confining it to Sunday mornings at church. The Bible says, “The Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Pr 2:6 NKJV).

MONDAY MARCH 5

“All these men of war...were of one mind to make David king.” 1Ch 12:38 NKJV

### MIGHTY MEN AND WOMEN OF GOD (3)

Here’s another quality that set David’s “mighty men” apart from others: They understood the importance of connection, unity, and strong relationships. “All these men of war, who could keep ranks, came to Hebron with a loyal heart, to make David king over all Israel.” Did you know that when Roman soldiers went into battle, their shields, which protected them from chin to toe, were linked to one another forming a wall of defense? What a picture! The Bible instructs us to pray for one another, defend one another, strengthen one another, sharpen one another, bear one another’s burdens, and yes, lovingly confront one another when it’s called for. When you have a stubborn habit you can’t conquer on your own, you need someone to support you and keep you accountable. You only mature spiritually as you connect with spiritually mature people. Paul addresses those who couldn’t work with anybody and always wanted to go off and do their own thing: “There should be no schism in the body, but...the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1Co 12:25-27 NKJV). Disconnected from other believers you are like a body part without the benefit of a brain, a blood supply, a source of nutrition, a system that eliminates toxins, etc. Literally, you are incapable of getting anywhere or accomplishing anything worthwhile. So the word for you today is, “Keep rank!”

TUESDAY MARCH 6

“Whosoever doth not bear his cross...cannot be my disciple.” Lk 14:27

### DISCIPLESHIP

Brenda Goodine says, “My friend decided it was time to talk to her bright four-year-old son, Benji, about receiving Christ. ‘Benji,’ she asked quietly, ‘Would you like to have Jesus in your heart?’ Benji rolled his blue eyes and answered seriously, ‘No. I don’t think I want the responsibility.’” Now, you may not like Benji’s answer, but you have to admire his honesty. He wasn’t just thinking about the rewards of discipleship, he was thinking about the responsibilities it brings. Brother Lawrence, a French monk, put it this way: “Let us think often, that our only business in this life is to please God.” Imagine asking yourself before each action, word, or attitude, “Is this pleasing to the Lord?” How different would your life be? How would your decisions impact the people around you? Jesus said, “Whoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” Crosses were not made to live on, but to die on. Every morning when you wake up, go into the bathroom, look in the mirror and say, “Today, I’ve been called to die to self-indulgence, self-interest, and self-promotion.” Tom Landry, coach of the Dallas Cowboys, once said, “The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don’t want to do, in order to achieve what they’ve always wanted to be.” And that is the essence of discipleship. Furthermore, Jesus said if you are not willing to do it, you “cannot” be His disciple.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 7

“Martha...you are worried and upset about many things.” Lk 10:41 NIV

### THE WORD FOR “WORRYWARTS”

Worry acts like a thief; it robs us of the joy God wants us to experience each day. Basically, all our worries come down to two things: that we won't get what we need, or that we'll lose what we've got. Martha was a “worrywart,” and it showed up when Jesus came to dinner. She worked hard in the kitchen while her sister Mary sat listening to Jesus. In frustration Martha asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?” (v. 40 NIV). Worry makes us forget who's servant and who's Lord. Notice three things in this story: (1) Martha was busy serving, but she wasn't enjoying it. No doubt she wanted to please Jesus; it's just that she allowed her work for the Lord to become more important to her than her relationship with the Lord. Has that happened to you? (2) Satan didn't take Martha out of the kitchen; he just stole her purpose for being there. Satan doesn't turn you against the church; he just makes you focus on yourself. He doesn't take away your ministry, he just discourages you by saying you're overworked and not appreciated. (3) God values your attitude more than your actions. “Do everything without complaining” (Php 2:14 NIV). A bad attitude spoils the gift you offer to God. Jesus said, “Martha...only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen...it.” (Lk 10:42 NIV). What did Mary choose? Sitting at the feet of Jesus. He always prefers the quiet devotion of a sincere heart to the noisy attitude of a complainer. Think about it.

THURSDAY MARCH 8

“Love each other as I have loved you.”

Jn 15:12 NIV

### BE NURTURING

When Jesus said, “Love each other,” He used the Greek word for “love,” which means to nurture. Think of a mother and her child: her love is constant and her greatest desire for that child is that they should thrive. You say, “But isn't that the kind of love people should get somewhere else, like at home?” No, beneath the façade, some of the people in your life desperately need to be nurtured. And they'll be influenced most by those who make them feel best about themselves. One leader writes: “Many people are very close to my heart because they believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. They listened to me without condemnation and loved me unconditionally, even when I wasn't very lovable. Without them, I wouldn't have possessed the hope I needed to keep pursuing my dream.” Now, you can't be like the little girl who came home from church and announced, “I want to be like the man who stood up in the pulpit today.” Delighted, her mom said, “You want to go into the ministry?” “No,” she replied, “I want to tell people what to do!” Hello! Some of us want to be authority figures so we can correct people and give them our so-called “constructive criticism.” Most folks don't need a critic, they need a cheerleader. When you nurture them they will welcome you to speak into their life—and they will listen. Goethe said, “Correction does much, but encouragement does much more.” So think encouraging words and speak words of encouragement. “Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (Pr 12:25 NKJV).

FRIDAY MARCH 9

“This I call to mind and therefore I have hope.”

Lam 3:21 NIV

## SPIRITUAL LANDMARKS

You need to establish some spiritual landmarks in your life to remind you of the times when God intervened on your behalf. Someone said, “We’re not slow learners, just quick forgetters.” How soon we forget, or claim credit for things we had little to do with. When God parted the Jordan River for His people to cross over, He knew something they didn’t—that on the other side they would face some big challenges, including the City of Jericho. That’s when they would need “reminders.” So He told them to collect twelve stones from the Jordan and build a monument, so they and their children would recall His past faithfulness to them. Samuel did the same after Israel defeated the Philistines. He took a stone and named it Ebenezer, meaning, “Thus far the Lord has helped us” (1Sa 7:12 NKJV). Before you give in to discouragement, doubt or defeat, stop and recall what God has done for you “thus far.” Like the day you met Jesus, or the times He guided you, or the doors He opened that you thought were permanently shut, or the scrapes He brought you through. Keep a record of these events and refer to it often. It will help you to remember His goodness when you tend to forget it. It will give you a sense of gratitude for yesterday’s blessings, and confidence to face whatever tomorrow brings. “This I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lam 3:21-23 NIV).

SATURDAY MARCH 10

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

Ps 14:1 NKJV

## DON’T BE A FOOL (1)

The atheistic fool. It’s said, “An atheist can’t find God for the same reason a thief can’t find a policeman.” Sometimes pride is at the core of atheism. Without a God, you become your own God, which means there’s no higher power than yourself! But the God of the Bible proves His existence in three ways: (1) Creation. Many people are in prison today who weren’t caught at the scene of the crime, and no one actually witnessed the crime. What proved they did it? Fingerprints! DNA! Creation carries God’s fingerprints and DNA. “Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out like an army, one after another, calling each by its name” (Isa 40:26 NLT). (2) Calvary. In creation you see God’s power, at the cross you see His love for you. In creation you see His hand, at the cross you see His heart. (3) Conscience. “Gentiles...even without having heard it...demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right” (Ro 2:14-15 NLT). Conscience is like having a Bible in your soul; no one was born without one. Voltaire, the French atheist, said, “It took twelve fishermen to build Christianity. I will show the world how one Frenchman can destroy it.” After Voltaire died, the home in which he had lived became Europe’s most famous Bible distribution center. Bottom line: Voltaire is dead; our God lives! Atheism is the greatest gamble of all. After all, what if there is a God and you stand before Him one day?

SUNDAY MARCH 11

“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” Lk 12:20

### DON'T BE A FOOL (2)

The ambitious fool. Jesus told the story of a successful farmer who said, “I will pull down my barns, and build greater” (v. 18). Evidently he was a good businessman and planner. But then he said: “I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee...So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (vv. 19-21).

This man had a plan for time, but none for eternity. He thought about himself, but not God. He paid attention to his body, but not his soul. It's said that the average body has enough phosphorus to make eight hundred thousand match heads, enough sugar to go into sixty cubes, enough salt to cover twenty spoons, and enough iron to make about ten dollars' worth of nails. The rest is just dust and water. When you pamper, promote and protect the part of you that will only live seventy or eighty years and neglect the part of you that will live on in either heaven or hell, God says you're a fool. This man told himself he had “many years,” but God said, “This night thy soul shall be required of thee.” Don't you realize that an accident, a blocked artery, a stray bullet, a plane with engine failure or a drunk driver could take you out in an instant? Wise up! The question is not will you die, but when? And are you ready to stand before God?

MONDAY MARCH 12

“Died Abner as a fool dieth.”

2Sa 3:33

### DON'T BE A FOOL (3)

The absolute fool. Abner slew a man called Asahel, whose brother happened to be Joab, King David's number one general. So Joab was out to take Abner's life. The tragedy of this story is that Abner was within reach of Hebron, one of the six cities of refuge. But instead of running into that city and enjoying its protection, he allowed the enemy to catch him outside the gates and kill him. “They buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept...and said, ‘Died Abner as a fool dieth?’” (vv. 32-33). Abner was the absolute fool. Why? Because unlike the atheistic fool who did not believe in God, or the ambitious fool who had no time for God, he knew what to do—but didn't do it. There were no rivers to cross, no mountains to climb, and no price to be paid. The gates of Hebron were open; all he had to do was go in and stay there.

Imagine being given a gospel tract with these words on the cover: “What must I do to be lost?” Then opening it and finding that page is—blank. You don't have to do anything to be lost! But you must do something to be saved: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Ac 16:31).

When Mary brought the newborn Christ to the temple, an old priest named Simeon held Him in his arms and said: “Now I'm ready to die, because I have seen the Savior of the world” (See Lk 2:25-32). In order to die right you must meet Christ, embrace Him, and acknowledge Him as your Lord and Savior. Why don't you do it today!

TUESDAY MARCH 13

“Do not be deceived...A man reaps what he sows.”

Gal 6:7 NIV

### THE LAW OF CONSEQUENCE

Your child says, “I didn’t mean to break the window.” You reply, “But you threw the rock that broke it, right? So you’ll pay for repairing it.” And when your child pays, he or she learns a principle that could save them from costlier consequences down the road. God, who is a loving heavenly Father, invented the law of consequence—for our benefit. Consider this: (1) Your decisions determine the kind of harvest you reap. Adam and Eve got to choose whether or not to obey God, but they didn’t get to escape the consequences of their choice. “A man reaps what he sows.” You’re not the pawn of a punitive god, malevolent cosmic force, the devil, or luck. You have been given the power to choose right or wrong. (2) Your decisions impact others. Hurting them may not have been your intention, but often it’s collateral damage you can’t avoid. After conquering Jericho, Achan stole some of the spoils, causing Israel’s defeat at Ai. Later Joshua challenged him, saying, “Why have you brought this trouble on us?” (Jos 7:25 NIV). Before you act, you need to consider who will get hurt by the fallout from your decision. Will it be your children, spouse, friends, church, etc.? (3) Forgiveness may not cancel the consequences of your decision. God hears your confession, freely forgives you and expunges your record, but the harvest law may still remain in effect. “David confessed...‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ Nathan replied, ‘Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you...[but] your child will die’” (2Sa 12:13-14 NLT). So if you don’t want to reap, don’t sow.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 14

“I will give you shepherds according to My heart.”

Jer 3:15 NKJV

### HOLD UP YOUR PASTOR’S HANDS

Here’s a sad statistic: Over 50% of those who enter the ministry leave it within ten years because of discouragement. Make sure that doesn’t happen to your pastor. Picture this: Joshua’s soldiers are down in the valley fighting the Amalekites. Above him on a hilltop sits Moses with his hands raised toward heaven. As long as his arms are raised the battle goes their way. But if you’ve ever tried to hold your hands up for long, you quickly grow weary and lower them. The moment Moses does that, the battle goes against Israel. So Aaron and Hur hold up his arms and the tide turns in favor of Israel. It wasn’t just Joshua’s ability to fight, it was Moses’ ability to hold up his arms that won the day. Aaron and Hur kept a leader from fainting so an entire nation could be saved. God said, “I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” If God has given you a pastor who loves, leads and feeds you, support them. Hold up their hands! In the Old Testament tabernacle the candlesticks had to be kept burning day and night because their light represented God’s presence among His people. If a light so much as flickered, designated servants moved in immediately to refuel it and restore it to its original glow. Are you getting the idea? It’s your responsibility to make sure the light doesn’t flicker in your church or the fire go out in your pulpit. So pray for your pastor every day and be sure to encourage him every chance you get.

THURSDAY MARCH 15

“To him who is able to do immeasurably more.”

Eph 3:20 NIV

## DRAW ON HIS POWER WITHIN YOU

There are words in your Bible which have so much power in them that they're more effective than any therapy. God can illuminate a Scripture that goes back into the past and heals your wounds, gives you direction in the middle of despair, and provides hope for the future. Satan will try to fill your mind with so much junk that you don't have an appetite for God's Word. That's because he knows the Scriptures unmask him, and release the potential lying dormant within you. Before Jeremiah rose to national prominence as a prophet, God told him two things: (1) “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” (Jer 1:5 NIV). Your parents didn't get the first look at you, God did. Nothing about you surprises Him. In spite of what you've been through, He hasn't changed His mind about who you are or what you're destined to become. (2) “Before you were born I set you apart” (v.5 NIV). You say, “I've always felt different.” That's because you are. Celebrate it! Stop looking for acceptance where you don't belong. You're on a mission for God; that's why the enemy has tried so hard to take you out. Once you understand that, your struggle will begin to make sense. As you study God's Word you'll begin to experience the mind-renewing, life-changing power He's deposited within you. “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” So start drawing on that power today.

FRIDAY MARCH 16

“Don't...give up.”

Gal 6:9 NLT

## IF YOU PERSIST, YOU WILL PREVAIL

James Watt spent twenty years perfecting the steam engine. William Harvey worked for eight years to demonstrate how blood circulated in the human body, then for another twenty-five years trying to convince the medical establishment. Most of us underestimate the time it takes to achieve anything of lasting value. You've got to be willing to pay your dues. Cutting corners is a sign of impatience and poor self-discipline. The secret of every breakthrough is to follow through. Albert Gray says, “The common denominator of all success lies in forming the habit of doing things that failures don't like to do.” If you find yourself continually giving in to your moods, you need to change your approach to doing things. To do this, you must set standards for yourself that require accountability. Suffering a consequence for not following through will keep you on track like nothing else. Once your new standards are in place, work according to them, not your moods; that will get you going in the right direction. Self-discipline is a quality that's won only through practice. Successful people have learned to do what doesn't come naturally. They are willing to confront discomfort, distractions and doubt, and act in spite of them. R. H. Macy, founder of Macy's department stores, failed at five different professions—whaler, retailer, gold miner, stockbroker, real estate broker—before he finally succeeded. When asked what sustained him through failure after failure he replied, “Purpose and persistence.” That's what separates those who achieve from those who merely dream! It's why Paul wrote: “Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time.”

SATURDAY MARCH 17

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Mt 24:35 NIV

## DO YOU LOVE GOD’S WORD?

One of the first books to come off the printing press when it was invented was the Bible. And it’s still the world’s best-selling book. An anonymous author has written: “It contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the fate of sinners, and the happiness of believers. It is a light to direct you, food to nourish you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller’s road map, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s weapon, and the player’s game plan. It’s a mine of incredible wealth, and a river of genuine joy. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Christ is its grand subject, your good its design, and the glory of God its end. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be spiritually healthy. Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. Let it fill your memory, rule your heart, and guide your steps. It is given to you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and be remembered for ever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and judge those who trifle with its sacred contents.” The Bible is “The word of our God which shall stand forever” (See 1Pe 1:25). Most of us respect the Bible; the trouble is we don’t read it daily and put it into practice. After hearing a discussion on various translations of the Bible, one man said: “I prefer my mother’s translation, because she translated it into everyday life.” Are you doing that?

SUNDAY MARCH 18

“I am the vine; you are the branches.”

Jn 15:5 NIV

## A BRANCH AND A BRIDE

The Bible gives us two interesting pictures of our relationship with Jesus: (1) A branch. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.” Jesus wants to be as close to you 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 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. Separation means certain death. (2) A bride (See 2Co 11:2). Aren’t we the bride of Christ? Haven’t we made vows to Him, and hasn’t He made vows to us? What does our marriage to Christ imply? For one thing, the communication never stops. In a happy home a husband doesn’t talk to his wife only when he wants something. He doesn’t pop in just when he wants a good meal or a clean shirt or a little romance. Healthy marriages have a sense of “remaining.” There is tenderness, honesty, ongoing communication. Sometimes we go to God with our joys, sometimes we go with our hurts, but we always go. And the more we go, the more we become like Him. People who live long lives together eventually begin to sound alike, talk alike, and even think alike. As we walk with Jesus we take on His thoughts, His principles, His attitudes. Indeed, we take on His heart.

MONDAY MARCH 19

“The people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.” Jdg 17:6 NLT

### THE NEED TO BE ACCOUNTABLE (1)

You’re never more vulnerable than when you can hide from others. Secrecy is the ideal breeding ground for deception, leading us into sin. Jesus points out that we love darkness rather than light because our deeds naturally gravitate toward evil (See Jn 3:19). There is within us a propensity to sin, so we are called to “walk in the light” where our motives and actions are transparent and we are encouraged to avoid sin (See 1Jn 1:7). But to walk in the light and overcome sin requires people who will hold us accountable. “Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others” (Pr 12:15 NLT). Our need for approval makes us want to hide our struggles. However, our willingness to be genuine frees us to acknowledge our struggles and overcome them. But the person to whom you are accountable should be mature, know God’s Word, keep your confidence, and love you enough to be honest with you. And you need to be open to hear what they tell you. King Rehoboam “rejected the advice of the older men and instead asked the opinion of the young men who had grown up with him” (1Ki 12:8 NLT). He wanted to hear only what pleased him. So he turned to his equally immature friends who told him what he wanted to hear, leading him to a decision that caused a major rebellion in Israel. So build a relationship with someone who’ll tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear!

TUESDAY MARCH 20

“The people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.” Jdg 17:6 NLT

### THE NEED TO BE ACCOUNTABLE (2)

There’s no better depiction of our ego-driven nature than this: “The people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.” Their philosophy was: “Don’t tell me what to do.” But that philosophy leaves you without checks or balances, exposing you to the dominating power of your flesh. We’re all capable of becoming addicted to something. Recognizing that is a necessary first step to overcoming it. “The sin that so easily entangles” (Heb 12:1 NIV) may be a weakness for food, money, sex, drugs, alcohol, popularity, toxic relationships, power, workaholism, etc. When it strikes, you’re much more likely to capitulate if you’re alone and can act covertly. “If you fall without having a friend nearby, you are really in trouble” (Ecc 4:10 CEV). You need to “turn on the light” immediately by connecting with your support system and sharing your situation. Don’t allow the darkness of isolation to overpower you. “If you fall, your friend can help you up” (v. 10 CEV). The pride that drives you to hide your weakness will keep you permanently weak. The humility to acknowledge it and ask for help is the key to breaking the vicious cycle. God has blessed us with mature, caring people who recognize our common struggles and will help us deal with them. We are part of Christ’s church, and “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1Co 12:26 NAS). God instructed Moses, “Select...some...honest men who fear God...They will help you carry the load” (Ex 18:21-22 NLT). Accept the help God provides!

WEDNESDAY MARCH 21

“You have great faith! Your request is granted.”

Mt 15:28 NIV

## HOW BADLY DO YOU WANT IT?

Matthew records: “A Canaanite woman...came to him, crying out, ‘Lord...My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession’...He answered, ‘I was sent only to...Israel...It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she said, ‘but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted’” (vv. 22-28 NIV). This Gentile woman was an outsider, yet she pushed through and got what comfortable insiders often miss. Talk about hurdles! First, Jesus refused to answer her. Next, He said, “What I have is only for the Jews.” Finally He said, “It wouldn’t be right to give the children’s bread to dogs.” Most of us would have walked away offended. Not her! She cried, “Have mercy on me.” She wasn’t asking for what she deserved, she was crying out for what she needed! As a result, Jesus removed every obstacle and answered her prayer. And if you persist, He will do the same for you too. In reality, this woman told Jesus, “Let the children have the bread, all I need are the crumbs.” Church folks become so complacent that they neglect the bread, waste the bread, complain about the bread, and sometimes don’t even come to church to get the bread. But desperate people pick up the crumbs and find life! They know that if there’s power in the loaf, there’s power in the crumb. And when a crumb is all you can get, a crumb is all you need. So what do you need from God today? How badly do you want it?

THURSDAY MARCH 22

“The younger son...journeyed to a far country.”

Lk 15:13 NKJV

## WHY PEOPLE LEAVE THE CHURCH (1)

The story of the Prodigal Son is especially applicable to backsliders. It speaks to those who have been raised in church, know God’s Word, have felt His presence, understand His claims, and once served Him. But like the Prodigal, they’ve “gone to the hogs.” Notice, he’s not called the Prodigal Sinner but the Prodigal Son, because he still belongs in the family. For the next few days let’s look at why people leave the church. First: Because the blessings of Father’s house become commonplace. Notice, he didn’t appreciate what he had until he lost it. Notice also, his father didn’t kick him out of the house, “[he] took his journey into a far country” (KJV). He left of his own free will and came back the same way. What’s the point? If God’s love can’t hold you, His power won’t force you! It’s your willing obedience that God finds pleasure in, not conforming to a set of religious rules because you are afraid of going to hell. Jesus told the story of a king who planned a wedding feast and invited different guests. What a privilege. “But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business” (Mt 22:5 NKJV). Are you too busy for God? Have you gotten used to His blessings and decided you want something different? Be warned, the road you are on leads to one place only: the hog pen. Stop, turn around, repent and come home while you still can. No matter how badly you have failed, your Father is waiting to take you back.

FRIDAY MARCH 23

“We have come to believe and know... You.”

Jn 6:69 NKJV

## WHY PEOPLE LEAVE THE CHURCH (2)

Because the rules of Father’s house seem too restrictive. Many people want Christ’s love but not His lordship, His blessings but not His commandments. It’s not that He offers them too little, but that the cost of serving Him seems too high. Maybe you are thinking that if you’d lived in the days of Christ, walked and talked with Him and heard Him preach, you would be a better Christian. Think again! “His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying’...From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ’” (vv. 60 & 66-69 NKJV). True discipleship doesn’t result from attending a special service at church. No, it’s progressive. It’s the result of “coming to believe and know” the Lord as you walk with Him on the mountaintop and in the valley, in the bad times as well as the good. That’s why Peter wrote: “Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe...A stone that causes men to stumble” (1Pe 2:7-8 NIV). Paul puts it this way: “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1Co 12:3). The purpose of the Holy Spirit working in your life is to bring you into submission to the will of God. And that involves a relationship—with rules!

SATURDAY MARCH 24

“Let us not...judge one another anymore.”

Ro 14:13

## WHY PEOPLE LEAVE THE CHURCH (3)

Here’s another reason people leave the church: Because of the attitude of some church members. The older boy in Christ’s parable knew how to be a son, but he didn’t know how to be a brother. If the jealousy and judgmentalism he showed toward his brother is anything to go by, it’s little wonder his brother left home in the first place. Paul writes: “Let us not therefore judge one another anymore: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” The Bible says, “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is [no] occasion of stumbling in him” (1Jn 2:10). Do your attitudes and actions strengthen others or cause them to stumble? Have you read about Diotrephes? John talked about him: “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church” (3Jn 9-10 NKJV). Diotrephes was a preacher-fighter and a prima donna who wanted only one thing—control! And John denounced him as “evil,” saying, “He who does evil has not seen God” (v.11 NKJV). Only eternity will reveal how many people have been driven away from the church by critical, callous, controlling Christians. Make sure you’re not one of them!

SUNDAY MARCH 25

“The years...pass quickly, and then we are gone.” Ps 90:10 NCV

## STOP SHORTCHANGING YOUR FAMILY

Eileen Silva Kindig writes: “We talk about lack of time...when what we lack is backbone to take responsibility for how we spend it...Instead of coming home, we’re escaping to the office and assembly line to get away from household chores, childcare, and the demands of relationships...work gives us a buzz. Besides money and freedom, it provides the satisfaction of a job well done, an outlet for creativity, breezy, low-demand camaraderie, and intellectual stimulation...All this may be keeping us financially afloat...but the less time we spend with family, the messier our home life gets.” Time is so precious that God gives it to us a moment at a time. “The years...pass quickly, and then we are gone.” So what will you have to look back on? Hours spent working overtime or hours spent with your loved ones? Kindig recommends seven things: (1) Remember who’s in charge. Manage your time, don’t let it manage you. Think through commitments before you make them. Decide what’s important. The urgent seldom is. (2) Schedule in reverse. Put your real priorities on the calendar first, then add the rest. (3) Drop one thing from your schedule; for example, spending two afternoons less a month volunteering at the Boosters’ Club frees you to enjoy lunch with your spouse. (4) Be, rather than do. Think. Pray. Relax in a chair. (5) Get your spouse’s perspective on how you’re spending your time, and what may be stealing it. (6) Be honest about your limitations. You can’t manufacture time; we all get the same amount. (7) Keep a list of your commitments by the phone so you think twice before adding to it.

MONDAY MARCH 26

“Everything in me will celebrate when you speak what is right.”

Pr 23:16 NLT

## HANDLING CRITICISM THE RIGHT WAY (1)

Criticism will make you a better person if you do these three things: (1) Look beyond the criticism and see the critic. If it’s someone you respect, listen to what they say. If it’s someone who’s constantly critical, don’t place too much value on what they say; they’re probably just projecting their frustrations onto you. The story’s told of a twelve-year-old boy who hadn’t spoken since he was born. After being served oatmeal for breakfast several weeks in a row, he shouted, “Yuck, I hate this stuff!” His mother jumped up, hugged him and said, “We thought you couldn’t talk. Why haven’t you ever spoken to us?” Bluntly he exclaimed, “Because up until now everything’s been okay.” Some folks only talk when they’re upset. The important question is, does your critic sincerely want to help you? (2) Try not to take yourself too seriously. Let’s face it, we all do things we regret. But when you can laugh at yourself and learn from it, you’re growing into maturity. (3) Know the difference between constructive and destructive criticism. Learn how to interpret criticism by asking: (a) In what spirit is it given? If your critic’s attitude is kind, rest assured it’s meant to be constructive. (b) When is the criticism given? When somebody criticizes you publicly, usually their intentions aren’t the best. (c) Why is the criticism given? “The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out” (Pr 20:5 NIV). When people are hurting, they tend to hurt others. So always ask, “Was this criticism given for my benefit or out of personal hurt?”

TUESDAY MARCH 27

“Christ...while being reviled...did not revile in return.” 1Pe 2:21-23 NAS

## HANDLING CRITICISM THE RIGHT WAY (2)

When it comes to handling criticism the right way you must: (1) Demonstrate emotional and spiritual maturity. Exhaustion can affect the way you act when you're under pressure. Elijah slipped into depression because of it. Queen Jezebel hounded him relentlessly. Her opposition sapped his strength and caused him to say, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life” (1Ki 19:4). Satan will take advantage of your weariness. When you're fatigued you can become overly sensitive and miss the opportunity for growth that comes with the criticism. (2) Realize that good people get criticized. Jesus was called an overeater (See Mt 11:19); a drinker (See Lk 7:34); a friend of disreputable characters (See Mt 11:19). People whose opinions are set and whose thinking is off, won't understand behavior based on obedience to God. So when your ideas and values clash with theirs, try to be gracious. (3) Always keep a good attitude. Your own attitude can be more detrimental to you than somebody else's. You know what they say: “A chip on your shoulder usually indicates wood higher up.” Peter writes: “You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to [God] who judges righteously.” Give it to God, and press on!

WEDNESDAY MARCH 28

“It is to a man's honor to avoid strife.”

Pr 20:3 NIV

## HANDLING CRITICISM THE RIGHT WAY (3)

When it comes to criticism: (1) Concentrate on your mission and change your mistakes! Most of us do the opposite; when criticism comes we change our mission and concentrate on our mistakes. If you run every time you make a mistake, you will never accomplish anything. Instead you'll live in constant frustration. The only real mistakes are the ones from which you learn nothing. So instead of dwelling on your mistakes, count on making some, growing wiser and moving on to finish the job. There's an old Arabian proverb that says, “If you stop every time a dog barks, your road will never end.” Don't let your failures become roadblocks—turn them into building blocks. In Proverbs 27 verse 17, the Bible says, “Iron sharpens iron” (NIV). So pray and grow sharper through criticism. (2) Spend time with the right people. When you have optional time spend it with those who build you up, not tear you down. Quality time with the right people will strengthen your faith and fortify you against the effects of the worst criticism. It will also keep you from becoming critical yourself. When crows attack a hawk, the hawk doesn't counterattack. Instead, it soars higher and higher in ever widening circles until the pests leave it alone. What a great strategy! Circle above your critics rather than stooping to their level: “It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.” If your attitude is to have an effect on people it will be because of your example, not your defensiveness.

THURSDAY MARCH 29

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Ro 8:31 NKJV

### HANDLING CRITICISM THE RIGHT WAY (4)

The moment you lift your head above the crowd you'll attract attention, and not always the kind you want. Learn from the duck. He stays calm on the surface, keeps paddling underneath, and lets the water run off his back. Time is on your side. When Nathaniel asked, concerning Jesus, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip answered, “Come and see” (Jn 1:46 NKJV). Nathaniel did, and he ended up becoming a disciple. Often, as events unfold, the cause of the criticism will become clear and you'll be vindicated. But you must keep going. George Bernard Shaw, the Irish playwright, certainly had his critics—but he knew how to handle them. After one opening a critic stood up in the audience and shouted, “It's rotten!” To which Shaw stood up and replied, “I agree, but what are we against so many?” Nobody had more critics than Paul, yet he wrote: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Without courage we simply accumulate a collection of good ideas—and regrets. Most of our missed opportunities wouldn't have been missed if we had been willing to push through the criticism and embrace what could have been. All of us experience fear. But here's the difference: the winner's need for progress overwhelms their reluctance to take a risk. They can live more easily with the memory of having tried and failed, than not having tried at all. They know that failure is an inevitable part of success, and failure always brings criticism. And while others fear stepping out into a new opportunity, the winner fears missing out on it.

FRIDAY MARCH 30

“O Lord; point out the road for me to follow.”

Ps 25:4 NLT

### DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS!

Even simple decisions can be stressful. Ever watch a child struggle to choose between chocolate or strawberry ice cream? And the bigger decisions, like whom to marry, which career to choose, whether to buy a house or to undergo high-risk surgery, etc. can be nerve-racking! But you can reduce your stress level by following these biblical principles: (1) Do the research. “Anyone who answers without listening is foolish and confused” (Pr 18:13 NCV). Get all the facts and avoid making decisions you'll regret. Knowledge has never been more accessible; through the Internet, helpful books, and especially God's Word: “Your commands...are my constant guide” (Ps 119:98 NLT). (2) Talk to God. “Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow.” Consulting God helps prevent premature decisions, clarifies your priorities and prepares you to hear His counsel. Is God interested in your decisions? Yes. “The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives” (Ps 37:23 NLT). (3) Be open to new ideas. Don't get trapped in old mind-sets. “Wise men and women are always learning, always listening for fresh insights” (Pr 18:15 TM). Clinging to the familiar can be crippling. God may choose to lead you along a new path of fresh insight. So breathe deeply, seek His wisdom, and open up your heart to receive it. (4) Get advice from trusted friends. “It's a hard road that's walked alone,” says an old Celtic proverb. So follow Solomon's counsel: “A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise man listens to others” (Pr 12:15 TLB).

SATURDAY MARCH 31

“Created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

Eph 2:10 NIV

## WORKING FOR GOD—HIS WAY

God had a plan for your life before you were born. Indeed, it’s why He brought you into the world. Simply keeping you “busy” was not His goal. He wants to see you doing the work He “prepared in advance for you to do.” Joining a worthy cause and working hard is commendable, but you can end up as a square peg in a round hole, expending time and energy without achieving the you-shaped purpose God had in mind. He wants you to be purpose-driven, not work-driven! So: (1) Ask Him to reveal His will to you. “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Php 2:13 NIV). God will actually create desires within you that guide you toward accomplishing His purpose. It’s not serendipity or super-spirituality, but God at the helm steering your ship. (2) Expect to do more than you are capable of. Self-directed activity is self-limited activity. God-directed activity is unlimited activity. God never calls us to do what we can; He calls us to do what He can! “[He] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph 3:20 NIV). Listen, act on His promptings, and all things become possible to you. (3) When the work is demanding, draw on His indwelling power. Paul says, “I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” How much divine energy is needed for your assignment? “All His energy.” Awesome! And it is available to you today.

SUNDAY APRIL 1

“That thou mayest know how...to behave...in the house of God.” 1Ti 3:15

## HOW TO BEHAVE IN CHURCH

The church is like a garden; it has great potential for growth and beauty. But cultivating a garden calls for time and labor; it also requires being on the lookout for weeds and pulling them up before they grow and kill your plants. Two of the most common weeds in the church are: (1) Favoritism. “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel’” (Ac 10:34-36 NIV). Peter, who struggled with prejudice, said, “I now realize...that God does not show favoritism.” How about you? Do you realize that too? Or do you mix only with “your own kind”? Cliques in church are high treason to the King of Kings. If there’s one lonely soul in your church, you have work to do! The Bible says that God “gives families to the lonely” (Ps 68:6 TLB). When people are shy, wounded, insecure, or lacking in trust, you must reach out and bring them into your circle of fellowship. (2) Gossip. “Don’t speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters” (Jas 4:11 NLT). When you hear gossip about someone, stop it dead in its tracks. Unless you are willing to talk directly to the person, don’t talk about them. And don’t let anybody else talk about them either. Gossip is the art of saying nothing, and leaving nothing unsaid. If you want to promote harmony in the family, don’t indulge in it.

MONDAY APRIL 2

“I am not able to bear all [this] alone.”

Nu 11:14 NKJV

### YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE (1)

One day Moses told God that the job was too big for him. So God told Moses to find seventy men with leadership ability. Then He said: “I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put [it] upon them; and they shall bear the burden...with you” (v.17 NKJV). Understand this: you will never fulfill your dream as long as you are unable or unwilling to get others to buy into it. Don't think that because your dream is worthwhile, people will automatically line up to be part of it. It doesn't work that way. The same dream that will bless you, can bury you if you don't surround yourself with the right people. Moses said, “I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now” (vv. 14-15 NKJV). Don't wait till you're on the verge of a nervous breakdown or your family is falling apart before you reach for help.

When God calls someone He always calls others to stand with them. So start looking around you. You may need just one person, or you may need many. Indeed, the greater your dream, the greater your team must be. But here's the good news: the size of your dream determines the size of the people who will be attracted to it. If you have a big dream, you have even greater potential for good people to help you. What you need to do is connect with them, invite them in, transfer the vision and then turn them loose.

TUESDAY APRIL 3

“They shall bear the burden...with you.”

Nu 11:17 NKJV

### YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE (2)

You may be a great visionary, but you will not succeed until you learn to inspire others with your vision and transfer it to them. If you can't do that, you are condemned to experience an ancient curse that was reportedly used in Romania: “May you have a brilliant idea, which you know is right, and be unable to convince others.” Now, while the ability to communicate is important in transferring your vision to others, it takes more than that. You must have credibility and conviction. People will only buy into your vision if you are sold out to it. Convincing others of the significance of your vision can happen only if you are convinced of its significance. That requires the right message, spoken by the right messenger, to the right people, at the right time, and in the right way. Psychologist and author Dr. Larry Crabb describes this convergence, saying: “A vision we give to others of who and what they could become, has power when it echoes what the spirit has already spoken into their souls.” That power can convince people to join you in the pursuit of your vision, and greatly enhances your chances of success. There is an interesting mathematical dynamic in the Bible which states that one person can put a thousand others to flight, but two people can put ten thousand others to flight (See Dt 32:30). Yes, the Scriptures teach the power of synergy. When you get the right people involved, plus the blessing of the Lord, you'll accomplish more than you ever dreamed possible.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 4

“Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said... ‘It is finished!’” Jn 19:28-30 NKJV

### CHRIST IS TOTALLY CREDIBLE (1)

What made great intellectuals like C. S. Lewis commit their lives to Christ? His credibility! Observe some of the Old Testament prophecies Jesus fulfilled during His lifetime: (1) He would enter into Jerusalem on a donkey: “Behold, your King... He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey” (Zec 9:9 NKJV). (2) He would be betrayed by a friend: “My own familiar friend in whom I trusted... has lifted up his heel against me” (Ps 41:9 NKJV). (3) He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver: “So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver” (Zec 11:12). (4) They would gamble for His garments: “They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Ps 22:18 NKJV). (5) Not one of His bones would be broken: “He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken” (Ps 34:20 NKJV). (6) He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb: “They made His grave with... the rich at His death” (Isa 53:9 NKJV). (7) That He would be raised again from the dead: “You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Ps 16:10 NKJV). John records: “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’” In full possession of His mental faculties, with His mind unclouded, He checked off the prophecies He was supposed to fulfill right down to the last one, and said, “It is finished” (v.30 NKJV). Christ—He’s totally credible, and you can trust Him!

THURSDAY APRIL 5

“Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said... ‘It is finished!’” Jn 19:28-30 NKJV

### CHRIST IS TOTALLY CREDIBLE (2)

From the moment of His birth to the hour of His death, Christ’s life was predicted in detail by Old Testament prophets. He fulfilled about forty different prophecies during His lifetime. Statistically, the chances of that happening are about one in a billion! Why is it important to point this out? Because voices are being raised that question His virgin birth, His deity, His miracles, His resurrection, and His soon return. Evidently the same folks were around when Peter lived. He writes: “I will work hard to make sure you always remember these things after I am gone. For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, ‘This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.’ We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God” (2Pe 1:15-21 NLT).

GOOD FRIDAY – APRIL 6

“[God] has delivered us from the power of darkness.” Col 1:13 NKJV

### THE BLESSINGS OF THE BLOOD (1)

History’s crowning moment occurred when “Christ died for the ungodly” (Ro 5:6). He didn’t just die for His friends and supporters, He died for people who despised Him. It was no quid-pro-quo deal where Jesus said: “I’ll accept you if you accept me.” No, it was a selfless, one-sided act of love. No conditions, nothing demanded in return. As a result, God “delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the dear Son.” Selah! Stop and meditate on the advantages you enjoy through Jesus’ blood: (1) You’ve been delivered. The Greek word Paul used means to literally rescue by drawing us to Himself. Your deliverance was a deeply personal event to Jesus. By His shed blood He drew you to Himself. The distance sin had put between you and God was reversed and you were “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6). (2) You’ve been freed from the power of darkness. That “power” is Satan’s tyranny over those living under his control. Christ’s blood liberated you from the darkness, ignorance and blindness Satan uses to deceive and manipulate you. (3) You’ve been translated into the kingdom of God’s son. The word “translated” implies being transferred from one place to another. In Paul’s day superpowers like Rome would annex other nations and make them part of Roman territory. Often the conquered were better off under Rome, enjoying such privileges as safety, food, mail service, travel protection, etc. Christ’s blood transferred you into His kingdom to enjoy these advantages: guaranteed protection, abundant provision for all your needs, full status of sonship, and unlimited access to His throne.

SATURDAY APRIL 7

“He has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ.” Col 1:22 NLT

### THE BLESSINGS OF THE BLOOD (2)

Observe: (1) You have been reconciled to God. God wants unbroken, intimate friendship with us, as with Adam in Eden. But sin made us enemies of God. “You who were once far away from God...enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions” (v.21 NLT). Yet He never stopped pursuing that relationship, sending Jesus to restore it. He “made peace by means of Christ’s blood on his cross” (v. 20), resulting in your reconciliation to God. The Greek word for “reconciliation” means “to be friends as we once were.” Now you can walk and talk with God as Adam did. Now God sees you as “holy and blameless...without a single fault!” (v.22 NLT). (2) You are the Lord’s redeemed. At the Jordan River John saw Jesus and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29 NIV)—Jesus, “In whom we have redemption through his blood” (Col 1:14). The word “redemption” means “liberation from captivity by a ransom paid.” Not only are you purchased at the cost of Christ’s life, you are also adopted by blood into God’s family. (3) You are forgiven of all sins. “In whom (Jesus) we have...the forgiveness of sins.” How did He accomplish the total removal of all our sins? “Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us...he took it away, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:14 NIV). He wrote in His blood, “paid in full” across your outstanding bill of indebtedness to God, nailing your “canceled debt notice” to His cross. You are forgiven. You owe nothing!

EASTER SUNDAY – APRIL 8

“Jesus...showed them his hands.”

Jn 20:19-20 NCV

“HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS”

Dr. Paul Brand, a brilliant surgeon who worked at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, writes: “I work with the marvels of the hand nearly every day...But one time of the year holds special meaning for me...When the world observes Passion Week...I reflect on the hands of Jesus...those hands that had done so much good were taken, one at a time, and pierced through with a thick spike...Roman executioners drove their spikes through the wrist, through the carpal tunnel that houses finger-controlling tendons and the median nerve...maiming the hand into a claw shape, and Jesus had no anesthetic...Later his weight hung from them, tearing more tissue, releasing more blood. Has there ever been a more helpless image? The disciples, who’d hoped he was the Messiah, cowered in the darkness or drifted away.” But that’s not the last time we see Jesus’ hands. The Bible says: “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...in the middle of them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After...this, he showed them his hands...His followers were thrilled when they saw the Lord.” Dr. Brand adds: “For the remainder of his time here, Jesus chose [to minister through] scars in each hand. That’s why I believe God hears and understands our pain...he kept those scars as a lasting image of wounded humanity. He knows what life on earth is like because he has been there. His hands prove it.” So bring your wounds to Jesus today and let Him make you whole—body, mind and soul.

MONDAY APRIL 9

“Be kindly affectionate to one another.”

Ro 12:10 NKJV

TRY TO BE MORE UNDERSTANDING

Often the reason a relationship fails is not because of a difference of opinion, but a lack of understanding. Why aren’t we more understanding? For three reasons: (1) Selfishness. Somebody quipped, “There’s two sides to every question—as long as it doesn’t concern me personally.” Paul writes: “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” (2) Fear. Prejudice is often the fear of what we’re unwilling to try and understand. When it comes to new ideas you’ve two options: open your mind and grow, or reject them and stay the same size. We tend to compare what we don’t understand with what we think we do—like the folks who told Columbus the earth was flat. When it comes to building relationships you’ve got to be willing to do what you’ve not yet done. (3) Differences. It takes more than one color to make a rainbow and one musician to make an orchestra. When you take time to appreciate the differences in people, you discover we all share the same hopes and fears. Harry Truman said, “When we understand the other fellow’s viewpoint and what he’s trying to do, nine times out of ten he’s just trying to do right.” Two of our most common problems are “gift-envy” and “gift-projection.” One happens when we compare our talents with others and feel inferior. The other happens when we expect others to feel equally passionate about what we do. The Bible says, “There are different kinds of service...but we serve the same Lord” (1Co 12:5 NLT).

TUESDAY APRIL 10

“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

Jn 13:8 NIV

### WHAT IT MEANS TO SERVE (1)

Jesus “took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist...poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’...Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me’...When he had finished...he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them...I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master” (vv. 4-16 NIV). Observe two things Jesus taught: (1) In order to serve God, you must serve others. When Peter objected, Jesus said, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” To play your part in God’s plan you must put others first. What you’re doing right now may enrich you personally, but are you serving others and pleasing God? (2) When it comes to serving, nothing should be beneath you. Can you picture it? Jesus, who was God, stooping to wash the lowest, dirtiest and smelliest part of the body. Keep that picture firmly in mind next time you’re asked to do something you don’t want to do, or something you think is “beneath you.” Christ saw so much value in the least, the lost, the last and the lowest, that He came to redeem them. And today He wants us to go out of our way to serve one another.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 11

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” Php 2:5 NIV

### WHAT IT MEANS TO SERVE (2)

Paul wrote: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant” (vv. 5-7 NIV). In order to serve God you must focus on others rather than yourself. Much of what we do is self-serving. We serve to be admired, or to achieve our own goals. Some of what we do is more manipulation than ministry. We’re really thinking about ourselves and how noble and wonderful we are. We even use serving as a bargaining tool: “God, I’ll do this for you if you’ll do that for me.” No, true servants don’t use God for their purposes, they let God use them for His. God is always more interested in your attitude than your achievements. King Amaziah lost God’s favor because “He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not with a true heart” (2Ch 25:2 NRS). Self-forgetfulness is a daily struggle, a lesson we must learn over and over. You can measure your servant’s heart by how you respond when others treat you like a servant. How do you react when you feel taken for granted, bossed around, or treated as an inferior? Jesus said, “If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life” (Mt 5:41 TM). You say, “It’s not fair. I keep giving to this person but they never give back.” Just keep serving, knowing “the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does” (Eph 6:8 NIV).

THURSDAY APRIL 12

“Serve the Lord with gladness.”

Ps 100:2

### WHAT IT MEANS TO SERVE (3)

Paul writes: “When people commend themselves, it doesn’t count for much. The important thing is for the Lord to commend them” (2Co 10:18 NLT). If your self-worth is based on anything other than God’s approval, you won’t serve with the right motives. Insecure people worry about how they’ll be perceived by others. They hide their weaknesses beneath layers of protective pride. The more insecure you are, the more you need people to serve you, and the more you work for their acceptance. One Bible scholar writes: “In order to be of service to others we must die to them; that is, we have to give up measuring our meaning and value by the yardstick of others...Thus we become free to be compassionate.” Your service should not be based on the response of those you are serving, but on obedience to God alone. True servants of God don’t insist on having lofty titles. If their job description calls for it, they wear that badge with humility. Paul, the greatest of the apostles, wrote: “You may brag about yourself, but the only approval that counts is the Lord’s approval” (v. 18 CEV). If anybody had a chance to name-drop, it was James the half brother of Jesus. What credentials; imagine growing up with Jesus as your brother! Yet he simply referred to himself in Scripture as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jas 1:1). Your service to Christ should be both your job and your joy: “Serve the Lord with gladness.” Can you imagine what would be accomplished if we all got serious about our role as servants—and did it joyfully?

FRIDAY APRIL 13

“What the law was powerless to do...God did by sending his own Son.” Ro 8:3 NIV

### SALVATION

The Bible says: “A certain ruler asked Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ So Jesus said...‘Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich” (Lk 18:18-23 NKJV). This man had already achieved the three P’s of success: power, prosperity, and prestige. He was a bottom-line guy: “What must I do?” Even the way he worded the question suggests he thought he could get eternal life the way he’d gotten everything else—by self-effort. He mistakenly assumed that heaven was just a payment away, but it’s not. Only a cold-hearted God would sell salvation to those who can afford it. That’s a hard concept to grasp since we’re rewarded for our performance. But just as you wouldn’t impress Picasso with your crayon sketch, so your character and good works don’t qualify you for heaven. Eternal life costs more than you can afford. That’s why you don’t need a résumé, you need a redeemer. Money wasn’t this man’s problem, self-sufficiency was. It wasn’t his income that kept him out of God’s kingdom, but his ego. And it’s not just the wealthy that have difficulty grasping this; so do the educated, the strong, the good-looking, the popular, and even the religious. To receive salvation you must first acknowledge that you’re spiritually bankrupt, your cupboard bare and your reputation worthless. You can’t approach God demanding justice—you can only come pleading for mercy. And if you come today, that’s what you’ll get!

SATURDAY APRIL 14

“Faith without deeds is dead.”

Jas 2:26 NIV

## WEIGH YOURSELF ON THESE SCALES!

One day a man trying to lose weight stepped on the bathroom scales. His wife asked, “How are you doing?” He replied, “Okay, just one problem; according to these scales I ought to be eight inches taller.” When it comes to demonstrating true discipleship, James puts us all on the scales: (1) When it comes to feeding the hungry: “Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, ‘Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is...useless” (vv. 15-17 NLT). (2) When it comes to loving people and treating them with respect: “Suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, ‘You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor’—well, doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?” (vv. 2-4 NLT). (3) When it comes to caring for the needy: “Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress” (Jas 1:27 NLT). Get your doctrine out of the deep freeze! Take your theology off the drawing board and start using it in a practical way. Come on—weigh yourself on these scales.

SUNDAY APRIL 15

“I chose you...to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” Jn 15:16 NIV

## BEARING FRUIT

Before leaving this world Jesus took His disciples aside to prepare them for the problems they would face after He was gone: “I am the vine; you are the branches...apart from me you can do nothing...I chose you...to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (vv. 5,16 NIV). Here Jesus teaches us two important things: (1) You only discover who you are, in relationship to Christ. “Apart from me you can do nothing.” When you forget that, you end up trying to do things only God can do, like solving your problems your own way, or promoting yourself through clever strategies. You’re not blessed in any endeavor because of your performance; you’re blessed because of your connection to Christ. Unless you understand that, you’ll waste your time chasing people who have no more power than you do. Your strength and success are in Christ, the Vine, so stay connected! (2) Before you get the fruit that remains, you lose the fruit that’s temporary. “He cuts off every branch that...bears no fruit” (v. 2 NIV). You can be a good branch, connected to a good vine, bearing good fruit, and suddenly God starts cutting back certain things in your life. Things you thought would always be there are taken away; now it feels like you’re going backwards. It takes faith to believe that God would permit you to lose what you’re proud of, and what you draw your security from in order to give you something better—fruit that lasts, enduring success. So, difficult though it may be, let it go. God has something better in mind for you.

MONDAY APRIL 16

“God...will fulfill his purpose for [you].”

Ps 57:2 NLT

## WAIT AND YOU'LL EXPERIENCE GOD'S BEST

If you've been praying for God to send you the right partner, or for a better job, or to change the heart of a rebellious kid, remember, whether He changes the situation or changes you, He “will fulfill his purpose for [you].” God sees the big picture, and He loves you so much that He works out “all things for good in your life” (See Ro 8:28). One author writes: “It's hard to make sense of life's challenges when you're in the middle...you're too tired, your perspective's limited...you don't have the strength or vision to do this on your own...‘Trust the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding’ (Pr 3:5 GWT) means letting go of floundering attempts to manipulate people, circumstances, or timing...and returning the reins to the One who knows the way. Think about it; if you knew what you were doing, would you be in this mess? We talk about waiting on God. But He also waits on us...until we're ready to receive...until we appreciate what we're asking for...until we've made sufficient preparations in our heart...until we're free from resentment and discontent...until our maturity level is appropriate and our understanding elevated...Sometimes He waits until we think He's forgotten us just to test and grow our faith...Remember, ‘With the Lord a day is like a thousand years’ (2Pe 3:8 NIV). Eternity is His backdrop...and He can solve a problem in a minute, or in two generations.” Isaiah says, “The Lord longs to be gracious to you...Blessed are all who wait for him!” (Isa 30:18 NIV). Wait! Don't get ahead of God and you'll experience His best.

TUESDAY APRIL 17

“Are you in health, my brother?”

2Sa 20:9 NKJV

## VITAMINS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH (1)

The principles of God's Word work like spiritual vitamins. For the next few days let's look at some: Never excuse in yourself what you accuse in others. King David did that. In confronting him over his sin with Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet told David a story about two men. One had many cattle; the other had only one lamb. When a guest came to the rich man's house for dinner, he took the poor man's lamb. “David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said...‘the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb...because he had no pity.’ Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’” (2Sa 12:5-7 NKJV). Nathan continued: “Thus says the Lord God of Israel...I gave you your master's house and your master's wives...And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!...You have killed Uriah [Bathsheba's husband]...with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife...Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house” (vv. 7-10 NKJV). David didn't know it, but he pronounced his punishment with his own lips: “He shall restore fourfold.” And David did. First, the child he fathered with Bathsheba died. Second, his son raped his daughter, and he didn't have the moral authority to deal with it. Third, Absalom, the beloved son destined to inherit his throne, fomented war and died at the hands of his own people. Fourth, civil war broke out in Israel and thousands of people died as a result. The lesson is clear: never excuse in another what you excuse in yourself.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 18

“Are you in health, my brother?”

2Sa 20:9 NKJV

## VITAMINS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH (2)

Never take God for granted. Don't become overly familiar with spiritual things. Samson did that and he paid dearly. After discovering the secret of his strength: “[Delilah] lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head...and his strength left him. And she said, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ So he awoke from his sleep, and said, ‘I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!’ But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him. Then the Philistines took him” (Jdg 16:19-21 NKJV). It's a story of tragedy. Samson was born to lead Israel to victory. But instead he gave in to his lowest impulses, consorted with the enemy and thought he could get away with it. Listen to him: “I will go out as before, at other times.” But this was one time too many. His disobedience hadn't robbed him of his supernatural strength before, but it did this time. He crossed a line and ended up losing his sight, his strength, his liberty, his credibility, and his usefulness. Eventually he died a prisoner of the Philistines. You say, “Today's devotion sounds a bit harsh.” No, it's protective! The Bible says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Pr 9:10). When you persist in disobeying what you know God has told you to do and think you can escape the consequences, you're headed for trouble. Repent, get right with God and get back on track while you still can.

THURSDAY APRIL 19

“Are you in health, my brother?”

2Sa 20:9 NKJV

## VITAMINS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH (3)

Never allow life's disappointments to make you cynical. If you live long enough people will disappoint you, including your family. Even spiritual leaders will let you down! Paul wrote: “We wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us” (1Th 2:18 NKJV). Did you think Satan was going to send you a congratulatory telegram because you decided to serve the Lord? Not a chance! The walk of faith is one of delight—and difficulty. When you signed on for the first, you signed on for the second. Paul was on a sixteen-month missionary journey—one of miracles and church building. But he ended up in prison on trumped-up charges and was left to rot there. How did he respond? “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Php 4:4 NKJV). You say, “How can somebody rejoice in prison?” When you see your disappointment as God's appointment, you start to understand its purpose. Paul had books to write that would change the world, so God needed to get him “off the road.” Listen to what he wrote from prison: “I want you to know...that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear” (Php 1:12-14 NLT). Hidden in some of your biggest disappointments, you will find treasures of truth that literally transform your life and your future.

FRIDAY APRIL 20

“Are you in health, my brother?”

2Sa 20:9 NKJV

#### VITAMINS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH (4)

Never forget the law of sowing and reaping. God set in motion certain laws and they never change. One is the law of gravity. Another is the law of sowing and reaping. “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest...shall not cease” (Ge 8:22 NKJV). This law works both negatively and positively. If you sow good things you will reap good things; if you sow bad things you will reap bad things. Consider parenting. Eli the high priest was not only called to be a role model to the nation, but also to his two sons. Now, he may have been a great success in ministry but he failed badly on the home front. His sons, who were also priests, enriched themselves by taking bribes. They even slept with women in the temple courts. Pretty shocking, eh? So what did God say? “I will judge his house...for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them” (1Sa 3:13 NKJV). As a result Eli’s sons were killed at the hands of their enemies, and when the news of it reached Eli he dropped dead. That’s the harvest law working negatively. But thank God it also works positively. Paul writes about it: “Knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord” (Eph 6:7 NKJV). You say, “What does that mean?” It means that whatever good you make happen for others, God will make happen for you. So whether it’s a smile, a prayer, a gift or a helping hand, start sowing good seeds and you will reap harvests of blessing.

SATURDAY APRIL 21

“Are you in health, my brother?”

2Sa 20:9 NKJV

#### VITAMINS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH (5)

Never withhold because times are hard. The Bible teaches that those who set their mind on “getting” always lose, whereas those who set their mind on “giving” always win. The story’s told of a dog walking across a bridge with a bone in his mouth. When he looked down into the river and saw his reflection, he thought it was another dog with a bigger bone. So he jumped in to get it—and drowned. Paul dedicates two entire chapters in the Bible to the subject of money. Perhaps that’s a good answer to those who say, “All the church ever talks about is money.” Since money is congealed sweat, coined time, coined talent, negotiable you, it’s one way in which you can give yourself to God. It’s not the only way, but it’s a very important way. So Paul writes: “Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully. And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others...Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous” (2Co 9:6-11 NLT). Unless you practice generosity there’s no point asking God for more money. He doesn’t pour His blessing into pots, but into pipes; not into reservoirs, but into rivers that let it flow out. Getting the idea?

SUNDAY APRIL 22

“Are you in health, my brother?”

2Sa 20:9 NKJV

## VITAMINS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH (6)

Never forget, you're not home yet. The story's told of an old steamship that pulled into Southampton harbor and the passengers got off. Helium-filled balloons rose into the air and the crowd went wild as a young Hollywood starlet walked down the gangplank to be greeted by her family and friends. The last person off the ship was an elderly man who had spent more than fifty years of his life as a missionary in India. All his earthly possessions were in a tattered suitcase he carried by his side. After getting to his room in a cheap boarding house, he knelt by his bed and prayed: “Lord, I've served you all my life. I've sacrificed everything to tell others the good news of the gospel and brought many to you. Yet there was no one to celebrate my arrival or welcome me home.” As he knelt there the voice of God spoke to him softly and said, “Son, you're not home yet!” And redeemed child of God, neither are you! If God has blessed you with a nice house, thank Him and enjoy it. But don't get too settled. At best, it's only temporary accommodation. Paul thought often of heaven: “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you” (Php 1:23-24 NKJV). God has something “far better” in mind for you. A great preacher once said: “It is our main business in this world, to secure an interest in the next one.”

MONDAY APRIL 23

“I will...tell you...things you do not know.”

Jer 33:3 NIV

## HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF GOD

In tough times we've a tendency to lower our expectations. As a result we end up settling for less than God wants. The Bible asks, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Ge 18:14 NKJV). Now it's easy to answer, “No!” But what you do next proves whether or not you actually believe that. Jesus said: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Jn 13:17 NKJV). To walk in God's blessing every day you must do what He tells you. And He may tell you to do something different! The problem is, we get attached to methods which worked in the past and keep going back to them. But by always looking to the familiar, you limit God. He's much greater than any proven method, and He's never predictable. His Word says, “Call to me and I will...tell you...things you do not know.” The Living Bible says, “I will tell you some remarkable secrets about what is going to happen.” What an offer! When God decided that Moses would lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses never questioned God's ability, he just questioned whether God could do it through him. What was God's answer when Moses complained that he wasn't an articulate speaker? “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (Ex 4:12 NIV). God is neither enhanced by your strengths nor inhibited by your struggles. There's more He wants to do through you than what you've experienced so far. So have high expectations of God and respond in faith to whatever He tells you.

TUESDAY APRIL 24

“Remember those...who are mistreated.”

Heb 13:3 NIV

## PRAY FOR CHRISTIANS UNDER ATTACK

Do you ever pray for persecuted Christians in other countries? You should, because they are your spiritual family. John writes: “I saw...those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” (Rev 6:9 NIV). Increasingly, believers around the world are giving their lives for the cause of Christ and the testimony they’ve maintained in the face of hostility. “Are you trying to make me feel bad?” you ask. No, just: (1) More prayerful. “Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Next time you hit your thumb with a hammer and your whole body aches, remember this truth and pray for the great big worldwide body of believers, many of whom are still being mistreated, imprisoned, tortured, and even killed in Christ’s name. (2) More grateful. You say, “Grateful for what?” That your faith is so effective that you’re on Satan’s hit list; that he considers you a threat to his kingdom and his agenda in the earth. (3) More faithful. Richard Wurmbrand, who wrote *Tortured For Christ*, said, “What a person really believes is not what he says in his creeds, but what he’s willing to die for.” Now, the odds are that you will never be called upon to die for Jesus. But the question is, if you’re not willing to die for Him, what are the chances you’ll really live for Him? Before you can answer that question you must ask yourself, “How much of my time, my treasure and my talents am I investing into His kingdom?”

WEDNESDAY APRIL 25

“Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Mt 25:23 NKJV

## KEEP TRYING

In *Discipleship Journal* Paul Thigpen writes: “I remember coming home one afternoon to discover that the kitchen I had worked so hard to clean only a few hours before, was now a terrible wreck. My young daughter had obviously been busy ‘cooking’ and the ingredients were scattered, along with dirty bowls and utensils, across the counters and floor. I was not happy with the situation. Then, as I looked a little more closely at the mess I spied a tiny note on the table, clumsily written and smeared with chocolaty fingerprints. The message was short—‘I’m makin somethin 4 you, dad’—and it was signed, ‘your angel.’ In the midst of that disarray, and despite my irritation, joy suddenly sprang up in my heart, sweet and pure. My attention had been redirected from the problem to the little girl I loved. As I encountered her in that brief note, I delighted in her. With her simple goodness in focus, I could take pleasure in seeing her hand at work in the situation that seemed otherwise disastrous.” In the parable of the talents, Jesus pointed out that the two servants who invested and multiplied what had been entrusted to them received the Master’s highest commendation: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” On the other hand, the servant who buried his gifts rather than risk and lose, received the Master’s harshest condemnation: “You wicked and lazy servant” (v. 26 NKJV). Commendation or condemnation: which will you receive? God doesn’t say, “If you can’t do it right, don’t do it at all.” No, He’s pleased when you try, make mistakes, learn from them and grow. So keep trying!

THURSDAY APRIL 26

“You desire truth in the inward parts.”

Ps 51:6 NKJV

### THE TRUTH ABOUT THE TRUTH (1)

According to Psychology Today, more people say they have cheated on their marriage partners than on their income tax returns or expense accounts. Nearly half say that if they scratched another car in the parking lot they would drive away without leaving a note, although 89 percent agree that it would be wrong. Perhaps the question shouldn't be, “Why does God demand such honesty of us?”, but rather, “Why do we tolerate such dishonesty?” Jeremiah weighs in: “The heart is deceitful above all things” (Jer 17:9 NIV). For many of us, our credo is, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you squirm.” At the age of three, when Mom asked, “Did you hit your little brother?” we knew that honesty had its consequences. So we learned to say, “Uhhhh, well, it's not really lying.” We learned to cover things up. “Did I hit my baby brother? That all depends on how you interpret the word hit. I mean, sure, I made contact with him, but would a jury consider it a hit? Everything is relative, you know.” We say, “Did I hit my baby brother? Yes, Mom, I did. But it's not my fault. Had I been born with nonaggressive chromosomes and had you not permitted me to watch television, it would never have happened. So I can say I hit my brother, but the fault isn't mine. I'm a victim of nurture and nature.” We smile, but the Psalmist said, “You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.” And that's the truth about the truth.

FRIDAY APRIL 27

“You desire truth in the inward parts.”

Ps 51:6 NKJV

### THE TRUTH ABOUT THE TRUTH (2)

If we're brutally honest, we'd have to admit that sometimes the truth seems inadequate to do what we need done. We want our bosses to like us, so we flatter. We want our friends to admire us, so we exaggerate. We want people to respect us, so we live in houses we can't afford and charge bills we can't pay. Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and gave a portion of the money to the church. But they lied, claiming the land sold for the amount of money they gave (See Ac 5). Their sin was not in holding back some money for themselves; it was in misrepresenting the truth. And their deceit resulted in their deaths. You say, “I'm glad God doesn't strike people dead today for lying.” Don't be so sure. Lying results in the death of: (1) A marriage. Falsehoods are termites in the trunk of the family tree. (2) A conscience. The tragedy of the second lie is that it's always easier to tell than the first. (3) A career. Just ask the employee who got fired for embezzlement. (4) Faith. Think: How can God use us if we won't tell the truth? Every football team has a player assigned to carry the play from the coach to the huddle. But what if the player doesn't tell the truth? What if the coach calls for a pass but the player says the coach calls for a run? The coach won't call on him very long. God says if you are honest in small things He will trust you with greater things (See Mt 25:21). So, can God trust you?

SATURDAY APRIL 28

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

Mk 1:17

NIV

## COURAGE (1)

If you want to experience God’s blessing in a new way, get ready to leave your comfort zone. When Jesus called His disciples they were on familiar turf, doing what they knew best: fishing. But they couldn’t stay there and follow Him. Neither can you. The Bible records: “As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net...for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him” (vv. 16-18 NIV). Notice, they had to leave the security of the familiar in order to fulfill their destiny. And in case you think you are too old to try something new, Abraham was seventy-five when he left the comforts of home to go out and establish a new nation. Your age is not the issue, your faith is. Understand this: today you are just one step of obedience away from the next truth God wants you to learn about Him, so you can’t afford to stay where you are. We all have a tendency to cling to the “tried and true.” The trouble with that is, when you are no longer being stretched you begin to shrink, you become complacent, you think you can handle things on your own, and you stop growing. That’s a dangerous place to be. If you feel restless at heart today and believe that God has more for you than you’ve been settling for, then it’s time to confront your fears, walk through them and launch out into a new experience with Him.

SUNDAY APRIL 29

“Rise up; this matter is in your hands...take courage and do it.”

Ezr 10:4 NIV

## COURAGE (2)

Pastor Andy Stanley writes: “I keep a little card in my desk that reads: ‘Dream no small dreams, for they stir not the hearts of men.’ More than once that simple statement has kept me from retreating from my dreams. I know from experience that it’s impossible to lead without a dream. When leaders are no longer willing to dream, it’s only a short time before followers are unwilling to follow. So dream! Dream big. Dream often. Somewhere in those random ideas that flood your mind, is one that will capture your heart and imagination. And that seemingly random idea may very well evolve into a vision for your life.” Every great accomplishment begins as a dream in someone’s heart. All things are created twice: first in your mind, and then in your life. Dreamers allow their minds to wander outside the boundaries of what is, creating a mental picture of what can be. They are not always the most talented or best educated—just the ones who refuse to put brackets around their thinking or limit themselves to what others have done. Doing this requires courage, lots of it! On the heels of every dream there’s a demon of doubt. No sooner is your dream conceived than your mind is suddenly filled with all the reasons why it may not work. And there will be folks around you who’ll be quick to confirm those fears. In spite of that, you must forge ahead and dream; otherwise you’ll spend the rest of your life fulfilling the dreams of others. “Rise up; this matter is in your hands...take courage and do it.”

MONDAY APRIL 30

“There is a greater power with us than with him.”

2Ch 32:7 NIV

### COURAGE (3)

David was bringing food to his brothers at the battlefield when he saw Goliath. He wasn't thinking of becoming a hero, he just seized an opportunity other soldiers only dream about. Opportunities will catch you by surprise, and if you're not alert and ready, you'll miss them. What others discovered in David that day—had been there all along! If you're a leader, you already possess the talent necessary to lead. But courage is what will establish you as a leader before others. The people we revere most, demonstrate courage—courage on the battlefield and in the boardroom, courage to defend the defenseless, or simply to attempt what nobody else thought possible. You say, “But I don't have the money.” Don't worry, capital follows courage. What always precedes how. Don't be intimidated by the numbers. God is not moved by spreadsheets and market conditions, He's moved by faith. Don't let how intimidate you. It's because how is so challenging that it provides you with great opportunity. If the pathway to success were well lit it would already be crowded. If how wasn't a problem, someone else would already have figured it out. All progress begins with one question: “What needs to be done?” And somebody needs to be asking that question—why not you? The future belongs to those who have the courage to ask that question and the faith to hang on until they discover the answer. When the obstacles look too big and opposition seems too strong, stand on this Scripture: “Do not be afraid or discouraged...for there is a greater power with us than with him.”

TUESDAY MAY 1

“She prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.” Jdg 16:16 NIV

### THE ULTIMATE THERAPY AND PROTECTION

When you're emotionally drained and under pressure, you're vulnerable to making serious mistakes. Samson did. Notice how Delilah brought him down: “She prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. So he told her everything” (vv. 16-17 NIV). You can attend church every week and read your Bible from cover to cover, but it will do you little good if you're running around physically and spiritually depleted. Furthermore, it's hard to live with such a person, and almost impossible to help them because their mind is in the grip of a negative force. You say, “What's the answer?” (1) Examine the company you're keeping. When you need rest and relief go to the right people; when you're feeling down, reach for those who can lift you up. The Psalmist said, “I am a friend to all...who follow your precepts” (Ps 119:63 NIV). (2) Check your fuel gauge. Samson wore himself out in a good cause because he failed to replenish his soul. Are you doing that? One New Year's Day during the Tournament of Roses parade in California, a beautiful float suddenly sputtered and quit—out of gas. The whole parade was held up until someone found a gas can. The funny thing is, this float represented the Standard Oil Company. The Bible says, “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Isa 40:29 NIV). As you spend time with God in prayer and the Scriptures, He will strengthen you and give you back your peace and stability. It's the ultimate therapy. It's also the ultimate protection!

WEDNESDAY MAY 2

“He will receive his reward.”

1Co 3:14 NIV

### GOD’S REWARD SYSTEM (1)

Read these three Scriptures: (1) “The fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss” (vv. 13-15 NIV). (2) “No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions)” (Mk 10:29-30 NIV). (3) “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Lk 14:13-14 NIV). These Scriptures clearly teach that God records your deeds and rewards you for them. Some of your rewards will come in this life, and some will come in the next. If you fail to understand that, you’ll find yourself saying, “I served God faithfully, so why am I still struggling? Doesn’t God notice or care?” Yes, God notices and He cares. But He doesn’t promise that the work you do for Him now will always result in gain from Him now. Many of the rewards God has for us are so great that it will take eternity to appreciate and enjoy them. Jesus said, “Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name...will by no means lose his reward” (Mk 9:41 NKJV). No deed for God will be overlooked or go unrewarded—even a cup of cold water or a prayer in the middle of the night.

THURSDAY MAY 3

“He will receive his reward.”

1Co 3:14 NIV

### GOD’S REWARD SYSTEM (2)

How will God evaluate and reward what you did for Him during your lifetime here on earth? Based on three tests: (1) The relationship test. The life God rewards is not a life of performance apart from relationship with Him. Jesus pointed out that unless you abide in Him and obey His commandments, you will not bear fruit for Him (See Jn 15:5). He commended the church at Ephesus for their good works, then turned around and condemned them because they hadn’t kept their love for Him alive. “I know your works, your labor, your patience...Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Rev 2:2-4 NKJV). (2) The motive test. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward...in heaven” (Mt 6:1 NKJV). Note the words “to be seen.” What should our motive be? To serve God and bring glory to Him! Even simple things like eating and drinking can do that (See 1Co 10:31). On the other hand, your most religious actions are worthless if your motive is to enhance your own ego and reputation. (3) The love test. Christ said, “Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great” (Lk 6:35 NKJV). When it comes to good works, why is always more important than what. The Bible says, “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward” (2Jn 8 NKJV). So keep your heart pure and your motives right!

FRIDAY MAY 4

“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” 1Co 12:3 NKJV

## THE BENEFITS OF MAKING JESUS “LORD”

Making Jesus “Lord” of your life means that He must have the first and last word in all things that concern you. It means you are called to walk with Him, to prove yourself valuable to Him, to please Him and do what He wants, when He wants it, and in the way He wants it done. Here are three great benefits that come from putting Jesus behind the wheel and making Him “Lord.” (1) When you don’t know what to say, He will tell you. “The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom, so that I may know how to comfort the weary. Morning by morning he wakens me and opens my understanding to his will. The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me, and I have listened. I have not rebelled or turned away” (Isa 50:4-5 NLT). (2) When you can’t defend yourself, He will fight for you. “The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble? When evil people come to devour me...they will stumble and fall. Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident” (Ps 27:1-3 NLT). (3) When the burden feels too heavy, He will carry it for you. “Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall” (Ps 55:22 NLT). And these three benefits are yours when you make Jesus “Lord” over every area of your life.

SATURDAY MAY 5

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.”

2Pe 3:18 NKJV

## FOUR WAYS TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD

First, make up your mind. Spiritual growth doesn’t happen by osmosis. You don’t just wake up with it one morning, you have to set your heart on it and make it your highest priority. Otherwise it won’t happen. “The Bible says: “Let not that man suppose he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (Jas 1:7 NKJV). Second, break up your will. Until your will is surrendered to God and brought into alignment with His purposes, you will go in circles spiritually. Israel went in circles in the wilderness for forty years, yet they were only eleven miles from the Promised Land. Don’t let that happen to you. “Now may the God of peace...make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight” (Heb 13:20-21 NKJV). Third, wake up your faith. Obey the leadings of God’s Spirit. Don’t be afraid, He will not let you down. Just make sure you don’t let Him down. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for He who comes to God must believe that He is...a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6 NKJV). Fourth, take up your cross. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25 NKJV). If you’re serious about building a relationship with the Lord, do these four things.

SUNDAY MAY 6

“In due season he will honor you with every blessing.” Ps 37:34 TLB

### ARE YOU FULFILLED? (1)

There is usually a huge gap between the birth of a dream and the achievement of that dream. The question you have to ask yourself is whether it will be a fulfillment gap or a frustration gap. If it's a frustration gap you'll be miserable most of the days you're in it. And every day that you're frustrated instead of fulfilled, you lessen the odds that you'll be able to keep moving forward toward your dream. Author Seth Godin calls this gap between when you set out to do something and when you actually start to see significant results, “the dip.” The dip represents the adversity you must face, the learning curve you must go through, and the hard work you must be willing to invest between conception and realization. If the dip you are in seems to be a road without end, here are some Scriptures you need to stand on: “Don't be impatient for the Lord to act! Keep traveling steadily along his pathway and in due season he will honor you with every blessing.” “Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised” (Heb 10:35-36 NIV). “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2Co 4:18 NIV). God has promised you more than just the fulfillment of your dream; He has promised joy in each step you take toward it.

MONDAY MAY 7

“Do not throw away your confidence; it will be...rewarded.” Heb 10:35 NIV

### ARE YOU FULFILLED? (2)

Consultant Dan Sullivan talks about the difference between our “ideals” and our “actuals.” He says, “The ideal is a picture we create of future desirable events and situations that enables us to move forward in time. The ideal does not actually exist outside our minds, nor is it achievable.” Why? Because it depends on everything being perfect. Life is, at best, messy. It's filled with surprises—both good and bad. If you need the ideal picture of your dream to come into being in order to feel fulfilled, you will never be fulfilled. That doesn't mean you should cast aside your ideal vision. It is useful for helping you to establish goals, find internal motivation, and strive for excellence. However, you also need to temper it. Where idealistic dreams expect to be realized immediately, realistic dreams make you appreciate the time it takes for them to become a reality. Where idealistic dreams do not tolerate anything less than perfection, realistic dreams leave room for you to be human and imperfect. Where idealistic dreams set you up for disappointment, realistic dreams set you up for success. The man who never made a mistake, never made anything. Indeed, the man who never made a mistake probably gets his salary from the one who does. The reason God doesn't whitewash His heroes in the Bible is to let you know that in spite of your flaws, He can use you to accomplish great things. You say, “But am I not supposed to work on my weaknesses?” Yes, but you'll only succeed in what you're called to do by working from your God-given strengths.

TUESDAY MAY 8

“I delight to do Your will, O my God.”

Ps 40:8 NKJV

ARE YOU FULFILLED? (3)

To keep your dream alive and find fulfillment in the pursuit of it, you must allow yourself to keep dreaming. God gave Joseph two dreams: in the first, other sheaves of wheat bowed down to his; in the second, other stars bowed down to his. Note, he dreamed progressively higher, from sheaves to stars. Most creative people intuitively understand the importance of dreaming as a process for inspiration, motivation and fulfillment. George Lucas, creator and producer of the movie Star Wars, says one thing that kept him and his colleagues going during the difficult times was this: “We were always dreaming of how it was going to be.” If you are not a naturally creative person, then you have to learn how to keep dreaming. And if you can do it with a sense of humor, that doesn’t hurt. There’s a story about a student riding a bicycle on a college campus. On his tee shirt was the message: “I am going to be a doctor.” On the bike was a sign that also had a message: “I am going to be a Mercedes.” That’s somebody who had learned to keep dreaming! Andrew Carnegie, who was a Christian philanthropist during the early 1900s, said, “If you want to be happy, set a goal that commands your thoughts, liberates your energy, and inspires your hopes.” In other words—keep your dream alive and it will keep you alive. When David said, “I delight to do Your will, O my God,” he simply meant you’ll find your highest fulfillment in doing what God put you on this earth to do.

WEDNESDAY MAY 9

“Watch out that no...bitterness grows up.”

Heb 12:15 NLT

DON'T GET BITTER

Betrayal is something others do to you; bitterness is something you do to yourself. It’s impossible to go through life without being hurt. It may be an unfaithful mate, an employee who slanders you, or a boss who fires you without explanation. Sitting at supper with His disciples, Jesus said, “One of you will betray me” (Mk 14:18 NIV). Shortly after that, Judas betrayed Him with a kiss. Some folks will kiss you today and kick you tomorrow. But Jesus refused to become bitter. That’s because He knew Judas’ kiss would usher Him into His destiny. Nor did Jesus turn His back on Peter when he denied Him. Instead, Peter was the only one He mentioned by name when He arranged to meet His disciples for breakfast following the resurrection. Jesus saw people in the light of their potential, not their problems. What they were at that moment didn’t keep Him from seeing what they would become when His grace touched their lives. And you must be that way too. This is why Paul wrote: “Get rid of all bitterness...Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you” (Eph 4:31-32 NLT). So eliminate any words of bitterness from your conversation. Stop rehearsing the details of your past unless it’s to teach and encourage others to rise above theirs. How often do you revisit your old issues? What are you doing to make sure no bitterness remains in your heart? God says, “Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing” (Isa 43:18-19 NKJV).

THURSDAY MAY 10

“And they chose...Philip.”

Ac 6:5 NKJV

ARE YOU A “PHILIP”? (1)

Philip was one of seven men chosen to lead the New Testament church. Why? Because he had certain qualities. Let's look at two of them: He had the ability to be Spirit-led. Philip started out as a deacon working in the administration department of the church. But he went on to become an evangelist, conducting a city-wide crusade in Samaria. “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Ac 8:5-6 NKJV). Now, the idea of staying there and building a great church must have been very appealing to Philip. But God had other plans. “An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip...‘Arise and go toward the...desert.’ So he arose and went” (vv. 26-27 NKJV). “Go where? To the desert? Are you serious, Lord?” Here's a thought: when God speaks to you He may not tell you what you want to hear, or send you where you'd like to go. Have you considered that? Is that why you're not actively seeking His guidance? Big doors swing on little hinges. In the desert Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch who served the queen of Ethiopia as secretary of the treasury. Philip's assignment was to introduce him to Christ and baptize him. After that the eunuch returned to Ethiopia and history says multitudes there were won to Christ as a result. But it only happened because Philip could leave his comfort zone, step out in faith and follow God. Bottom line: in order to lead others you must know how to be led by God.

FRIDAY MAY 11

“And they chose...Philip.”

Ac 6:5 NKJV

ARE YOU A “PHILIP”? (2)

The Bible says: “We...came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip...this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied” (Ac 21:8-9). Here's the second thing that qualified Philip for leadership in the church: He knew how to build a strong family. You say, “Does that mean if I've failed in marriage God won't use me?” No, Samuel was one of Israel's greatest prophets, yet he failed with his children. David wrote Psalms, yet his family life was a shambles. Interestingly, neither Samuel nor David had much to say in Scripture about family life. When it comes to church leadership, to have credibility in God's house you must first have it in your own. So, pastor: (1) don't sacrifice your family for your church; (2) don't sacrifice your children for your congregation; (3) don't sacrifice your spouse for your children; (4) don't sacrifice the important for the urgent. The Bible gives us qualifications for leadership in the church. Paul writes that a leader “must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious...He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent or dishonest with money...He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong” (Tit 1:6-9 NLT). So, do you qualify?

SATURDAY MAY 12

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.”

Jas 1:12

## ARE YOU BEING TEMPTED?

You'll never be exempt from temptation. Each season of life just brings temptation in a different form. When you're young you'll struggle with the need for companionship and sexual fulfillment. In business you'll be tempted to distort the truth, cheat and pocket the money. When you become successful, if you're not careful you'll become ego-driven, controlling and opinionated. The truth is, you never become so spiritual as to be exempt from temptation. After forty days of prayer and fasting, Satan tempted Jesus. So you are as vulnerable to attack after a great spiritual experience as you are in your lowest moments. Satan understood Jesus' assignment and he was out to stop Him from accomplishing it. And he is out to stop you too! The battle you're in is not over the past, it's over the future. In the face of repeated temptation Jesus defeated Satan by using the Word of God, and you must too. Without it you have no defense. In what specific areas do you struggle? What's your strategy for victory? What percentage of the time are you successful? What Scriptures have you memorized to help you conquer the tempter when he comes against you? Look at Samson, God's champion: blinded, chained, grinding corn like an ox in a Philistine dungeon. Sin has a blinding effect, a binding effect, and a grinding effect. Graveyards and prisons are filled with people who were too weak to stand up against Satan. Dreams crash daily on the rocks of temptation. Move the ship of your life away from those rocks while you still can.

SUNDAY MAY 13

“I prayed for this child.”

1Sa 1:27 NCV

## RAISING SECURE KIDS IN AN INSECURE WORLD

Protectiveness is part of parenting. But unless you're careful you can shield your kids from the very things they need to mature. Sheila Wray Gregoire says we should Surrender them to God. We think we control their futures, but most of the time they turn out differently than we planned. Samuel's mother, Hannah, said: “I prayed for this child...Now I give him back to the Lord” (vv. 27-28 NCV). Whether He chooses to send them to the jungles of Africa...the inner city...or a house around the corner...God knows best. Live with hope, not wishful thinking. Trust God to use them and guide them through life, even if He never reveals how or why. From this perspective it's easier to accept that circumstances don't determine the final outcome; they're just the tools God uses to shape character. Encourage responsibility. Letting kids experience consequence shows them what works and what doesn't. For example, a tumble off the swing set teaches them not to be reckless...and that failure to study results in poor grades. “It is good for people to endure burdens when they're young” (Lam 3:27 GWT). Kids who learn responsibility and independence early are better equipped to succeed. Pray often and with purpose. Instead of praying for his “spiritual children” to be spared persecution, Paul said: “My prayer [is] that your love...abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so...you may be able to discern what is best and...be pure and blameless until the day of Christ” (Php 1:9-10 NIV). Being a Christian doesn't mean life is always easy. But when you, the parent, demonstrate faith in God, your kids learn to trust Him too.

MONDAY MAY 14

“Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

2Ti 2:3

### KNOW YOUR ENEMY (1)

The new birth creates a battle between your old nature and your new one. When you were redeemed, you were recruited into this battle. And it begins the moment your eyes open each morning. The big question is, will you hold up or fold up? Victory depends on knowing your enemy’s strategy and having a plan to deal with it. As a follower of Christ the attack you face each day is twofold. First, there is the attack that comes from without. “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jas 4:4). Now that doesn’t mean distancing yourself from your unchurched friends and denouncing all their activities. Nor does it mean adopting a holier-than-thou attitude toward them. It means that instead of the culture affecting you negatively, you engage and influence it positively, like light in darkness. Susanna Wesley defined “worldliness” as four things: (1) “Whatever dulls the sensitivities of my spirit toward God, or takes the fine edge off my thought of Him—must be ruled out for He is my Lord. (2) Whatever injures and weakens my body, or affects the mastery of it—must be ruled out for it is the temple of the Lord. (3) Whatever adversely affects the clearness of my witness to Jesus Christ before others—must be ruled out for it was His parting wish that I should be a witness of Him. (4) Whatever may cause my brother to stumble in his Christian life—must be ruled out for that would grieve Jesus.”

TUESDAY MAY 15

“There is another power within me that is at war with my mind.” Ro 7:23 NLT

### KNOW YOUR ENEMY (2)

Today let’s talk about the enemy within. Your old nature is like a fifth column, always looking for ways to sabotage you. It’s the door through which Satan enters. You have two natures, an old one and a new one. They are opposite, and they are always on a collision course. A great illustration of this can be found in the birth of Jacob and Esau. “Rebekah became pregnant with twins. But the two children struggled with each other in her womb. So she went to ask the Lord about it. ‘Why is this happening to me?’ she asked. And the Lord told her, ‘The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son’” (Ge 25:21-23 NLT). Paul talks about his “Dr. Jekyll” nature and his “Mr. Hyde” nature. “I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to sin that is still within me” (Ro 7:22-23 NLT). What’s the answer? Starve your old nature and feed your new one! Again Paul writes: “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2Ti 2:4). That means you must: (1) regularly communicate with headquarters through prayer; (2) read God’s Word to be sure you’re obeying your Commanding Officer; (3) keep your spiritual morale high; (4) not get entangled with the wrong people or things.

WEDNESDAY MAY 16

“Be it known...that we will not.”

Da 3:18

### DOING THE RIGHT THING (1)

The higher you climb in life, the more certain people will try to assert control over you. Their threats can sound real, and the consequences of ignoring them, intimidating. Look at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Their commitment to God landed them in a fiery furnace heated seven times over. But it also promoted them to a place of great blessing and influence. Their story teaches us that for something to be an authentic test of character, it must be a situation in which the outcome is not in your hands. You simply make the choice to do what is right before God and leave the consequences to Him. It's a trial by fire, but it's a fire of refinement, and on the other side of it you come out stronger. Each time you do the right thing, choosing to embrace rather than escape the path God has called you to walk, you enter a new level of freedom. And as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego discovered, three things happen: (1) You are set free from the “Nebuchadnezzars” who claim to have control over the outcomes of your life. (2) You are set free to say no to those who would try to use and manipulate you. (3) You are set free to serve your all-powerful King and say no to all the other pretenders who really have no power over you at all. In that moment you not only gain insight into who you are, but more importantly, Whose you are. And God will do one of two things: develop you in the fiery furnace, or deliver you from it. Indeed, He may do both!

THURSDAY MAY 17

“Be it known...that we will not.”

Da 3:18

### DOING THE RIGHT THING (2)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had achieved career success, so they had nothing to gain by challenging the king of Babylon. So, why did they? Because he ordered them to disobey God and violate their convictions by bowing down in worship before a pagan image. No doubt they could have reasoned, “Better a live dog than a dead lion. If we stay alive, maybe we can do good for God and for others.” That philosophy would have convinced many of us, so why not them? Because they realized that Nebuchadnezzar was not the reason for their success. He may have been an instrument God used to promote them, but he was not the source of either their significance or their security. Those two things came from God—and they understood that you can't abandon the principles of God and walk in the blessings of God. You don't grieve the One who controls everything, just to get along with those who think they control everything. There will always be those who think they know what you should do. But these three Hebrew boys knew better: “Our God whom we serve is able” (v. 17). Able to do what? “Able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20 NKJV). By refusing to bow, when bowing seemed like the expedient thing to do, they turned the hearts of a nation to God. Now, your influence may not be that widespread, but one thing you can count on: others are watching who will be influenced by the stand you take. So ask God to strengthen you, and do the right thing!

FRIDAY MAY 18

“David inquired again of God.”

1Ch 14:14 NKJV

## DON'T GO UNTIL YOU GET IT

The Bible says: “David asked God what to do. The Lord replied... ‘When you hear a sound like marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, that is your signal to attack, for God will go before you and destroy the enemy.’ So David did as the Lord commanded...and he cut down...the Philistines” (vv. 14-16 TLB). Observe three things in this story: (1) David refused to make a move until he first talked it over with the Lord. Notice the words, “David inquired again of God.” It wasn’t just something he did occasionally or in times of crisis, it was something he did on a regular basis. (2) David waited until he heard a certain sound: “A sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees.” Do you know God well enough to recognize the sound of His voice? With time and testing you can. “You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (1Jn 2:20 NKJV). Not only will you know what God wants you to do, He will actually create within you the desire to do it. “It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Php 2:13 NKJV). (3) David went, knowing God had gone before him to deal with every obstacle that stood in his way. The Bible says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally” (Jas 1:5). Wisdom is “the ability to use knowledge so as to successfully meet the challenges of life.” You may acquire knowledge from books and schools, but this wisdom is a gift from God. Don’t go until you get it!

SATURDAY MAY 19

“God...made Jesus perfect by suffering.”

Heb 2:10 CEV

## MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING (1)

None of us has come close to experiencing what Jesus endured on the cross, yet we run from suffering. A lost job, a debilitating illness, a painful divorce—none of us escapes. Even “Jesus...had to suffer before he could learn what it really means to obey God” (Heb 5:8 CEV). Pain is a learning experience. The Bible says, “God...made Jesus perfect by suffering.” Philip Yancey writes: “God understood physical pain, having designed the nervous system that carries it to our brains...But had a Spirit ever felt physical pain? Not until the Incarnation. In thirty-three years on earth Jesus learned about...family squabbles...social rejection...verbal abuse and betrayal. And he learned too about pain. What it feels like to have an accuser leave the red imprint of his fingers on your face...to have a crude iron spike pounded through muscle, tendon, and skin. On earth, God learned all that. And because of Jesus, God hears our groans differently. The author of Hebrews marveled that whatever we are going through, God has gone through: ‘For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but...one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin’ (Heb 4:15 NIV). We have a high priest who graduated from the school of suffering and ‘is able to be gentle with those who do not understand and who are doing wrong things’ (Heb 5:2 NCV)...We need no longer cry into the abyss, ‘Hey, [God], are you listening?’ By joining us on earth, Jesus gave visible, historical proof that God hears our groans and...groans along with us.” What a comfort!

SUNDAY MAY 20

“If it is possible, let this cup...be taken away from me.” Mt 26:39 NLT

## MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING (2)

Sometimes in Christian circles when somebody is suffering we blame it on hidden sin. That way we think it can't happen to us because we're not guilty of that particular problem, right? How shortsighted, given the fact that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, exemplified suffering! In Gethsemane He didn't stand up with false bravado and say, “Bring it on!” No, “He...bowed...his face to the ground, praying, ‘My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away...Yet...your will...be done, not mine.’” Jesus took pain and showed us how to glorify God in it. One Christian author observed: “God never promised tornadoes would skip our houses on the way to our pagan neighbors, and microbes would flee from Christian bodies. We're not exempt from the tragedies of this world, just as God wasn't exempt. In fact, Peter earned the strongest rebuke when he protested against the need for Christ to suffer. Jesus said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block...you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men...If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself...take up his cross and follow me...whoever wants to save his life will lose...whoever loses his life for me will find it’ (Mt 16:23-25 NIV)...God took the worst thing that could happen—the execution of His innocent Son—and turned it into the final victory over death...He turned the design of evil into the service of good...It's by His wounds that we are healed (Isa 53:5), and by His weakness that we are made strong.”

MONDAY MAY 21

“Keep your conscience clear.”

1Ti 1:19 NLT

## A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Speaking of conscience, Paul writes: “I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people” (Ac 24:16 NLT). He lays it on the line to Timothy: “Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.” Now a captain doesn't set out to wreck his ship. But if he falls asleep at the wheel or takes his eye off the compass, he will end up on the rocks anyway. The question is not, “Can I get away with it?” No, the question is, “Can I live with it afterwards? How will it affect my confidence before God? How does He feel about it? Will it prevent or promote His blessing in my life?”

Someone has written: “I have to live with myself and so, I want to be fit for myself to know; I want to be able as days go by, always to look myself in the eye. I don't want to stand with the setting sun, and hate myself for the things I've done. I want to go out with my head erect; I want to deserve all men's respect. Here in the struggle for fame and wealth, I want to be able to like myself. I don't want to look at myself and know, that I'm bluster and bluff and empty show. I can never hide myself from me, I see what others may never see; I know what others may never know; I can never fool myself and so, whatever happens I want to be, self respecting and conscience free.”

TUESDAY MAY 22

“Cross-examine me, O Lord.”

Ps 26:2 TLB

## ARE YOU DRIFTING OFF COURSE?

The story’s told about a guy called Bill who telephoned his boss and said: “I believe you’re looking for an experienced, talented, hard-working manager for your front office. I’d like to apply for the job.” The boss replied, “We already have someone in that slot and he’s doing an excellent job. By the way, your voice sounds familiar. What’s your name?” The guy replied, “It’s me, Bill; I was just checking up on myself!” You need to check up on yourself regularly. The Bible says, “We must listen very carefully to the truths we have heard, or we may drift away from them” (Heb 2:1 TLB). That word “drift” should set off alarm bells. It doesn’t happen overnight, but slowly and imperceptibly you drift off course and end up in places you never thought you would be—places you may not be able to get back from. An airplane flying just one degree off its assigned flight plan can end up hundreds of miles from its destination. And if it’s out of fuel, it’s only going one place—down. Knowing his propensity to drift and to turn a blind eye to his defects of character, the Psalmist prayed: “I have tried to keep your laws and have trusted you without wavering. Cross-examine me, O Lord...test my motives and affections too. For I have taken your loving-kindness and your truth as my ideals” (Ps 26:1-3 TLB). Notice the words “cross-examine”! Cross-examine what? (1) Your motives, or your reasons for doing things. (2) Your affections, or the things toward which you are being drawn. Are you drifting off course?

WEDNESDAY MAY 23

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” Pr 16:3 NIV

## DECISION MAKING (1)

If all your life you’ve been warned about making bad decisions, fear can cause you to miss God-given opportunities. “If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?” (1Co 14:8 NIV). Now you’re like the mule standing between two bales of hay; unable to decide which one to eat and afraid of making the wrong choice, you starve to death. You must act! Your need to do things perfectly and your desire to control every possible outcome will keep you stuck. So: (1) Stop trying to please everybody. “Fear of man is a dangerous trap, but to trust in God means safety” (Pr 29:25 TLB). Once you know what brings you fulfillment, as long as it’s God’s will, chart your course accordingly and refuse to let the opinions of others stop you or color your view. (2) Remember, over time your goals can change. What’s needed today may not be right for you a year from now. So reassess your plans regularly and be willing to change direction. “We should make plans—counting on God to direct us” (Pr 16:9 TLB). When your spiritual gut says no, pay attention. (3) When God is on your side, you’ll prevail. Somebody asked Abraham Lincoln if he was sure that God was on his side. He replied, “I haven’t thought much about it. I just want to know I’m on God’s side.” It’s normal to speculate about how you’d like things to turn out, but God alone controls the future. Just trust Him. “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”

THURSDAY MAY 24

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” Pr 16:3 NIV

## DECISION MAKING (2)

Here are two important things to remember when you're making an important decision: (1) Believe that God is directing your steps. Because He is! “The Lord directs the steps of the godly...Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand” (Ps 37:23-24 NLT). God didn't say you wouldn't stumble. He just promised to pick you up, dust you off, correct you when you need it, and keep working with you. J. I. Packer says: “A moment of conscious triumph makes one feel that after this, nothing really matters; a moment of seeming disaster makes one feel like this is the end of everything. But neither feeling is realistic, because neither event is really what it's felt to be.” So don't get bent out of shape; by God's grace you'll handle it and come out wiser. (2) Realize that God can bring good out of bad situations. “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them” (Ro 8:28 NLT). In every success story you'll find struggles and setbacks. And you'll also find tenacious faith that refuses to give up. After listing a series of adversities that would make your worst day seem like “a trip to the beach,” Paul writes: “None of these things move me” (Ac 20:24). Where does such an attitude come from? It comes from knowing that God is working in you, He's working with you, and He's working through you. And as Ethel Waters used to say, “My God don't sponsor no flops!”

FRIDAY MAY 25

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Ro 10:17

## READ GOD'S WORD—EVERY DAY

If you are wise, when God talks you'll listen. And He will talk to you through the Bible. The reason the Bible has outsold every other book is because it is God's Word on the issue. It takes approximately fifty-six hours to read the Bible through. If you read forty chapters a day you would complete the Bible within a month. If you read nine chapters of the New Testament each day you would complete it within thirty days. But you must read it systematically, regularly, and expectantly. When Satan attacked Him in the wilderness, Jesus quoted the Scriptures to him. That's why the Psalmist said, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps 119:11). The book of Proverbs has thirty-one chapters. Here's an idea. Since there are thirty-one days in most months, why not read a chapter of this wisdom book every day. Can you imagine what you'd learn? The Word of God will build your faith. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Your faith grows when you hear God speak, and it works when you do what He says. If you struggle to lead a victorious Christian life, read these words carefully: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word” (v. 9 NKJV). The solution to every problem you face is contained in Scripture. To be wise you must study it. To be strong in faith you must believe it. To be successful in life you must practice it.

SATURDAY MAY 26

“Therefore, pray...Our Father in heaven.”

Mt 6:9 NKJV

### HOW JESUS TAUGHT US TO PRAY (1)

Here's how Jesus taught us to pray: (1) “Our Father in heaven.” When you say, “Father” you are acknowledging that you're “family,” that you have a special relationship with God which entitles you to go to Him at any time, confident you're loved, welcomed, and assured of His favor. When you say, “in heaven,” you can go no higher. You're drawing what you need from the ultimate source of goodness, grace, mercy, provision, protection and authority. What a privilege! (2) “Hallowed be Your name” (v. 9 NKJV). This thought should always be uppermost in your mind: “Whatever I do today, Lord, whether in thought, word or deed, let it honor You.” People should be able to look at your life and want to become acquainted with the One you serve. (3) “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (v.10 NKJV). Each time you choose to say no to yourself and yes to God's will, you demonstrate to a watching world what it means to live as a citizen of His kingdom. Note the words, “as it is in heaven.” Is anyone in heaven fearful or doubting? Stubborn or disobedient? Critical or negative? When the enemy brings something to your door that's contrary to God's will, you have the authority to rise up and say, “If it's not done and approved in heaven it has no place in my life here on earth.” When it comes to disobedience, refuse to accept the package and sign the receipt. The one thing Satan hopes you never discover is that you have the God-given authority to restrict his movements in your life.

SUNDAY MAY 27

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Mt 6:11 NKJV

### HOW JESUS TAUGHT US TO PRAY (2)

Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Notice the word “daily.” You can't fight today's battles on the strength of yesterday's bread; you must have a fresh supply. In the wilderness God's people were only permitted to collect enough manna for one day; if they tried to collect more it rotted. It's wonderful to talk about what God did yesterday and what He's going to do tomorrow, but all you've got is today. “Give us this day our daily bread.” Only as you partake of what God's provided for you today will you be able to stand up to the challenges you face. This prayer is an expression of faith. The very fact that you ask means you believe God's got what you need and that He cares enough to provide for you. It says, “I don't need to go to anybody else but You, Lord.” So hang up the phone, turn off the TV, shut the door, get down on your knees, approach God in faith and pray, “Give me what I need for this day.” God knows what you need, you don't! As you partake of what He provides for you each day you'll be able to handle whatever life throws at you.

And one more thought. When people start getting on your nerves for no apparent reason, or you start having all sorts of mood swings, or you begin living by feelings instead of faith, it's probably because you're not eating right. If that's so, it's time to go back to your source and say, “Lord, I've come for my daily bread.”

MONDAY MAY 28

“Forgive us...as we forgive.”

Mt 6:12 NKJV

### HOW JESUS TAUGHT US TO PRAY (3)

Let’s clear up some misconceptions about the words, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Satan will try to convince you that if your feelings haven’t changed toward the person who wronged you, you haven’t truly forgiven them. No, you can make the right decision and still have the wrong feelings! This is when you need faith to carry you through. You have done your part, now you are waiting for God to do His. God has the power to change your feelings toward the one who hurt you, and He will. Another misconception is that all you have to do is make a decision to forgive and then your job’s finished. No, you are instructed to “Invoke blessings upon and pray for the happiness of those who curse you, implore God’s blessing (favor) upon those who abuse you” (Lk 6:28 AMP). You say, “Bless them? Are you serious?” Yes. The word “bless” means “to speak well of.” You’re extending mercy to those who don’t deserve it. But isn’t that what God does for you? The truth is, you cannot truly forgive without the Holy Spirit’s help. So today why don’t you pray, “Holy Spirit, breathe on me and give me strength. I forgive \_\_\_\_\_ [name] for what they did. I release them from this debt and ask You to bless them. I turn the situation over to You. I trust You for my total restoration. Help me, Lord. Heal my heart, in Jesus’ name, amen.” Now, by faith, leave it all in your Father’s hands, move forward and anticipate His blessing. You won’t be disappointed.

TUESDAY MAY 29

“Deliver us from the evil one.”

Mt 6:13 NKJV

### HOW JESUS TAUGHT US TO PRAY (4)

Jesus taught us to pray: “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (v.13 NKJV). Satan knows your areas of weakness and he will exploit them. But there’s good news. It’s your weaknesses, not your strengths, that draw you closer to God and make you lean on Him. Paul wrote: “I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me” (2Co 12:9 NLT). At first this verse doesn’t seem to make sense. You want to be freed from your weaknesses, not boast about them. But Paul gives you several reasons: (1) Your weakness prevents pride. Paul writes: “So I wouldn’t get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations” (2Co 12:7 TM). You’ll often find a weakness attached to strength, acting as a governor to keep you from becoming boastful or running ahead of God. Gideon chose 32,000 men to fight the Midianites, but God reduced his numbers to 300 (See Jdg 7). Why? So that Israel would know it was God’s power and not their own that saved them. (2) Your weakness creates fellowship. Your struggles show you how much you need the support of others. Vance Havner said, “Christians, like snowflakes, are frail, but when they stick together they can stop traffic.” (3) Your weakness enables you to help others. It’s the broken who become masters at mending. Your most effective ministry can come out of your most painful experiences. The things you’re most reluctant to share are often the very things God will use to help others.

WEDNESDAY MAY 30

“No man ever spoke like this Man!”

Jn 7:46 NKJV

## THE JESUS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON

Historical research authenticates the personal faith of many of the founders of the United States. In his foreword to the second edition of Thomas Jefferson’s *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, later known as *The Jefferson Bible*, Douglas E. Lurton tells how the President in his first White House term so revered and cherished the words of Jesus, he dreamed of writing them down in a separate volume. From the four Gospels Jefferson extracted Christ’s words, which he described “as easily distinguished (from other words) as diamonds in a dung-hill.” In 1816, he told his friend Charles Thompson, “I, too, have made a...little book...by cutting the texts out of the book and arranging them on the pages of a blank book in...order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel...I have never seen.” Jefferson also wrote his book in Greek, Latin and French. Although he acknowledged initially writing down Christ’s words “for my own use,” never intending to publish them, he subsequently claimed they “will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent...which has ever been offered to man.” Jesus’ words so moved Jefferson that he wrote from his home in Monticello to Thompson describing his book as “a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus.” They were much more than sublime and benevolent words to Jefferson, they were words that changed his life and made him a follower of Christ. In Douglas Lurton’s words about the Bible, let’s “Study it out. Pray it in. Put it down. Pass it on!”

THURSDAY MAY 31

“You have...put a wall of protection around him.”

Job 1:10 NLT

## A WALL OF PROTECTION

When God praised Job for his integrity, Satan replied, “You have always put a wall of protection around him...take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you.” So God gave Satan permission to test Job, but He placed limits on how far he could go (See Job 2:6). There are times “When the enemy comes in like a flood” (Isa 59:19 NKJV) to attack your mind, your marriage, your ministry, and anything that’s born of God in your life. When that happens, Isaiah says, “The Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard [shield] against him” (Isa 59:19 NKJV). When you feel you’re at breaking point and can’t handle one more thing, the Holy Spirit lifts up the wall of the blood of Jesus and tells Satan, “This far and no further!” Paul says, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2Co 4:8-9 NIV). There’s a wall of protection around you. There’s also a time for your deliverance. “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you” (2Co 6:2 NIV). God will step in and intervene. The Psalmist said, “When my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Ps 61:2 NAS). When your resources are depleted and you think you’re going under for the last time, God has provided a refuge that’s higher than your circumstances, a place where you’re under divine protection and the enemy has no jurisdiction. All you have to do is lift your eyes toward heaven.

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