

Devotional Quarterly

Through-the-Bible Series

Vol. 19, No. 4

September 1, 2009

Fullness of Joy

Studies in 1, 2, 3 John and Jude

These Daily Devotionals are informative and true to the Bible. Sometimes these devotionals deal with subjects that are unpopular. This is true because people in general, lost or saved, do not like to be told that they need to repent and make their lives be in harmony with Jesus Christ. A Christian must display characteristics of love and forgiveness. While living in the truth one has the ability to heed God's warnings and discern the spirits. Living in the truth is a confirmation of personal salvation.

**Personal and Daily Devotionals
for
Fall Quarter, 2009**

Written by
Mary McCalister, Gene Smith and Mark Shultz

Read Through the Bible in a Year

To help you with your Bible reading, we are providing suggested Scripture readings for each day of the quarter. You will find these suggested readings at the beginning of each devotional quarterly.

The readings include the “Sunday Devotionals,” “Daily Readings” and the “Daily Devotionals.” The “Sunday Devotionals” are now included in the Devotional Quarterly. The “Daily Readings” cover other Scriptures not related to the Sunday School lessons. By reading all passages listed each day, you will have read the entire Bible at the end of one year. You may use the box beside the date to check when you have read the Scriptures for that day.

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September Scripture Readings

DATE	DAILY DEVOTIONALS	DAILY READINGS
<input type="checkbox"/> August 31	John 1:1-3	Daniel 7; 8; 9:1-3, 7-27
<input type="checkbox"/> September 1	John 1:14	Daniel 10—12
<input type="checkbox"/> September 2	Philippians 2:12-16	Hosea 1—3
<input type="checkbox"/> September 3	John 8:12	Hosea 4—6
<input type="checkbox"/> September 4	Ephesians 5:8-11	Hosea 7—10
<input type="checkbox"/> September 5	Ephesians 1:7	Hosea 11—14
<input type="checkbox"/> September 6	1 Corinthians 1:9, 10	Joel 1:1—3:16
<input type="checkbox"/> September 7	Romans 8:34	Amos 1—3
<input type="checkbox"/> September 8	1 Timothy 2:5	Amos 4—6
<input type="checkbox"/> September 9	John 14:16	Amos 7:1—9:7
<input type="checkbox"/> September 10	2 Corinthians 5:14, 15	Obadiah
<input type="checkbox"/> September 11	Romans 3:24-26	Jonah
<input type="checkbox"/> September 12	John 15:4-8	Micah 1; 2
<input type="checkbox"/> September 13	Colossians 2:6, 7	Micah 3—5
<input type="checkbox"/> September 14	James 4:4	Micah 6:1-5, 9-16; 7
<input type="checkbox"/> September 15	Isaiah 40:6-8	Nahum
<input type="checkbox"/> September 16	Psalms 125:1, 2	Zephaniah 1:1—3:13
<input type="checkbox"/> September 17	John 10:28, 29	Zechariah 1; 2
<input type="checkbox"/> September 18	1 Peter 1:5	Zechariah 3; 4:1-7, 11-14
<input type="checkbox"/> September 19	Matthew 7:16-18	Zechariah 5; 6
<input type="checkbox"/> September 20	John 15:18, 19	Zechariah 7; 8
<input type="checkbox"/> September 21	Philippians 3:20, 21	Zechariah 9; 10
<input type="checkbox"/> September 22	John 1:29	Zechariah 11; 12
<input type="checkbox"/> September 23	Galatians 5:16-26	Zechariah 13; 14
<input type="checkbox"/> September 24	John 1:12, 13	Matthew 1:1-17; 2; 3
<input type="checkbox"/> September 25	Romans 8:14	Matthew 4; 5:17-37; 6:1-32, 34
<input type="checkbox"/> September 26	2 Peter 3:13, 14	Matthew 7:1-6, 12-14, 19-23, 28, 29; 8; 9
<input type="checkbox"/> September 27	1 Corinthians 15:51-57	Matthew 10:1-23, 32-42; 11:1-6, 16-30
<input type="checkbox"/> September 28	Genesis 4:2-7	Matthew 12; 13
<input type="checkbox"/> September 29	Deuteronomy 15:7-11	Matthew 14; 15
<input type="checkbox"/> September 30	1 Timothy 6:17, 18	Matthew 16:1-20, 26-28; 17:10-27

October Scripture Readings

DATE	DAILY DEVOTIONALS	DAILY READINGS
☐ October 1	Psalms 34:15-17	Matthew 18; 19
☐ October 2	John 15:11-13	Matthew 20; 21:1-41; 22
☐ October 3	Ephesians 5:2	Matthew 23:1-3, 9-39; 24:3-51
☐ October 4	John 13:34, 35	Matthew 25:1-30, 32-46; 26:1-32, 36-51, 55-76
☐ October 5	2 Peter 2:1, 2	Matthew 27:1-58; 28
☐ October 6	John 16:13-15	Mark 1—3
☐ October 7	2 Corinthians 4:3-5	Mark 4—6
☐ October 8	John 15:19, 20	Mark 7—9
☐ October 9	Romans 8:9-11	Mark 10:1, 13-52; 11
☐ October 10	John 14:16-18	Mark 12; 13; 14:1-31, 43-72
☐ October 11	Matthew 7:5, 16	Mark 15; 16
☐ October 12	Romans 5:5	Luke 1; 2:21-24, 34-52; 3
☐ October 13	1 Peter 1:22	Luke 4:1-15, 21-44; 5
☐ October 14	Exodus 34:6, 7	Luke 6:1-21, 24-49; 7
☐ October 15	Ephesians 2:4, 5	Luke 8:1-37, 40-56; 9:1-21, 27-62
☐ October 16	Romans 5:8-10	Luke 10; 11
☐ October 17	Ephesians 4:31, 32	Luke 12—14
☐ October 18	1 Thessalonians 4:9, 10	Luke 15—17
☐ October 19	1 Peter 1:22, 23	Luke 18—20
☐ October 20	John 14:21-24	Luke 21; 22:1-23, 28-71
☐ October 21	Psalms 19:7-11	Luke 23; 24:1-48, 50-53
☐ October 22	Romans 8:35-37	John 1:4-11, 15-28, 30-51; 2; 3:8-36
☐ October 23	1 Corinthians 15:57	John 4:1-9, 15-54; 5:1-23, 25-47; 6
☐ October 24	Revelation 12:11	John 7; 8:1-11, 13-59; 9
☐ October 25	John 1:12, 13	John 10:1-8, 12-27, 31-43; 11; 12
☐ October 26	Romans 8:15-17	John 13:1-33, 36-38; 14:4-14, 19-31; 15:1-3, 5-10, 14-17
☐ October 27	Jeremiah 33:3	Acts 1:1, 2, 12-26; 2; 3:1-18, 25, 26; 4
☐ October 28	Psalms 34:15-17	Acts 5:12-39; 6:1-6, 16-60
☐ October 29	1 Corinthians 5:5-7	Acts 7; 8
☐ October 30	Proverbs 11:19	Acts 9:1-21, 30-43; 10:1-41, 44-48
☐ October 31	Acts 5:1-11	Acts 11; 12

November Scripture Readings

DATE	DAILY DEVOTIONALS	DAILY READINGS
<input type="checkbox"/> November 1	John 17:12-15	Acts 13—15
<input type="checkbox"/> November 2	John 17:17	Acts 16; 17:1-10, 12-34
<input type="checkbox"/> November 3	1 Peter 4:8	Acts 18; 19; 20:1-27, 33-38
<input type="checkbox"/> November 4	Romans 13:8, 9	Acts 21—23
<input type="checkbox"/> November 5	Galatians 1:6-9	Acts 24—26
<input type="checkbox"/> November 6	Romans 16:17	Acts 27; 28
<input type="checkbox"/> November 7	2 Timothy 4:3, 4	Romans 1; 2; 3:1-23, 27-31
<input type="checkbox"/> November 8	John 14:15	Romans 4; 5:7-21; 6:1, 2, 6-23
<input type="checkbox"/> November 9	Philemon 5—7	Romans 7; 8:1-7, 19-27, 29, 30
<input type="checkbox"/> November 10	1 Corinthians 3:5-9	Romans 9; 10; 11:1-24, 27-36
<input type="checkbox"/> November 11	Hebrews 13:1-3	Romans 12:3-18, 21; 13:10-14
<input type="checkbox"/> November 12	Luke 22:24-27	Romans 14:1-6, 13-23; 15:1-3, 7-33; 16
<input type="checkbox"/> November 13	Matthew 23:4-8	1 Corinthians 1:1-8, 11-16, 19-31; 2:1-9, 14-16; 3:1-4, 10-23
<input type="checkbox"/> November 14	Philippians 2:3-8	1 Corinthians 4; 5:1-4, 8-13; 6:1-18
<input type="checkbox"/> November 15	1 Peter 4:10, 11	1 Corinthians 7—9
<input type="checkbox"/> November 16	Acts 6:7-15	1 Corinthians 10:1-12, 14-30, 32, 33; 11
<input type="checkbox"/> November 17	Acts 9:22-29	1 Corinthians 12; 13:1-3, 8-13; 14
<input type="checkbox"/> November 18	Philippians 1:27	1 Corinthians 15:1, 2, 9-56; 16:3-24
<input type="checkbox"/> November 19	1 Thessalonians 2:2	2 Corinthians 1—3
<input type="checkbox"/> November 20	2 Timothy 1:13	2 Corinthians 4:1, 2, 7-15; 5:5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 16, 19
<input type="checkbox"/> November 21	Hebrews 4:14-16	2 Corinthians 6:1-13; 7:2-16; 8
<input type="checkbox"/> November 22	2 Timothy 4:7, 8	2 Corinthians 9:1-5, 13-15; 10; 11
<input type="checkbox"/> November 23	2 Timothy 3:1-5	2 Corinthians 12:1-8, 11-21; 13
<input type="checkbox"/> November 24	2 Peter 3:2-4	Galatians 1:1-5, 10-24; 2:1-3, 6-18, 21
<input type="checkbox"/> November 25	Acts 20:32	Galatians 3:1-25, 28, 29; 4:1-3, 8-31
<input type="checkbox"/> November 26	1 Thessalonians 5:18	Galatians 5:1-21; 6:1-13, 15-18
<input type="checkbox"/> November 27	2 Timothy 2:15	Ephesians 1:1-6, 8-12, 15-23; 2:11-22
<input type="checkbox"/> November 28	Ephesians 6:18	Ephesians 3; 4:1-21, 25-30
<input type="checkbox"/> November 29	Acts 20:28-31	Ephesians 5:1, 3-7, 12-21; 6:4-24

In the Beginning

KEY VERSE: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” John 1:1.

What is your answer when someone makes the statement, “God is made out of chemicals”? How can we answer this Satanic inspired claim? We can ask him, “If God is made out of chemicals, who made the chemicals?” Continue to say that God made everything. Say also that you believe the Bible and this is what the Bible teaches.

The Bible has been banned, burned, scoffed and ridiculed. Scholars have mocked it as foolish. Kings have branded it as illegal. A thousand times over the grave has been dug, and the dirge has begun, but the Bible never stays in the grave. Not only has it survived, it has thrived. It is the single most popular book in all of history. It has been the best-selling book in the world for years.

The Bible’s durability is not found on earth; it is found in Heaven. For the millions who have tested its claims and claimed its promises, there is but one answer—the Bible is God’s Word and God’s voice.

The purpose of the Bible is to proclaim God’s plan and passion to save mankind. That is the reason this book has endured through the centuries. It contains a treasure map that leads to God’s highest treasure, eternal life.

LIVING IT: *Believe the Bible and believe God.*

Mary McCalister

The Word Became Flesh

KEY VERSE: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth,” John 1:14.

“The Word was made flesh” (verse 14). What does that mean to you? It means He was touchable, approachable and reachable. To the unbelieving world of that day, He was ordinary. If He were to come to our generation, people probably would not notice Him as He walks through a shopping mall. He would not turn heads by the clothes He wears. He would not sport flashy jewelry.

But, to those who believed in Him, He was completely different. He was God Incarnate, come down to live with mankind, to walk with mankind and eventually to suffer for mankind.

The story is told of a young girl in Africa who gave her teacher a Christmas gift. It was a beautiful seashell.

“Where did you get this?” the teacher asked. The child told her that such shells were found only on a certain faraway beach.

The teacher was deeply touched because she knew she had walked many miles to find the shell.

“You should not have traveled so far just to find a gift for me,” she said. The girl smiled and said, “The long walk is part of the gift.”

Jesus gave us such a gift. His gift began with a journey. He left all the splendors of Heaven to come to our sin-drenched earth. His walk ended in the long road to the cross. The journey was part of His gift.

LIVING IT: *Jesus gave Himself to give us salvation.*

Mary McCalister

Holding Forth the Word of Life

KEY VERSE: “Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain,” Philippians 2:16.

It is easy for pastors to relate to the concerns Paul expressed in this passage. But anyone who has done any soul-winning at all should feel the same concern. We have a special place in our hearts for the souls we have won to the Lord, and we watch anxiously for signs of spiritual growth in their lives.

Paul was blessed by his work with the Philippians as he saw their growth in the Lord. Now, however, he could not be with them. He admonished them to “work out” (verse 12) their salvation. This does not mean work for your salvation, but to work at or manifest what God has already worked in.

If we examine our daily lives and our relationships with fellow church members, we gain a better understanding of what Paul was teaching. If we are to allow God to work in our lives, we must be blameless, harmless and without rebuke. Only then can we shine as lights in a dark world.

If we do this, we will as Christ’s light bearers portray the Word of Life to a world darkened by sin. We should remain true to the truth of the gospel, to hold it fast as a torchbearer would grasp securely the light he carries and let nothing cause us to fail. Remembering the publicity given the Olympic torchbearers will give us a picture of what this means.

LIVING IT: *Let your light so shine before men.*

Mary McCalister

The Light of Life

KEY VERSE: “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life,” John 8:12.

Has the world ever seemed much darker than it is today? Most of us do not think so. We are faced with economic problems of global proportions, terrorist threats which could explode anywhere, moral disintegration in our younger generation, and a refusal to turn to God for the answers.

Things were dark in Jesus' time, too. Jesus spoke plainly, “I am the light of the world” (verse 12). He had the answer to mankind's problems if only they would follow Him. His answer to them was, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

A recent television program was presenting ways to relieve stress—“Take time to reflect and meditate,” the host said. I thought, They almost have it, but not quite.

How often do our teachers and pastors encourage us to take time each day for prayer, Bible study and meditation? Doing this gives us the “light of life” (John 8:12) which Christ offers to all those who walk with Him. We cheat ourselves and others as well when we do not follow Christ and accept His light in our lives.

LIVING IT: *Christ has the answer to every problem the world faces. Follow Him.*

Mary McCalister

Walk as Children of Light

KEY VERSE: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are* ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light,” Ephesians 5:8.

What is your reaction when you see someone who is walking in darkness? We may say, “There but for the grace of God go I,” but do we really mean it? Or is it just a pious platitude (dullness) to hide our self-righteousness?

We were darkness not in darkness. We were sinners and were full of sin. Sometimes, after we are saved, we tend to forget what we once were.

Paul said believers are light in the Lord—receiving that light from the Lord—we should walk “as children of light” (verse 8). Jesus said: “Ye are the light of the world . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14, 16).

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.” In other words, change your habits, and in time you will change your character. You will become one who is walking as a child of light.

You do not become sinless when you are saved. You still have the human sin nature with which to deal. There are steps you can take to deal with this problem. You can deal with your sinful habits, ridding yourself of them as you grow in grace. The key is to develop good habits to replace the bad habits. Establish a devotional habit, reading your Bible and meditating on God’s Word. Pray daily. Praise God for His blessings. Then, you will be walking as a child of light.

LIVING IT: *Begin living the way a child of God should live.*

Mary McCalister

Redeemed by the Blood

KEY VERSE: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace,” Ephesians 1:7.

Those who visit Niagara Falls are awed by the sight, sound and sense of it all. Every minute about 200,000 tons of water plunge into the Niagara River in a thunderous ovation, first to God and then to the ingenuity of man. People come from all over the world to see Niagara Falls.

What a picture this is of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. We are redeemed according to the riches of His grace. Verse 8 states He made this grace to abound toward us. The word translated *abound* means “an exceeding measure, something above the ordinary.” His grace toward us is not squeezed out from an eyedropper or carefully rationed. Instead, His grace is a Niagara Fall type of superabundance—so lavish we marvel at its display.

Jesus taught of freedom but a different kind of freedom. It is the type of freedom that comes not through power but through submission, not through control but through surrender, not through possessions but through open hands.

God wants to emancipate His people. He wants to set them free. He wants His people not to be slaves but sons. He wants them governed not by law but by love.

We have been redeemed—liberated—from our own guilt and our own legalism. We have the freedom to pray and to love the God of our hearts. And we have been forgiven by the only One who could condemn us.

LIVING IT: *Rejoice in Christ. We are truly free!*

Mary McCalister

Called To Fellowship in His Son

KEY VERSE: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,” 1 Corinthians 1:10.

Charles E. Hughes asked, “What does the Christian character or balanced life mean? It is this: faith without credulity, conviction without bigotry, charity without condescension, courage without pugnacity, self-respect without vanity, humility without obsequiousness, love of humanity without sentimentality and meekness with power.” These characteristics bring unity.

We have need of patience with ourselves and unity with others; with those below and those above us, as well as with our own equals; with those who love us and those who love us not; under our daily burdens; for disappointments which break the heart; in the weariness of the body or the weariness of the soul; in our own failures or others’ failure toward us; in everyday wants; in the decay of age; in disappointment, bereavement, losses, injuries and reproaches. In all these things patience is the gift of God’s helping us endure evil for the love of God.

What is this unity Paul says is so important? In Ephesians 4:3 and 13, he enlarges on it, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

LIVING IT: *Jesus first, others next, you last. That’s unity!*

Mary McCalister

Interceding for Us

KEY VERSE: “Who is he that condemneth? *It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us,*” Romans 8:34.

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are goals all the world has. In fact, most people think these characteristics are just what they deserve, no matter how they live.

I watched a TV personality recently who spoke of her younger years and how she spent her time searching for who she really was. She went through cocaine possession, illicit sex, and just about every temptation available to teenagers today. Finally, she reached the bottom. She was given some help and pulled herself up and out of the morass of sin. Sadly, she never once gave any credit to the Lord. My thought was, You could have been spared all that heartache if you had just turned to God for the help you needed.

Job testified, “Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit” (Job 10:12). This verse in this devotional is saying the same thing. Christ is ready and available to help those who trust in Him, to intercede with God for them, thus giving them eternal life, freedom and liberty through His Spirit and the happiness which comes knowing He is on our side.

The devil is our enemy and wants to lead us astray, but God will never let us be pushed beyond our limit. He will always be with us to protect us (1 Cor. 10:13).

LIVING IT: *There’s no greater life, liberty or happiness than what Christ can give.*

Mary McCalister

One God—One Mediator

KEY VERSE: “For *there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*” 1 Timothy 2:5.

Are you saying, “Of course! I know that!” But do you, really? God told Jeremiah, speaking of His people, Israel, “They know not me . . . they refuse to know me” (Jer. 9:3, 6). To the people of Israel this was like a slap in the face. But how do we know they did not know God? Their actions tell us this.

To know God is vitally important to the life of the Christian. What does this knowledge do? It shapes our moral and ethical standards. It directly affects our response to tribulation. It gives us strength when we are tempted. It keeps us faithful and courageous when we are outnumbered. It enhances our worship. It determines our life-style. It is the foundation upon which everything rests.

The most important thing about knowing God is to know that He is indeed the One, and that His Son, Christ Jesus, stands as our Mediator. Without Christ we could never approach God.

What does knowing God accomplish in our lives? We find God’s answer in Jeremiah 9:24, “But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.” Know first of all how little you are, and how great, omnipotent and omniscient God is. Then, you can be at peace feeling strong and secure.

LIVING IT: *Know the one true God and glorify Him in your life.*

Mary McCalister

Another Comforter

KEY VERSE: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever,” John 14:16.

A few years ago a forty-two foot sailboat got caught in stormy seas off the east coast of the United States. Waves rose higher and higher until a giant wave flipped the boat upside down. The heavy keel righted the craft but damage was significant.

A Coast Guard cutter quickly responded to the sailboat’s SOS. But, when the ship located the desperate boat, no one could be rescued because of the violent seas. So the cutter drew as close as possible to the smaller craft, taking the brunt of the waves. The ship remained alongside the imperiled boat throughout the storm and then led it safely into port.

The literal meaning of the word translated *comforter* is “one called alongside to help.” The Holy Spirit guides and protects us through life’s storms, much like that rescue ship escorted the sailboat.

Look at some of the things the Holy Spirit does for us and in us. He seals (Eph. 1:13); teaches (Luke 12:12); empowers (Acts 1:8); leads (Acts 13:2); renews (Titus 3:5); inspires God’s Word (Mark 12:36; 2 Peter 1:21); and, of course, as our devotional reading reads, He comforts, or comes alongside to help.

The disciples may have felt like they had been abandoned, but, as they followed Christ’s instruction and tarried, they soon learned they would have help eternally.

LIVING IT: *The Spirit is leading you. Follow Him!*

Mary McCalister

Christ Died for All

KEY VERSE: “And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again,” 2 Corinthians 5:15.

There are many religious groups in the world today that teach universal salvation, meaning that all of mankind is saved. Their purpose is just to tell them that. In a sense, salvation is universal, but it means that Christ died for all mankind. So, what does this truth mean to you? Paul wrote in verse 14, “Christ constraineth us.” Constrains us to do what? To carry the message of salvation to all that they might receive it and be saved.

So, we may glibly say that we believe Christ died for all mankind. We do not believe in a limited salvation. But, what do your actions say? How many people have you witnessed to this week? Last month? Last year? Are there some people to whom you simply choose not to witness? What about the gang member who lives down the street? What about the Jehovah’s Witness or Mormon who interrupts your daily routine? So you simply say that you are not interested and slam the door in his face? Face it. He needs to hear the truth about salvation once.

The second truth Paul gave us was that, if we have accepted this salvation, there needs to be a change in our lives. We cease being selfish, living only for ourselves but now live for Christ who died for us and brought us salvation.

LIVING IT: *Let the whole world know that salvation is for every person who will accept it.*

Mary McCalister

God's Propitiation

KEY VERSE: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God," Romans 3:25.

Propitiation is a big word and we seldom use it. What does it mean? We do occasionally encounter a related word *propitious* which means "able to make one favorable to another." So, it must mean "atonement," because through our acceptance of the blood of Christ as payment for our sins, we are placed in a position to be acceptable to God.

Another term Paul used here and we seldom see in use today is *forbearance*. What does the "forbearance" (verse 25) of God mean to the believer? It means that God is withholding judgment for our sins because we have remission of sins when we accept Christ as our Savior. If we accept Christ's payment for our sins, that judgment will be in our favor.

So, too, does the forbearance of God give us the grace to live from day to day, knowing that as Paul said, "Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:13, 14).

LIVING IT: *We can rejoice in the forbearance of God which delivers us from the judgment rightfully due us.*

Mary McCalister

Abide and Obey

KEY VERSE: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples,” John 15:8.

The usual practice in viticulture, the care of vines, is for the branches to be pruned each year to cleanse them.

A vine produces certain shoots called sucker shoots, which start to grow where a branch joins the stem. If allowed to continue to grow, they would dissipate the life of the vine through so many branches that the vine would produce little or no fruit and would produce mainly leaves instead. Every vinedresser knows it is important to prune away the little sucker shoots to ensure plentiful fruit. Since the shoots grow right where the branch joins the stem, creating a tight cluster where dirt, leaves and other debris collect, the pruning is basically a cleansing process.

The Father’s work in our lives is to find a branch that is beginning to bear fruit, beginning to produce the likeness of Christ, and then to cut it back. He trims off the troublesome shoots, so that we might bear more fruit.

Any parent who is worthy of the name knows how painful this pruning process—discipline, if you will—can be. The writer of Hebrews dwells on this process in Hebrews 12:6-11. He calls this pruning process chastening, and states it is lovingly administered by a loving God.

If you are in the midst of chastening you might ask, why? It is for your profit, leading you into God’s holiness. It also produces the fruit of righteousness, making us more fruitful in all of our lives.

LIVING IT: *Discipline is God’s way of getting our attention when we are not listening to Him.*

Mary McCalister

Walk in Him

KEY VERSE: “Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving,” Colossians 2:7.

There was a time when God told the people of Israel, “Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD” (Ex. 14:13), but His command to us is different—“walk ye in Him” (Col. 2:6). Walking requires purpose and motion. It is not produced by static.

God would not have us merely take a stand. He would have us walk. Too many have taken a stand and they are still standing; for years they have made no progress.

So, how are we to walk? We are to walk by faith, not by sight. We are to walk in the light, walk in love, walk in newness of life, walk worthy of our vocation, walk circumspectly, walk worthy of the Lord, walk honestly, walk in truth and walk as He walked.

Notice, the Christian life begins with the step of faith—“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord” (verse 6)—and it proceeds step by step—“so walk ye in Him” (verse 6).

How can our walk be productive and God-pleasing? It helps us be rooted and built up in Him. Just as a tree puts down roots and becomes established, it grows into a mighty oak.

We can become like a mighty oak, established in the faith and abounding in the work of the Lord. Our faith grows as we go, not when we are standing still.

Another key to spiritual growth in this passage is “as ye have been taught” (verse 7). The importance of making yourself available to being taught cannot be stressed too much. Take advantage of all the teaching your church offers, and you will indeed be rooted and grounded in the truth.

LIVING IT: *Live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit.*

Mary McCalister

Right Friends and Enemies

KEY VERSE: “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, 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,” James 4:4.

John the Baptist would never get hired today. No church would touch him. He was a public relations disaster. He wore clothes made from camel’s hair, had a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. Who would want to look at a guy like this every Sunday?

His message was as rough as his appearance: a no-nonsense, bare fisted challenge to repent because the Messiah was on His way.

John the Baptist set himself apart for one task, to be a voice of Christ. Everything about John centered on His purpose, his dress, his diet, his actions and his demands.

You do not have to be like the world to have an impact on the world. You do not have to be like the crowd to change the crowd. You do not have to lower yourself down to their level to lift them up to where they can see God. Holiness does not seek to be odd. Holiness seeks to be like God.

Jesus prayed, “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil” (John 17:14, 15).

LIVING IT: *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, 1 John 2:15.*

Mary McCalister

The Temporal and the Eternal

KEY VERSE: “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever,” Isaiah 40:8.

Secrecy, lawsuits and technological advances are part of a news item some have called the greatest achievement of the past one thousand years. This is not a recent story of spy satellites or computer programs. It is the story behind Johannes Gutenberg’s first ever printing press—in 1455!

Gutenberg had tried to keep his invention top secret until it was completed, but a lawsuit by heirs of one of his investors revealed what he was working on. His press was a technological marvel that would make possible the mass printing of literature. When Gutenberg finished his press, the first book he printed was the Bible. That single event would eventually make the Bible by far the most widely distributed book in the world.

Why has this one book attracted so much attention? Why was it Gutenberg’s first choice? And why are millions still printed each year? It is because God wills it so. The Bible is a supernatural book, the written revelation of God to man. God inspired it, and He preserves it. As the prophet said, “The word of our God shall stand for ever” (verse 8).

In the midst of the so-called age of enlightenment when deism was spreading rapidly, Voltaire proclaimed that within twenty-five years the Bible would be forgotten, and Christianity would be a thing of the past. Forty years after his death, the Bible and other Christian literature were being printed in what had once been Voltaire’s own home.

LIVING IT: *Many books inform, but only the Bible transforms.*

Mary McCalister

Forever Surrounded by God

KEY VERSE: “As the mountains *are* round about Jerusalem, so the LORD *is* round about his people from henceforth even for ever,” Psalm 125:2.

When this psalm was written, the nation Israel was in grave danger of being dominated by foreign powers, but God inspired the psalmist to write about the security of those who trust in the Lord. They are like Mount Zion, which is solid and immovable, rooted deeply in the bedrock of the earth.

Then, the psalmist compared the protective care of God to the mountains which surrounded Jerusalem, pointing out He will be for them an impregnable defense. We learn from this that our sense of security cannot be based on quality in human relationships or the relative stability of life’s circumstances. We must place our trust squarely in the Lord Himself who is immutable and unchanging. We must believe that God is our mountain. Then, we can be secure whether we feel like it or not.

Several years ago astronaut Alan Shepherd said, “It’s a very sobering feeling to be up in space and realize that one’s safety factor was determined by the lowest bidder on a government contract.”

We as Christians can rejoice that the work of salvation did not go to the lowest bidder but was performed by an infinite God.

LIVING IT: *Pray, Give me a vision of You, Lord—unshakable, unchangeable and secure. Help me trust You to keep me true and straight.*

Mary McCalister

Safe in His Hand

KEY VERSE: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand,” John 10:28.

This is a favorite chapter for many believers and especially Missionary Baptists, as Jesus was described as the Good Shepherd. Much of the chapter could be placed under the heading—assurance. Yet, in all the reference books I read for new approaches to a certain subject, only one of them had any references to John 10. How could that be? Is it because the religions of the world do not look for assurance and security but instead teach, look out, be careful lest you lose your salvation?

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and we are His sheep, and as such, we exhibit certain characteristics. We believe on Him (verse 26). We hear His voice; that is, take heed or recognize Him (verse 27). We follow Him (verse 27). That means we are to be within whispering distance. We possess eternal life (verse 28). This is a gift given freely by our Good Shepherd. We are eternally secure (verses 28, 29).

There it is—eternal security. We have assurance in Christ. We have assurance in God. And this assurance cannot be destroyed because Jesus said, “I and my Father are one” (verse 30). How could it be stronger than that?

Those who do not believe in eternal security say that the doctrine leads to license and sin. This is as absurd as saying that because we have Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance, we will chew on razor blades or guzzle hydrochloric acid.

LIVING IT: *Do not trust in anything you can do. Trust only in God who can give you the assurance of eternal life.*

Mary McCalister

Kept by God's Power

KEY VERSE: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," 1 Peter 1:5.

This letter from Peter was written to strangers; that is, pilgrims, wanderers, the persecuted, as verses 6 and 7 seem to indicate. He was writing to encourage them, pointing out what was in store for them—abundant mercy, enough to cover every trial; a living hope in the resurrection, an incorruptible inheritance with the reservation already being paid by God for them in Heaven.

But, he offers even more, reminding them they are kept by the power of God unto a salvation which shall be revealed at a later time. They needed to believe and trust in God's power to help them overcome. They needed to surrender completely to God, placing everything in His hands. Proverbs 3:5, 6 declares plainly, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

You might have made a journey through the Old Testament, feeling the excitement and challenge of the Israelites as they left Egypt and struck out for Canaan. You watched the Red Sea open, you saw the cloud by day and felt the warmth of the pillar of fire by night. You witnessed Jericho's walls crumble to the ground. You marched into Canaan and heard the warnings of Joshua. Perhaps as you studied all these things, you were stirred, realizing that total surrender, dropping your guard, and being accountable were all goals you are challenged to meet. Trust in the power of God, and He will give you mighty blessings.

LIVING IT: *Trust in God for He can do all things.*

Mary McCalister

Known by Their Fruit

KEY VERSE: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”
Matthew 7:16.

In this modern age of supermarkets and farmer’s markets, much of what the average person knows about fruit is what he or she learns in the grocery store. We are much like the friend of a farmer who repeatedly encouraged him to try his apples, and the friend repeatedly refused. Then, it dawned on the farmer what the problem was. You’ve tried the apples that grow over the fence. The friend nodded and the farmer laughed. Those are the crab apples that were planted to fool the boys who live around here. Come into the center of my orchard and taste the good apples.

This friend was turned off by the fruit he had tasted, much as many are turned off by the kind of fruits we exhibit—selfishness, worldliness and careless living. These fruits do not glorify God or give us credit for being fruitful.

Have you ever noticed how a vine grows on a chain link fence? The fresh growth is easy to remove with a simple twist of your wrist. But the old, brown, woody part of the vine is difficult to remove. The same is true of bad habits which are the result of the wrong kind of fruit.

Habits can take us in a direction that we would never have chosen. Good habits, the result of good fruits, can guide us through treacherous situations. We need to be sure we are producing good fruits, which make good habits. Do not be like the Christian living in the land of Canaan with its figs and pomegranates, but all he has to show are crab apples.

LIVING IT: *Bad habits are like comfortable beds, easy to get into, hard to get out of.*

Mary McCalister

The Hatred of the World

KEY VERSE: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you,” John 15:19.

All of us have had times when we have been in places where we did not feel we belonged. It might have been in a dorm room or an army barracks. Most of us have slept in our share of hotels. They have beds. They have tables. They may have food, and they may have been fairly comfortable, but it just was not home for us.

In the same way, the Christian does not feel at home on this earth. He’s often treated as an intruder, a stranger or a person who just does not fit in.

This is the way it should be. This is not our home. We should feel unwelcome. Jesus told His followers the world hated Him, so it should be no surprise the world hated them.

Life is tough. We might have some rough experiences, but we can find God’s grace. His love and His strength are ours as we follow His direction because we know the glory ahead is worth it all. God’s Spirit makes the difference. There is nothing humdrum about walking by faith for we can look with expectation for what God will do next in our lives, knowing full well that He is in control.

Prayer is a vital tool for dealing with being confronted by the world. It is essential to deliver those who spend their lives witnessing and spreading the gospel. Prayer also brings comfort to the heart and gives stability to the life.

LIVING IT: *Do not seek the world’s approval. It will hate you as it hated Jesus if you live for Him.*

Mary McCalister

Fashioned Like Jesus

KEY VERSE: “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself,” **Philippians 3:21.**

How would you describe your body? My cancerous body; my arthritic body; my deformed body; my crippled body; my addicted body; my ever-expanding body. These are not pleasant descriptions but the majority of the time they can be applied.

And they all say that we are weak. There is nothing about this body that would cause us to keep it if we were able to exchange it for a different one.

Thankfully, every wrinkle, every pain and every disability takes us one step closer to the last step when Jesus will change our sin-sick, simple bodies into forever bodies. There will be no pain, no depression, no sickness and no end.

This is not our forever house. But what will those resurrected, immortal bodies be like? Meditating on this can often bring many questions. Paul voiced this question in 1 Corinthians 15:35. He answered the question by saying the new body will be a spiritual body. Will we look so different that we are not instantly recognized? Perhaps. Maybe we will need name tags. Will we be walking through walls? Chances are we will do that and much more.

Will we have any disfigurements, wounds of violence, marks of war? Jesus kept His, but will we keep ours? Notice that Paul said our vile bodies shall be changed, made like the glorious body of Christ. What a blessed promise that is.

LIVING IT: *Rejoice that you are in the hands of the divine potter. Let Him form you as He wills.*

Mary McCalister

Christ Came To Take Away Sin

KEY VERSE: “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” John 1:29.

Only twice in Scripture is Christ called “the Lamb of God” (verse 29), both times by John the Baptist and both times in this chapter. However, He is spoken of as the “lamb” (verse 29) in several places. We know of Him as the Son of God and the Son of Man. But it is as the “Lamb of God” (verse 29) that He is able to take away the sin of the world.

That is a lot of sin, but He took it to the cross that “as many as received him” (verse 12) might be free. Sin became actual and the cross became essential.

We often hear the question these days, What is the world coming to? It is an interesting subject but, sadly, the discussion does not relieve the situation.

Another thing we often do is decry the sin of the world. There never was more of it and it was never more evident. But John the Baptist was not pointing out the existence of sin as much as he was pointing out the cure, the “Lamb of God” (verse 29).

It is important to know that Jesus has been made sin—not a sinner, nor sinful, but sin—for us, though He knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Let us not focus on the sin of the world but instead behold Him who came to take it away.

LIVING IT: *Does your life reflect the beauty and wonder of the Lamb of God?*

Mary McCalister

Walk in the Spirit

KEY VERSE: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit,” Galatians 5:25.

Walking is almost a lost art these days. If you see someone walking along the roadside, you think he is either out of his mind or out of gas. But, until this modern vehicle generation, walking was a large part of man’s daily life. No doubt, this is the reason it is featured in many of God’s commands to His children.

You might be familiar with many of these—walk in newness of life, walk after the Spirit, walk in love, walk as children of light, walk worthy of the Lord, walk honestly, walk in the light and walk in truth.

This devotional reading tells us what happens when we walk in the Spirit as well as what happens when we walk in the flesh. It makes a good checklist for us by which we can measure our lives. Verses 19-21 list all the terrible things which are produced by walking in the flesh. Read them again and resolve to remove all of them from your life.

On the other hand, walking in the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit. All of us hope our lives produce this kind of fruit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.

Walking was an important part of Christ’s life. There is no way of knowing how many miles He walked to fulfill His purpose here on earth. We should be proud to walk as He walked, showing our connection to the Heavenly Father.

LIVING IT: *The key is living godly. Do we do that?*

Mary McCalister

Born of God

KEY VERSE: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,” John 1:12.

One day a single friend asked a father of four, “Why do you love your kids?” The father thought for a minute, but the only answer he could come up with was, “Because they’re mine.”

The children had no need to do anything to prove themselves to this father. He took them as they were.

So it is with God’s love for us. He loves us as we are, and it is His love that motivates us to trust and obey Him in return.

In some South American countries, and even in China and the Far East, American families often go to those countries to adopt children. They spend days, sometimes weeks, immersed in a different language and a strange culture. They fight red tape and pay large fees, all with the hope of taking a child home to the United States.

God has done the same for us. He sent His Son to enter our culture, battle resistance and pay the unspeakable price which adoption of sinners as sons would require. He made for us every legal privilege available as His child.

What does that entail? Believe in Him and you have life, light, hope, peace, salvation, redemption, grace and mercy. For what more could you ask?

LIVING IT: *Let the power of God be manifested in your life.*

Mary McCalister

Privileged Sons of God

KEY VERSE: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God,” Romans 8:14.

A teenager I once knew came to church in his regular garb, a T-shirt with a logo of the devil on it, jeans that were pushed down far below his waist so that his boxers were in evidence, uncombed hair and a scowl on his face. He would plop down on the back pew, looking completely bored for the entire service and leaving as soon as the service was over, not giving anyone time to talk to him.

Finally, one of the deacons of the church who dearly loved the pastor, took the young man aside and tried to get him to see the error of his ways. He pointed out that the young man’s father was a great man in the Lord’s work and should be shown respect. Of course, he admonished the young man for his appearance and begged him to think about how that appearance reflected on his father.

I moved from that area soon after, so I do not know whether the son made any changes, but I have thought about him often.

Do we need to be reminded of the kind of picture we present to the world as sons of God? How do our lives, our behavior reflect on our Heavenly Father? Think about the privileges we have as sons of God. We are indwelt and led by the Spirit of God. We are cleansed, redeemed, adopted by God, made whole, given liberty and freed from the law of sin and death. What blessed privileges these are. Thinking about them should make us desire to be more like Christ, bringing glory and honor to our glorious Heavenly Father.

LIVING IT: *Follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and you will be free indeed!*

Mary McCalister

Live Looking for Jesus

KEY VERSE: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,” 2 Peter 3:13.

Little Johnny was looking out the living room window at the first snowfall of the season. “Mommy,” he exclaimed. “Look at the snow!” “Yes,” Mommy said, “it is beautiful. The first snowfall always is.” “But,” Johnny exclaimed again, “does this mean it’s almost Christmas? I can’t wait!”

Mommy gave Johnny a hug to comfort him. “Yes, but I think we have to say Christmas means snow, not snow means Christmas. It’s still a few weeks away.” Johnny sighed and turned away, disappointed. “I wish Christmas came every day, not just once a year.”

Everyone who has had small children can relate to Johnny. And, we can learn a lesson from him, too. We need to remember the angels who spoke to the disciples after Jesus’ ascension, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Did these disciples live looking for Jesus to return? Yes, indeed. In fact, they were so hopeful about Christ’s return that they became disturbed about members who had died. Paul wrote to encourage them (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

What about us? Do we have that kind of joyful anticipation? Or are we so wrapped up in the cares of the world that we really do not look for His coming? If we feel His coming is delayed, remember it is only because God is not willing that any should perish.

LIVING IT: *Believe it—Christ is returning soon.*

Mary McCalister

We Will Be Changed!

KEY VERSE: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality,” 1 Corinthians 15:53.

Are you anxious for the Lord to come back? It will be a relief to see an end to this insane world. The Israelites polish their guns on the Lebanese border. Iraq and Iran stockpile weapons of mass destruction to be used against the Jewish state. The Persian Gulf stays a simmering volcano of potential conflict with such incidents as pirates seizing ships or the downing of aircraft. National economies collapse. The most powerful nation in the world is mortgaged to the tip of the capitol dome with a multitrillion dollar deficit.

Life is indeed crazy without Christ. How important it is to accept Him as your Savior and your deliverer from all the craziness of this world. He will change the corruption of the world into incorruption. He will remove the sting of death. He will give His followers immortality.

Even as Christians, we are not what we should be; we are not what we could have been. But, we thank God we are not what we were, and what we now are, and we shall not be when we see Him face-to-face. We shall be changed—a wonderful transformation! We shall be like Him—a glorious transfiguration! We shall be caught up—a mighty transportation!

“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). It does not explain the world, nor endure it, nor enjoy it—it overcomes the world. Every day is a day of victory when our faith is in Christ. And every day is a thanksgiving day for our victory through Christ.

LIVING IT: *God . . . giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 15:57.*

Mary McCalister

The Sin of Cain

KEY VERSE: “And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord,” Genesis 4:3.

The firstborn child of Adam and Eve was a boy which they named, Cain. The nature of rebellious man unfolds in the person of Cain who had an auspicious beginning as the child of hope. However, this narrative lines him up with the curse God placed on man. Cain worked the soil or ground which was also under the curse of God.

Cain is a type of the mere man of the earth. His worship was destitute of any adequate sense of sin and the need of forgiveness. Inasmuch as he brought the fruit of the ground as an offering to God, it displayed he believed in salvation by good works. God did not respect his offering because it displayed Cain’s lack of faith in Him. Cain became angry with God because He did not accept his offering. It is a flagrant sin for one to turn away from God and His wonderful salvation like Cain did.

Cain’s religion was destitute of any adequate sense of sin and the need of atonement. His worship was self-willed, he became angry with God, he refused to bring a sin-offering to God, he murdered his brother, he lied to God and became a vagabond. Nevertheless, he remained the object of God’s love.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Cain’s attitude is a graphic picture of a sinful man’s separation from a loving God.*

Gene C. Smith

Open Thine Hand Wide

KEY VERSE: “But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, *in that which he wanteth,*” Deuteronomy 15:8.

Every seventh year in Israel was a sabbatical year, which was a year of release from all debts. The Israelites were to release or cancel every creditor of any and all debts because God was good to them and blessed them abundantly.

The “poor man” (verse 7) and the “poor brother” (verse 7) were to be released of all unpaid debts. The law of debt cancellation (verses 1-6) was intended to instill a spirit of generosity in the Israelites and hence a freedom from the love of money and other things. Therefore, a calculating Israelite was guilty of sin if he refused a loan for a poor brother or a needy brother out of fear that it might not be repaid since the seventh year was near. Being hard-hearted and tightfisted meant he was not trusting the Lord to bless by providing one’s need.

There will always be poor and needy people in America where God has so abundantly blessed. Various needs are brought about by floods, storms, hurricanes and other tragedies. As I pen these words, many people are experiencing a devastation because of a hurricane. People have responded generously to aid the people who have been affected by it. This displays a Christian spirit and attitude.

JUST A THOUGHT: *And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also, 1 John 4:21.*

Gene C. Smith

Be Ready To Distribute

KEY VERSE: “That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate,” 1 Timothy 6:18.

Paul, in writing to Timothy, gave him a special charge to pass on to the rich people in his congregation. They were to be ready to distribute to those who were in need.

Some people might be prone to think that this charge does not apply to present-day believers, but it does. After all, the present-day standard of living would certainly make us rich in the eyes of Timothy and his congregation. Christians are to trust God for their needs and not rely on monetary wealth. God’s people are also to utilize their wealth to help others and employ their wealth in God’s work and service. When this goal is achieved, one’s monetary wealth is put to work for the Lord and that one will enrich himself spiritually.

God’s people must not put their hope in wealth which is so uncertain and transient. This could be a temptation to wealthy believers. Believers in Christ are to put their hope in God not in their wealth. Wealthy Christians are to make every effort to be generous and willing to share what they have with the less fortunate.

Christians must not merely consume material possessions selfishly. Possessions are to be shared with those who have less. When Christians do this, they lay up treasures for themselves in Heaven.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Enjoy what God gives you and employ it to help others.*

Gene C. Smith

Keys to Answered Prayer

KEY VERSE: “The eyes of the LORD *are* upon the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their cry,” Psalm 34:15.

The book of Psalms is one of the most useful books in the entire Bible. This is true inasmuch as it is suited to the human heart. There is a great difference between learning a truth with the head and learning it with the heart. David is viewed here as he made a desperate plea for an audience with God. He wanted God’s eyes to be focused on him and His ears to be opened to hear his prayers.

There are four encouraging thoughts in this devotional reading which will stir the heart of every believer in Jesus Christ.

1. The Lord’s eyes are upon the righteous. This truth emphasizes that the Lord watches over His children day and night like a caring father watches over his own children.

2. The Lord’s ears are open to the faintest cry of His children. Anxious parents listen intently for the faintest cry from their children. Likewise, the Lord’s ears are tuned to heart the faintest cry of His children.

3. The Lord sets His face against any and all of His children who do evil deeds. A child of God cannot do anything without Him knowing about it. God’s people cannot hide anything from Him.

4. The Lord hears the faintest cry of God’s children and delivers them out of all their troubles.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Because Christ lives in believers, we will live with Him forever in Heaven.*

Gene C. Smith

Love as He Loved

KEY VERSE: “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you,” John 15:12.

Many electrical devices have been invented to make our lives more comfortable and enjoyable. There are electric lights to light up our houses, radios and televisions for our entertainment, electric refrigerators for keeping our food from spoiling, electric mixers to mix certain foods, electric clocks to keep the time, electric shavers to ease the burden of daily shaving, and on and on the list could go. However, all these devices must be connected to a power supply to function. Without a power supply they are somewhat useless. In our churches we have more equipment than ever before, and we have plenty of organization to achieve our goals, but one thing is lacking—power.

Christians have a source of power in Jesus Christ our Lord. What is needed is a vital connection with this power supply to love as He loved us. When a vital connection is established between Jesus Christ and believers in Christ, we will be able to achieve this goal.

In Christ believers have a life that can never die, a peace that can never be fully understood, a rest that can never be disturbed, a joy that can never be diminished, a hope that can never be clouded, a light that can never be extinguished and a love that cannot be fathomed.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Because Jesus Christ lives in the hearts of all believers, we are to love as He loves.*

Gene C. Smith

Walk in Love

KEY VERSE: “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour,” Ephesians 5:2.

Some years ago this writer observed an unusual phenomena in the church I pastored. One particular man was unusually faithful to attend all the services of the church. He had a certain place to sit which was at the end of the pew and next to the aisle. He had a habit of turning his right foot on the side and rubbing it back and forth on the wooden floor as the service progressed. This was done so often that he rubbed a noticeable impression in the floor. This became a tribute of his love for the Lord, his church and the cause of Christ in the world. This man’s faithfulness became an inspiring example to the entire church and others who knew about it.

Ephesians 5:2 sets forth how followers of Christ are to be imitators of our Heavenly Father. Children tend to be like their parents. Likewise, children of God are to imitate their Heavenly Father. The supreme example of this love is seen in Christ’s atoning death on Calvary’s cross.

The word *walk* refers to one’s daily life and conduct. The Christian’s daily conduct is to openly display his love for others. Christians are to love others with the same kind of love that Jesus Christ displayed for us on the cross.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God’s children are to imitate their Heavenly Father.*

Gene C. Smith

The New Commandment

KEY VERSE: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another,” John 13:34.

A father, reading his Sunday paper and wishing not to be disturbed by his little daughter, cut up a map of the world, gave it to her and told her to put it together. She soon returned with it and every piece was in place. The father was surprised and said, “Why, how did you do it, darling? You did not know anything about geography.” The little girl replied, “There was a picture of Jesus Christ on the other side, and I knew when I had Jesus in the right place, the world would be in place.”

How true it is! When Jesus is in the right place in one’s life, other things tend to align themselves and take their proper place. This includes the love life of a believer in Christ. When one loves Jesus, there is a positive inclination to love the things He loves.

Jesus loves all people. He displayed that love by going to Calvary and dying for all mankind. In so doing, Jesus atoned for the sins of the whole human race. In His atoning death, He set the example for us to follow in loving others.

Believers in Christ are God’s children, and, as such, they are to display a love for one another.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God has given us the pattern of loving fellow-believers. We are to make sure we are following it!*

Gene C. Smith

Sound the Warning!

KEY VERSE: “And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of,” 2 Peter 2:2.

In the city where this writer lives, we have a warning system that is set off to indicate an impending danger. The citizens are urged to take shelter when the alarm is sounded to avoid any personal harm.

During a recent hurricane, this alarm was sounded, warning the citizens of a threatening danger. My wife and I did not hear the siren because we were in Iowa visiting our daughter. We did, however, have considerable damage to some large trees that grew along a creek on the back side of our property. We could not have done anything to avoid this damage had we been at home.

The apostle Peter in this devotional reading was sounding a warning against apostate teachers. An apostate teacher is someone who has deserted the teachings and principles of the Word of God or has deserted the true faith and embraced false doctrines. The problem of false teachers plagued the apostolic churches. Likewise, false teaching is a paramount problem facing the Lord's churches today.

The best safeguard against false prophets and religious apostates is to know the Word of God and what it teaches. Therefore, God's people are challenged to “study” the Word of God so as to not be ashamed before false teachers (2 Tim. 2:15).

JUST A THOUGHT: *To know the truth of God's Word is to be well protected from false teachers.*

Gene C. Smith

The True Spirit Glorifies Jesus

KEY VERSE: “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you,” John 16:14.

Believers in Christ have a constantly abiding friend in the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit guides God’s people to make the right choices and do the right things when they follow His guidance. He is also present with them to comfort their troubled hearts when sorrows come. Therefore, God’s people are to rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and comfort.

The Holy Spirit revealed divine truths to the disciples of Christ and guided them in recording the Scriptures so that the recorded truth, the Bible, would be the Word of God. In so doing, the Holy Spirit was to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. (See John 16:12-14.)

Every Christian would do well in securing a copy of God’s Word, the Bible, to read it daily and follow its guidance. In so doing, one will discover God’s will and seek to apply it in that one’s life.

The purpose of God in giving us the Scriptures was that we, His followers, might have peace of heart and mind. (See John 14:27.) Many people are presently disturbed because of the failing economy, the loss of jobs and the fear of bankruptcy. Contrariwise, the committed Christian relies on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who speaks peace to his troubled heart. (See John 14:16, 18, 26.)

JUST A THOUGHT: *To be an atheist requires more faith than to be a Christian!*

Gene C. Smith

We Preach Christ

KEY VERSE: “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake,” 2 Corinthians 4:5.

A visiting preacher once asked Charlotte Elliott if she knew herself to be a Christian. After several days she confessed. “I am miserable,” she said, “I want to be saved. I want to come to Jesus; but I don’t know how.” “Why not come *just as you are?*” answered the preacher. She received Jesus Christ as her Savior and was gloriously saved. Later, she wrote the words to a beautiful song, entitled, “Just As I Am.”

The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth, assured the members that he had not handled the Word of God deceitfully in his ministry there. He had not added to nor subtracted from it in his ministry in Corinth. He faithfully preached Christ to the Corinthians. Jesus was the crucified Christ and the resurrected Lord. Christ was the focus of Paul’s message. He labored to advance the cause of Christ and not his own interests.

This is the same message faithful preachers preach today. Preachers cannot save anyone. Neither are people saved by joining any given church. Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior. A lost sinner must repent of his sins and receive Jesus Christ as Savior to be saved.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Going to church does not make one a Christian any more than going into the kitchen makes one a chef.*

Gene C. Smith

Do Not Be Surprised

KEY VERSE: “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your’s also,”
John 15:20.

Have you ever been surprised? If so, reflect upon what it was that surprised you and how it affected you. A lady once remarked that, when she was born, she was so surprised that she did not talk for a year and a half. Perhaps your surprise was not that dramatic. However, surprises often awaken one to a situation with which one must deal.

In this devotional reading we view Jesus as He was teaching His disciples. He revealed to them that a “servant is not greater than his lord” (verse 20). Christians are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, we Christians are to be in subjection to Him and His will at all times.

Christ has chosen us to be His servants. We are to listen to His promptings given to us by the Holy Spirit. As believers in Christ who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:22), our desire should be to please the Lord. We must not grieve the Holy Spirit by ignoring His gentle promptings. When we obey Him, we might be used to lead someone to Christ for salvation, or to teach new believers in Christ. Do not be surprised when the Holy Spirit prompts you.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Make the right choice by responding to the Holy Spirit’s voice.*

Gene C. Smith

The Holy Spirit Indwells

KEY VERSE: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,” Romans 8:9.

A fellow pastor recently talked with me about his being discouraged in his work for the Lord. He was diligent in his prayer life, and he worked diligently to build up his congregation. Yet, the church he pastors remains small while a nearby congregation flourishes and is growing rapidly. This writer encouraged him to remain faithful to God, His Word and be a powerful witness for the Lord by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's presence and power can be evidenced in a dynamic preacher who attracts large audiences. However, it might also be seen in a faithful pastor who endeavors to grow a flourishing church. Furthermore, it might be viewed in the lone volunteer who carries on a jail or prison ministry, or in a Sunday School teacher who faithfully teaches a Sunday School class.

The power of the Holy Spirit is not especially reserved for the highly gifted individual. Instead, it is available to all believers in Jesus Christ. A newcomer to the faith might fail to realize this truth, and, as a result, fail to allow the Holy Spirit to control his spiritual life. The Holy Spirit's presence in one's life is a valuable proof of one's salvation.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God's people are controlled by the Holy Spirit not by their circumstances.*

Gene C. Smith

Jesus Promised Comfort

KEY VERSE: “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you,” John 14:18.

The Lord’s disciples were greatly troubled at what Jesus had said about His leaving them. (See John 14:1-6.) They had probably indicated their distress to Him in some manner. He then proceeded to administer comforting consolations to them inasmuch as they were about to be left in the world because Jesus was to be leaving them soon. They were to be left alone to meet the persecution and trials of life. They were without wealth, friends and honor. They possibly felt that Jesus’ impending death would demolish all their hopes and desires.

The Lord’s disciples had not fully comprehended the idea that Jesus, the Messiah, must suffer and die on Calvary’s cross to atone for the sins of mankind. (See Luke 24:1-31.) Thus, Jesus proceeded to comfort their disturbed hearts. He assured them that their consolation and comfort was to be found in trusting the Heavenly Father and Him. The Comforter of whom Jesus spoke was the Holy Spirit of God (John 14:16, 26). This Comforter came upon the church as told in Acts 2:1-4. The Holy Spirit remains with God’s people in this present generation. He is with God’s people to render comfort and consolation in the time of need.

The Lord’s disciples were men who were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were also willing to follow the Lord’s direction. Are you like them?

JUST A THOUGHT: *The Holy Spirit will give comfort to those who need it!*

Gene C. Smith

Beware of False Prophets

KEY VERSE: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves,” Matthew 7:15.

Jesus gave a warning about false prophets. He referred to these advocates of the broad way (verses 13, 14) as ferocious wolves which appear as harmless as sheep. How can one determine the character of false teachers? That one needs only to look at the fruit they produce. Grapes and figs do not grow on thorn bushes or thistles. Good fruit trees produce good fruit, but bad fruit trees produce only bad fruit. In Jesus’ evaluation, the Pharisees were obviously producing bad fruit. The logical thing to do with bad trees is to cut them down and destroy them. If a tree does not fulfill its purpose for existence, it should be removed and destroyed.

Those who heard Jesus’ message must have wondered about these religious leaders, who seemed to be good men, teaching spiritual truths about the Messiah and His kingdom. Jesus made it quite clear, however, that they were not good teachers for they were leading people astray. They were to be refused admission into Heaven because they had no personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

God’s people are still plagued with false teachers in this present generation. Recently, officials in a small town raided a commune where a false teacher was imprisoning, molesting and abusing young children. Their fruits strongly reveal that they are “false prophets” (verse 15).

JUST A THOUGHT: *To bear good fruit, clear out the trees of sin in your life!*

Gene C. Smith

Divine Source of Brotherly Love

KEY VERSE: “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us,” Romans 5:5.

The Key Verse sets forth one of the seven results of a believer’s justification before God. It states that “the love of God is shed abroad” (verse 5) (poured out) in the believer’s heart by the Holy Ghost.

No biblical teaching is of more importance than a believer’s justification before God. It embraces the whole gamete of the salvation of lost sinners and is vitally related to all other fundamental doctrines of the Bible. Justification is the judicial and declarative act of God, by which, on account of the meritorious work of Christ, to whom the sinner is united by faith. He declares that sinner to no longer be under condemnation but is to have a righteous standing before God. In other words, the justified believer stands before God as though he had never sinned.

This fifth result of one’s justification is that the love of God is poured out into that one’s heart by the Holy Spirit. This creates a delightful consciousness that God indeed loves that individual. As a result, that one has the capacity to have a brotherly love for other believers in Christ.

A child of God can live like a king when he or she has experienced the results of being justified before God.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The fact of the indwelling love of God is a positive proof that the believer’s hope is in Christ.*

Gene C. Smith

Love—Pure-hearted—Fervently!

KEY VERSE: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see *that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently,*” 1 Peter 1:22.

The writer of the book of 1 Peter identified himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (verse 1). Peter was a fisherman, along with his brother, Andrew (Matt. 4:18). They were busy in their business of commercial fishing in the Sea of Galilee when Jesus called them to follow Him. They immediately laid down their nets and began a journey of following Jesus Christ. At a later time, he wrote this short book of five chapters.

Those to whom he wrote had “purified” their “souls in obeying the truth” (1 Peter 1:22). Hence, they were born-again believers in Christ. As a result of their salvation, they came to love their brothers in Christ with an “unfeigned [not hypocritical] love” (verse 22). The instrument that effected their sincere love was the “incorruptible . . . word of God” (verse 23).

Peter addressed this epistle to those believers who had been scattered abroad throughout the Roman empire. Biblical teaching was probably scarce at that time, and fellowship with other Christians was somewhat curtailed. Thus, Peter wrote to them and encouraged them to “love one another with a pure heart fervently” (verse 22). Their love for each other would bind them together in Christian fellowship. In like manner, present-day believers in Christ are to exhibit a brotherly love for one another.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Brotherly love binds believers together in serving Christ.*

Gene C. Smith

God Is Love

KEY VERSE: “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,” Exodus 34:6.

This devotional reading contains the second giving of the Law to the people of Israel. The first giving of the Law was at Mount Sinai as recorded in Exodus 20:1-17. They broke that Law (Ex. 32:1-35). God then gave them the same Law the second time (Ex. 34:1-4). As they viewed the Law, the Israelites had a new vision of what God was really like and what He wanted from His people.

The Key Verse reveals some of the attributes of God. For God to be merciful means that He is a God of compassion and love. For God to be gracious reveals that He expresses His love to man. The long-suffering of God means that He will not immediately deal with man's sinfulness but will seek to bring him back into the love of God. For God to be abundant in goodness reveals how good God is to man. For God to be abundant in truth reveals that He is the essence of truth and that He shares this with mankind.

This might be a good time to count your blessings. Make a list of all the good things God has done for you and give Him glory and praise, knowing it is only through His power that you have received all these good things.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Always be mindful of what God has done for you and praise Him for His generosity!*

Gene C. Smith

His Love Is Great

KEY VERSE: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,” Ephesians 2:4.

The second chapter of the book of Ephesians contains some of the most profound truths regarding God’s plan with man. Many believers in Christ have died defending the vital truth of salvation by grace through faith. Others have suffered imprisonment rather than renounce God’s plan of salvation. These two verses set forth three perfections in God’s attributes.

1. *God’s great love.* Verse 4 reveals that God loves sinful man. As one beholds God’s great love, that one can rejoice in this great truth. The Greek word for *love* is *agape* which declares that God seeks the highest good for the one who is loved. Lost sinners are spiritually dead toward God; they have nothing to commend them to God. They have only to accept God’s great love.

2. *God’s rich mercy* (verse 4). Mercy is that quality of God’s goodness which extends compassion to those in despair, distress and misery. God’s mercy is not limited; He is “rich in mercy” (verse 4). God’s mercy provides a Savior for lost sinners.

3. *God’s saving grace* (verse 5). God’s saving grace demands that all human merit be set aside. Salvation must be the absolute gift of God, or grace is not grace. God’s quickening power reveals that the moment one believes in Jesus Christ, the life of God becomes his life. Eternal life infuses and energizes his whole being.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The new birth is experienced only through faith in Jesus Christ!*

Gene C. Smith

Saved by His Life

KEY VERSE: “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life,” Romans 5:10.

A sleepwalker got out of bed one night, walked out of the house and into the street. As he walked in his bare feet, he started across a stream of icy water. He was suddenly awakened! What a picture of many lost souls who do not awaken to their lost condition until they come to the chilly waters of death!

The word *enemies* is a much worse word than either *strengthless* or *sinners*. It involves a personal alienation and animosity against God. What a condition! And yet, while we were going about avoiding and hating God, that same God was having His Son, Jesus Christ, meet all the divine claims against us by His death on the cross. Again, God had done the more difficult thing—delivering Christ to death to reconcile us to Himself. He will certainly, much more, do the lesser thing for us. He will see that we share Christ’s risen life forever, and thus, even in the hour of His visitation upon the ungodly, we shall be “saved by his life” (verse 10).

Inasmuch as reconciliation was accomplished by Jesus’ death. His resurrected life is certainly able to insure the complete and final salvation of believers. Have you accepted Him as your Savior?

JUST A THOUGHT: *The devil’s number one tool is not an active sinner but an inactive Christian.*

Gene C. Smith

Forgive—For Christ’s Sake

KEY VERSE: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you,” Ephesians 4:32.

In the Key Verse, the apostle Paul urged Christians to be kind one to another, tenderhearted and forgiving as was the Lord Jesus Christ. In so doing, he laid down the law of personal relationships among believers in Christ. This law challenges Christians to treat each other in the same manner as Jesus treats us. A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ, and He has forgiven us of our sins. Likewise, we are to forgive others of any and all transgressions against us.

Most people, when they feel wronged, can contrive a hundred reasons against forgiveness. However, one factor that motivates them to forgive is that they are commanded to do so as children of God. Beyond that there are three practical reasons for having a forgiving spirit. First, forgiveness tends to halt the cycle of blame and pain and thereby breaks the chain of disgrace. Without forgiveness the guilty one is held in the vice of sin. Second, forgiveness loosens the stronghold of guilt in the forgiving one. It allows the possibility of a change taking place in the guilty party. Third, forgiveness creates an atmosphere whereby the forgiven one and the forgiver are placed in a neutral atmosphere. Forgiveness must be accepted as well as offered before it is complete.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Remember Jesus said as He was crucified, Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do, Luke 23:34.*

Gene C. Smith

Brotherly Love Is God-Taught

KEY VERSE: “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another,” 1 Thessalonians 4:9.

A little six-year-old girl became deathly ill with a terrible disease. She needed a special blood transfusion, but her rare blood type complicated the problem. The girl's nine-year-old brother qualified as a donor, but the parents were hesitant to ask him since he was so young. They searched for a qualified donor but found none. The last resort was to ask the brother to be the donor. When asked to be the donor, he said, “Sure, I will give my blood for my sister because I love her.”

In like manner, believers in Christ are to love each other. The word *love* (verse 9) refers to an affection which is based upon an intimate relationship of fellow-believers in Christ. It carries the idea of a friendly, loving relationship. This is the kind of love God has toward His children, and He expects them to have this same kind of love for one another. Christians are “taught of God to love one another” (verse 9). They are to have an intimate loving relationship with one another. If this kind of love does not prevail in a church, there will likely be much strife and contention among the members. Christians are to also practice brotherly love to all other believers in Christ (verse 10).

JUST A THOUGHT: *When you walk with the Lord, you will be out of step with the world.*

Gene C. Smith

Loving God—Loving Brethren

KEY VERSE: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see *that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently,*” 1 Peter 1:22.

It is logical to believe that this short book was written by the apostle Peter inasmuch as he so designates in 1 Peter 1:1. He wrote it to the Jewish Christians who had been scattered abroad from Jerusalem. They had settled in the areas listed in verse 1. These areas made up the northern part of Asia Minor. It encompassed the northern part of what is today known as Turkey.

Those to whom Peter had written had “purified” their souls “in obeying the truth” (verse 22). In other words, they had experienced God’s wonderful salvation, having been born again by the Holy Spirit. A changed life is evidenced by a changed relationship with God. A purified life allows one to sincerely love those who share in the same faith. The word *sincere* means “to be without hypocrisy.” All evil thoughts and feelings regarding one’s fellow-Christians must be removed from a believer’s life. Christians are to love deeply from the heart. This kind of love can only come from a changed heart.

Those to whom Peter wrote had been saved by God’s grace. This great event made it possible for them to obey the truth, purify their hearts and love the brethren. The same is true for God’s children in this sinful age.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The Word of God is God’s instrument to bring about a changed life.*

Gene C. Smith

Keeping Christ's Commandments

KEY VERSE: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him," John 14:21.

It is reported that Thomas Jefferson went through the New Testament and carefully cut out any part which made Jesus more than a man. He cut all parts of the gospel concerning the resurrection of Christ. Jefferson's Bible, now on display in a Washington, D.C. museum, ends with his translation of Matthew 27:60 which reads, "And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed." Thomas Jefferson was in effect saying that was the last of Him. But how mistaken he was. Jesus arose from the dead and is alive today in Heaven with the Father.

A Christian's love for Christ is manifest as that one obeys His commandments (John 14:21). The Father and Christ will show their love to that one (verse 21). This does not imply, in any way, a works religion, but rather that one who believes in Christ will be obedient to Him. Saving faith results in obedience to God and His Word. Obedience grows out of love for Jesus and His Word (verses 23, 24).

JUST A THOUGHT: *One of the reasons some people find it difficult to be obedient to the commands of Christ is that they are uncomfortable taking orders from strangers.*

Gene C. Smith

The Work of the Word

KEY VERSE: “The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple,” Psalm 19:7.

In the year 1990, my associate pastor, his wife, my wife and I had the privilege of visiting Niagara Falls. It is one of the most spectacular sights we had ever seen. The roar of six million cubic feet of water each minute makes it the most powerful waterfall in North America. Few people, however, know that more than fifty percent of the river’s water is diverted via four huge tunnels before it reaches the falls. This water passes through hydroelectric turbines that supply power to nearby areas in the United States and Canada before returning to the river well past the falls. Viewing Niagara Falls is one of the most moving experiences this writer has ever seen.

David, the writer of this Psalm, was moved by observing the heavens, which declare the splendor of God’s handiwork. By comparison, he then described the dominating influence of the “law of the LORD” (verse 7) which enlightened him. He described the efficacious nature of the Word of God in mankind’s salvation.

As God’s Word is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit works in conjunction with the Word to bring about the salvation of a lost sinner. Thus, the Word of God has a powerful effect in the life of one who accepts Jesus as Savior.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Without Jesus Christ life is a hopeless end; with Christ life in an endless hope.*

Gene C. Smith

More Than Conquerors

KEY VERSE: “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us,” Romans 8:37.

The eighth chapter of Romans has been called the mountain peak of this great book. This chapter begins with the words *no condemnation* and ends with the thought of “no separation from the love of God” (verse 37). Chapter 8 is one of the upmost peaks in the whole realm of revealed truth. The doctrine of security of the believer is vividly set forth in this chapter. Some people fail to grasp the truth of this teaching, but, nevertheless, it remains true whether they believe it or not. Many people are looking for security in stocks, bonds, big bank accounts, savings and many other things. Contrariwise, true security is found in one’s relationship to Christ Jesus.

Jesus Christ loved mankind and has provided salvation for all who would trust Him by His atoning death on the cross of Calvary. (See John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Hebrews 2:9.) Through this same love, believers in Christ become more than conquerors because this love binds believers to Him.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Eternal security can be enjoyed only by those who are truly born-again children of God.*

Gene C. Smith

Victory Through Christ

KEY VERSE: “But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” 1 Corinthians 15:57.

The mystery of the ages is now about to be revealed. Throughout human history, man has known it to be his inevitable lot to die. True, he had hope of immortality beyond death be he pagan bushman, or pagan intellectual. But always there was the grim specter of death, waiting to claim him before entering into that blissful realm of the beyond. Paul now came to declare the hidden “mystery” (verse 51) which could be understood only by those initiates in Christ Jesus. Here is the mystery with its explanation. Some who live in this present church age will be allowed to put on immortality without having to go through the experience of death. Such a thing was entirely out of human concept! However, it is a divine reality. This marvelous event will take place at the Lord’s coming in the air. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.)

However, death is still man’s most feared enemy. All mankind seeks to delay its approach. When it comes, they seek to camouflage its existence under blankets of flowers and greenery. However, death is an enemy which has been conquered. Jesus, the mighty Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5), invaded the realm of death and emerged victorious. He offers this victory to all who will receive Him as Savior. This is the greatest incentive for faithful service on the part of a believer in Christ.

JUST A THOUGHT: *All believers in Christ are assured of life everlasting. (See John 3:15, 16.)*

Gene C. Smith

Victory by the Blood

KEY VERSE: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death,” Revelation 12:11.

In Revelation 12, a warfare is viewed as it will be carried out during the Tribulation Period. Michael, the warrior angel and Israel’s defender, along with his angels are viewed in deadly combat with the dragon (Satan) and his forces. They succeed in terminating forever Satan’s traffic in Heaven, along with his host of warriors (verse 8). They are cast out upon the earth (verse 9). All who are in Heaven rejoice because of this great feat (verse 10).

Infuriated by his expulsion from Heaven and sensing that his time is limited, the dragon (Satan) will turn his fury against the woman (Israel) and will persecute her because she brought for the man child, which is Christ (verse 13). Satan knows he will soon suffer in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). Therefore, he seeks to do all the damage he can in his last few days on earth.

The victory Christ and His followers will enjoy in that day is made possible by the “blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11), which was none other than the death of Jesus Christ.

Satan is a powerful being, but he has never been able to annul God’s eternal plan of redemption. Christ’s death was perfectly sufficient to redeem mankind and take us to Heaven in the end.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Calvary is a low hill; but it casts a long shadow!*

Gene C. Smith

What It Means To Be Born of God

KEY VERSE: “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,”
John 1:13.

One would do well to make a mental trip to the banks of the Jordan River in Israel to learn some basic truths about one's eternal salvation. Arriving there, one would view a large crowd of people who had gathered around a man who was preaching a sermon. In so doing, he pointed out the awfulness of sin and called upon the people to repent of their sins and be saved. Who was this strange and mighty preacher? He was John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, who had come to bear witness of the Savior. He immersed those who professed faith in Jesus Christ in the Jordan River. Jesus Christ is the Messiah who came to save people from their sins.

As a whole, the Jewish people did not receive Jesus as their Messiah. However, some did receive Him, and they were given the power (authority or right) to become the sons of God (verse 12). Upon believing in Jesus, they were born into the family of God (verse 13).

The new birth is a spiritual birth whereby repentant sinners are born again into the family of God. Those who are born again are saved from a life of sin and hell and will someday take their rightful place in Heaven.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Salvation is the eternal possession of the one who has genuinely trusted Christ as Savior.*

Gene C. Smith

Witness of the Spirit

KEY VERSE: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,” Romans 8:16.

A young lady, visiting church services for the first time, walked the aisle during the invitation with tears in her eyes asking what to do to be saved. As the congregation sang “Just As I Am,” she accepted Christ as her Savior. Over the next few weeks the people who knew her remarked about the change they saw in her. She no longer seemed bitter but happy. There was a glow about her that was not seen before. No one doubted the young lady had truly accepted Jesus as Savior.

The Holy Spirit indwells the believer at the moment of salvation. This is an evidence of salvation. The Holy Spirit does not indwell nonbelievers. The believer is fully indwelled by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the divine agent of conviction and leadership. The Holy Spirit convicts believers of sin in their lives and leads them toward righteous living.

Changed lives are also an evidence of salvation. Saul quit persecuting Christians when he became a child of God. His passion was changed from being a persecutor of Christians to a preacher of the gospel. This dramatic change could not have taken place if he had not accepted Christ as Savior. Much of the religious world has the cart before the horse. They claim a person must change to be saved. The reality is that salvation causes positive changes in a person’s life.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Christ accepts sinners as they are then changes them for the better.*

Marc Shultz

God's Promise About Prayer

KEY VERSE: “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not,” Jeremiah 33:3.

Every day the president of the United States is given a risk assessment briefing. This briefing details the hot spots in the world and the danger these hot spots present to the United States. The president then allows other members of congress and the administration to receive the same briefing. If the president believes the public needs to know of the risks, he will make the knowledge public. Most of the time the information in these briefings are not made public because the public does not need to know the information.

Compared to the infinite knowledge of God man knows relatively little. Most of what God knows the human mind is incapable of grasping. Part of every prayer should be asking God to reveal His will. When God's will becomes known, the power of God is revealed in a mighty way. God's answer to prayer is often greater than the desired result. The apostle Paul asked God to remove the thorn in the flesh. God did not grant his request but gave him the grace to live above the thorn. God revealed to Paul an inner strength the apostle did not realize was available to him. Paul learned things about God and himself that he had not known before. God is not cruel when He does not grant our requests.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God is not bound by our prayer requests, but we are bound by God's answer to our prayers.*

Marc Shultz

God Hears Prayer

KEY VERSE: “The eyes of the LORD *are* upon the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their cry,” Psalm 34:15.

Almost every young woman about to become a mother for the first time worries about hearing her child cry in the middle of the night. She wants to be able to give her child whatever love and support she can. Mothers have an instinct that allows them to hear their child cry even when they are deep asleep.

There are approximately six billion people in the world. God is able to give each one of them His undivided attention every moment of the day. His ears are always attentive to the prayers of His children. He hears every prayer they pray. This does not mean He will grant every request offered in prayer. God grants every request that fits within His perfect will. He will never ignore any prayer but will seek to reveal His perfect will. God will not be badgered into granting prayer requests. God will do what He knows is best.

How does God answer prayers? He will grant our requests when they fit within His will to do so. God will never violate His will to grant selfish prayer requests. He will say no when our petitions do not fit within His will. When God says no, it is for the best. There are times when God will make us wait for His answer. Patience is a virtue when waiting for God to answer prayer.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God answers your prayers. Have you accepted His will?*

Marc Shultz

Delivering to Satan

KEY VERSE: “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus,” 1 Corinthians 5:5.

There is a war in which every Christian engages. It is a war between good and evil. The Christian spirit desires to be faithful to God and turn away from evil. The human spirit desires to satisfy the lusts of the flesh at any cost. The individual determines which spirit wins. In every situation the Christian makes a choice between doing the proper thing or the wrong thing. Sometimes the choice is conscious and sometimes it is subconscious. God will hold the individual accountable for his choice.

The Christian desire for those making the improper choices is for them to see the error of their ways, repent of the sins and turn from their evil ways. God will forgive anyone who repents. Those who refuse to repent are in danger of divine judgment. Unfortunately, some people have become so accustomed to sin that they feel no remorse for their actions. They resist any effort to bring them to repentance. Such a person will suffer the consequences of his actions.

It is difficult to watch a loved one suffer the consequences of a lack of repentance. Our prayers should be that their suffering will cause their eventual repentance. It is difficult to learn from the school of hard knocks, but it is the only school some people will attend.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God's love will allow sinners to suffer to bring them to repentance.*

Marc Shultz

Righteousness Tendeth to Life

KEY VERSE: “As righteousness *tendeth* to life: so he that pursueth evil *pursueth it* to his own death,”
Proverbs 11:19.

Jim was a widower with little fashion sense. His Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes consisted of a blue sport coat, green plaid pants and a red striped tie. One could see him coming for a long way. Jim was always the first person to arrive for church services. A man who lived next door to the church always laughed when he saw Jim enter the church building in his wild ensemble. The neighbor was also convicted about the fact he never attended church services. One day the neighbor attended church services and sat next to Jim. He began to attend church services every Sunday and eventually accepted Jesus as Savior. He then led his family to the Lord. It all happened because one lonely man took care of business by attending churches services regularly.

Good character has been described as doing the proper thing even when no one is looking. A person with good character not only does the proper thing in public but also in private. There is no proper reason for doing the wrong thing. A person of character strives to do the right thing and never gives excuses for failure. Christians should do the proper thing at all times and in all situations. Christians do their duty in the small things as well as the significant things. Christians always seek to be the right example for others to follow.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Christians do the proper things because it is the proper thing.*

Marc Shultz

Sinners unto Death

KEY VERSE: “And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things,” Acts 5:5.

A small white wooden cross was placed on the grassy knoll beside a railroad crossing. It signified the fact a young woman was killed in an accident at that sight. She ignored the flashing lights on the signal and the whistle sounding from the locomotive. She drove around the downed arms of the railroad guard and was hit by the locomotive and died instantly. She violated the law and died because of her sin.

Ananias and Sapphira conspired to lie to God. Their lie may seem insignificant to mankind, but it was serious to God. They lied about how much of the profits from selling a possession they gave to God. They died because of their sin. Their sin was not against man but God.

The Bible speaks about two types of death, both caused by sin. There is the death caused by separation of life from the body. Everyone dies this death because of the sin nature (Rom. 6:23). The other death is eternal separation from God, the second death. Those who die the first death without accepting Christ as Savior also die the second death. The Bible also speaks of two births. There is the natural birth and the new birth. Those who accept Christ as Savior are born again.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Those who are only born once die twice. Those who are born again die only once. Have you been born again?*

Marc Shultz

The Keeping Power of Christ

KEY VERSE: “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled,” John 17:12.

The parental bond is so strong that parents will always love their children regardless of their actions. The Lord’s love can be compared to that of parents. The Lord knows those who are His. He knows their strengths and weaknesses. The Lord loves each of His children with the full measure of His love. He does not forsake those who rebel against Him. The Lord considers His children a precious possession. He will not turn his back on them. The Lord always manifests His love for His children.

Parents desire their children to experience joy in life. They will care for, provide, discipline and nourish their children so their lives will be filled with joy. The Lord also desires that His joy be fulfilled in His children. God will provide for His children according to His perfect will. He will love His children with a perfect love. The Lord will discipline His children to lead them toward the paths of righteousness. The Lord will also nourish His children toward spiritual growth.

As parents seek to protect their children, God seeks to protect His children from evil. God’s children are hated by the world because the world hates the Lord.

JUST A THOUGHT: *While they must live in the world, the Lord will enable His children to live victoriously.*

Marc Shultz

God's Word Is Truth

KEY VERSE: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth,” John 17:17.

An old circuit rider preacher was defending the authenticity of the Bible. He stated he believed the Bible from cover to cover, and he even believed the cover because it said Holy Bible. If the Word of God is not truth, it cannot be the Holy Bible.

Biblical truth is literal and not subjective. The Bible is not to be interpreted in the light of human opinion but according to God's intention at its writing. The Bible does not just contain truth; it is truth. The Bible states the truth about creation. God created the universe by design. The Bible states the truth about mankind. Adam was created innocent of sin but became a sinner by choice and thereby passed the sin nature upon all humanity. The Bible states the truth about salvation. Salvation does not come by works but by the grace of God.

Christians should follow biblical instruction because it is truth. They should hide the Word of God in their hearts so they will not sin against God (Psalm 119:11). It is truth that sets the sinner free (John 8:32). The gospel truth is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Christians should not just hear the Word of God proclaimed but also obey the Word of God (James 1:25). Jesus Christ is the embodiment of truth (John 14:6). Anyone who preaches anything other than biblical truth does not speak the Word of God.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The Word of God is truth because it is from God who is truth.*

Marc Shultz

Love's Priority

KEY VERSE: “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins,” 1 Peter 4:8.

The bride and groom have been pronounced man and wife. Suddenly their priorities have changed. They no longer can look at their own interest alone but now the interest of their mate. They have promised to love one another through good times and bad until death alone parts them. If their spouse is not a priority, the marriage will not likely endure.

Christians know they are a priority to God because of His love for them. John 3:16 states that God so loved the world. The depth of this verse is found in the word *so*. The verse would be meaningful if it just said that God loved the world. When the word *so* is added it shows the depth of God's love for the world. God's priority of love is evident because He gave His only begotten Son to be our sin sacrifice. God's love for the world is evident because He works all things for the good (Rom. 8:28). God cares for the needs of His children (1 Peter 5:7).

God should be the Christian's first priority. We should love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Christians should give evidence of their salvation by loving their brethren (1 John 3:14). The evidence of our love for God is seen in faithfulness to Him (Joshua 22:5). Christians make God a priority by putting His kingdom work first (Matt. 6:33).

JUST A THOUGHT: *One cannot make God a priority without loving Him first.*

Marc Shultz

Love's Obligation

KEY VERSE: “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,*” Romans 13:9.

A young man will act with chivalry to win his true love's heart. He will open the door to allow her to walk in first. He will offer her his coat if she has a chill. He will treat her with tenderness and respect at all times. He will do these things because he loves her. Unfortunately, often times once a young man has won his true love's heart, chivalry goes out the window. Though he still professes love for her, he no longer treats her with the same respect.

The words *I love you* ring hollow if not backed up with action. The Ten Commandments can be divided into two groups of action. One group of action has to do with man's actions toward God and the other with man's actions toward man. The intent of the Ten Commandments can be stated in two commands—to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. The proof of loving your neighbor as yourself can be seen in looking for the good of others before self. It is evident in forgiving others as God has forgiven us. Loving of others is seen in doing good for them and speaking good about them.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Love is a verb which requires action.*

Marc Shultz

There Is No Other Gospel

KEY VERSE: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed,”
Galatians 1:8.

The gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures. There is but one Lord. He came from Heaven’s glory to earth’s gloom and took upon Himself the form of wretched flesh but without sin. The one Lord died one death. His sacrifice on the cross was the only sacrifice needed for repentant sinners to be granted eternal life. Since the Lord died but once there is but one resurrection. He arose from the grave the third day triumphant over death. There is but one true body of Scriptures. Its writing was superintended by God and guarded by the Holy Spirit against error. Since there is but one Lord, who died but one death, and who rose once from the dead, and proclaimed by the one authentic body of Scriptures there is but one gospel.

Anyone who preaches any other gospel than the one proclaimed in the Scriptures is not proclaiming the truth. Jesus is the only Savior. No one else was worthy to fulfill the Father’s redemptive plan for humanity. The Bible records His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. Any doctrine that does not conform to the biblical record is not of God. False gospels do not give the true plan of salvation. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

JUST A THOUGHT: *False gospels are not gospels at all.*

Marc Shultz

Avoid the Divisive

KEY VERSE: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them,”
Romans 16:17.

Richard Nixon resigned as president of the United States in disgrace because of the Watergate scandal. When his resignation took effect, workers in all federal buildings across the nation took down his portrait and replaced it with a portrait of Gerald Ford, the new president. Former President Nixon was an outcast in national politics. He was never asked to speak at future Republican conventions. His advice was not sought in political matters. The mention of his name invoked thoughts of corruption. Richard Nixon spent the rest of his life as a divisive figure in the political world.

Heretics are divisive figures in religious matters. They proclaim a false gospel which contradicts the Word of God. They fool hearers into believing they are speaking the Word of God. Their false gospels do not reveal the true plan of salvation. Their false gospels do not promote spiritual growth. Their false gospels hinder hearers from believing the true gospel.

The gospel truth is the best weapon against false gospels. Christians are not to believe any religious tenant that contradicts the Word of God. They are not to ask God's blessings upon those who proclaim a false gospel. Christians and New Testament churches are not to proclaim false gospels or cooperate with those who do. The gospel of Jesus Christ is too precious to compromise.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God's Word is truth. Anything else is a lie.*

Marc Shultz

Beware of Itching Ears

KEY VERSE: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears,” 2 Timothy 4:3.

I vividly remember when as a child, I was infected with the chicken pox virus. Just the thought of it makes me itch again. It was difficult not to scratch the spots. It is human nature to want to scratch an itch to bring relief.

The same analogy is used for those who reject the truth to embrace heretical doctrine. Why would a person reject the truth and believe in false doctrine? Because false doctrine is more appealing. The truth condemns sin while false gospels take a less condemning attitude toward sin. This is more appealing to the flesh. The truth declares that salvation comes by grace and through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. False gospels proclaim salvation is by works, which is more appealing to the flesh. The true gospel tells a person what they need to hear. A false gospel tells a person what they want to hear.

The truth is difficult to hear when it violates our preconceived ideas. I remember when a seminary teacher told our freshman class that we needed to forget some things before we could learn what we needed to know. Erroneous beliefs do not foster spiritual growth. Erroneous beliefs do not reveal the will of God. Erroneous beliefs do not lead lost people to accept Jesus as Savior. Erroneous beliefs do not bring peace with God.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The truth satisfies the searching mind.*

Marc Shultz

If You Love Me

KEY VERSE: “If ye love me, keep my commandments,”
John 14:15.

A popular bumper sticker states, “Honk if you love Jesus.” The Bible states that if we love Jesus keep His commandments. Love is not seen in words but actions.

Jesus is the epitome of obedience to the Father. As a young man the Lord said that He must be about His father’s business. His earthly ministry was dedicated to the Father’s will. Jesus knew the Father’s will was to die on the cross and rise from the dead the third day, yet, He pledged to the Father He would do His will. When Philip asked the Lord to show the Father, Jesus said, since they had seen Him, they had seen the Father (verses 9, 10). Christians show their love for the Lord in faithful obedience to Him. Those who love the Lord are loved of the Father (verse 21). The love of the Father is made known in them because of their faithful obedience to the will of God.

Many Christians show little evidence of their love for Jesus. They spend their time indulging their own personal desires rather than serving the Lord. Few people know about their profession of faith. They are content being anonymous Christians. A person’s profession of faith should be more than a statement that they have accepted Jesus as Savior. It should also be a statement of commitment to faithful service to the Lord. Words of love not backed up with action do nothing to prove love for the Lord.

JUST A THOUGHT: *It requires more than a bumper sticker to prove love for Jesus.*

Marc Shultz

Refreshing the Saints

KEY VERSE: “For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother,” Philemon 7.

General Dwight Eisenhower was known as the G.I.’s general. He cared greatly about the private fighting on the battlefield. On several occasions when morale among the soldiers was low, General Eisenhower would visit the troops. His visits had a positive effect of boosting morale among the soldiers.

Christian fellowship has a positive effect upon believers. Christian fellowship aids in fostering an attitude of love among brethren. Christian fellowship encourages brethren to continue their faithful service to the Lord. Christian fellowship aids in spiritual growth.

Think about a person who played a positive role in your spiritual growth. It might be a parent, grandparent, Sunday School teacher, or other faithful servant of God. Pausing for a moment to think about them no doubt brings a smile to your face. This person is influential to you because he or she took the time to help you in your spiritual walk. He or she was there to encourage you in your spiritual growth and faithful service to the Lord. He or she was there to encourage you when times were tough and to rejoice with you in the good times. He or she was there to point you in the right direction when your life got off track. His or her influence had a positive impact in your life. Give thanks to God that he or she was a part of your life.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Be a positive spiritual influence toward others as your mentor was toward you.*

Marc Shultz

Colaborers in Truth

KEY VERSE: “So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase,” 1 Corinthians 3:7.

The next time you sit down to eat a meal consider the number of people involved in bringing that food to your table. There is the farmer who planted the seed and grew the crop to harvest. There are the harvesters who reap the crop at harvesttime. There is the truck driver who transports the crop to the company who prepares the crop for consumption. There is the stockman who prepares the crop for sale in the grocery store. There is the cashier who processes the food purchase at the check out counter. These people likely do not know one another, but they are colaborers in providing food for your meal.

There are also many laborers involved in the spiritual harvest. There is the pastor who proclaims the Word of God from the pulpit and aids in the spiritual growth of church members. There are the teachers in Sunday School and other Bible classes who teach the blessed truths of God’s Word. Consider others who are not so well-known. There is the person who drives the church van bringing people to church services. There is the literature writer who faithfully prepares lesson material for teachers. There is the church janitorial staff who assures the church facilities have been made ready for church services. Each of these people has an important role in the local church’s ministry of obeying the Great Commission.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Give thanks for those who serve the Lord.*

Marc Shultz

Share Bonds and Blessings

KEY VERSE: “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; *and* them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body,” Hebrews 13:3.

During the Vietnam War, Americans were asked to remember our prisoners of war. These men were being tortured by a ruthless enemy to get information about the American war plans. One slogan stated they were chained that we might be free. Americans rejoiced once the war was over, and the P. O. W.'s were freed.

Many biblical characters were persecuted for their faith. John the Baptist was beheaded. The apostle Paul spent much of his ministry imprisoned. The faith of the biblical martyrs paved the way for the gospel to be preached and souls to be saved. Their sacrifice was not in vain. Christians should be thankful these men were willing to pay a great personal price to be faithful to God's call.

Many modern day Christians have also paid a great personal price to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. One woman in a communist country had boiling water poured down her throat because she handed out Christian literature. A missionary returned home from an extended evangelization trip to find his family had been brutally murdered. Another missionary's wife was kidnapped and murdered because he would not quit preaching the gospel. We grieve for those who paid the ultimate price to carry the gospel into the entire world. A part of us suffers with those who have experienced suffering for their faith.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Christian suffering for the faith's sake is not in vain.*

Marc Shultz

Chiefs Are Servants

KEY VERSE: “For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth,” Luke 22:27.

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden won ten national championships as coach of the U. C. L. A. Bruins. Coach Wooden stressed teamwork as the key to winning championships. The team was not only the players but also the coaches and trainers. He did not tolerate anyone on the team treating another team member with anything but respect. The team photo included not only the players but coaches and trainers.

Jesus set the example of humble service by washing His disciple’s feet (John 13:5). Those who are unwilling to do the menial things are not worthy to do the great things. Jesus washed the disciple’s feet to prove He had the heart of a servant. Jesus left the glory of Heaven to take upon Himself the form of man. He came to earth not for Himself but to serve mankind. The man who committed no sin died the death of a criminal so those who believed in Him would have eternal life.

God requires faithfulness from His servants (1 Cor. 4:2). He only requires reasonable service (Rom. 12:1). God does not value any of His faithful servants more than another. There are no unimportant workers or unimportant tasks in the Lord’s service. Christians are to serve for the glory of God and not self-gratification.

JUST A THOUGHT: *It will be better to hear the well done of God than the applause of men.*

Marc Shultz

No Self-Promotion

KEY VERSE: “But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren,”
Matthew 23:8.

The 1948 presidential election pitted incumbent Harry S. Truman against Thomas Dewey. President Truman was not a popular president and considered a long shot to win the election. Dewey was so confident in his election that he began interviewing candidates for his cabinet. The early returns seemed to indicate a Dewey win. A Chicago newspaper’s headline even proclaimed “Dewey Wins.” The tide turned with later returns and President Truman won the election. One man thought he would become president. The other man actually won the election.

The slogan on a bumper sticker read, There is but one God and you’re not Him! God does not need an assistant. He is able to do His work. Christians are simply instruments God uses to complete His will. Christians should not think more of themselves than God does. God values the labor of each of His faithful servants, but none is so important that God could not complete His work without him. No one doubts the importance of John the Baptist’s ministry, but the gospel continued to be preached after he was beheaded. The individual servant of God is not greater than the work of God.

The glory belongs to God and not mankind. Christians should serve God for His good and not their own praise. Attention placed upon the individual servant of God is misplaced. Let God be God and do His will.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Humility is one of the most important qualifications for God’s servants.*

Marc Shultz

No Vain Glory

KEY VERSE: “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves,*” Philippians 2:3.

Carol was popular among her classmates at school. In junior high school she was elected best citizen by her classmates. Part of this recognition was the honor of having her picture so designated in the yearbook. When the yearbook was published, the printer had made a horrible mistake. Carol was designated as being the runner-up for the best citizen award. Carol was frustrated by the mistake and let it be known she was unhappy. She even vented her anger at the runner-up whose picture appeared above hers in the yearbook. Carol's vain attitude kept her from acting like a good citizen.

Christians should not serve God for their own personal benefit but for the glory of God. The apostle Paul knew whatever he had achieved in the ministry was because of the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10). Since Christians achieve their best when God works through them they should praise God for their success. John the Baptist knew that, for Jesus to increase through him, he must decrease. John did not wish to be noticed but that God be noticed through him. It should not matter whether or not others notice or appreciate our service for God but whether God approves. It is better to be blessed of God than approved by mankind.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God knows the faithful service of His children and will reward them accordingly.*

Marc Shultz

Sharing Our Resources

KEY VERSE: “As every man hath received the gift, *even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God,*” 1 Peter 4:10.

A certain church was erecting a new church building. They could not afford to hire a contractor so the members were doing the work themselves. One man had experience as a plumber so he donated labor to plumb the new building. Another man was an electrician so he wired the church building. No one was asked to do something he or she was unable to do. He or she simply used the talents God had given. When the efforts were completed, a beautiful new church building was erected.

No one is without an ability to use in the service of God. It would be selfish to use those abilities only for personal benefit. It is best used for the work of God. God enables those whom He uses in His service. God will grant the grace of speech to those He calls to preach the Word of God or teach a Bible class. Christians should wisely use the abilities God has granted them.

Christians should serve God for His glory and not personal benefit. They should take pride that their efforts are used to benefit the work of the Lord. Do not be satisfied to sit on the sidelines and do nothing. Be an active participant in the Lord's service. Do what you can for the Lord because He has done so much for you.

JUST A THOUGHT: *You are a vital part of the Lord's work.*

Marc Shultz

Stephen Contended for the Faith

KEY VERSE: “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people,” Acts 6:8.

In Christopher Columbus’ day almost everyone believed the world was flat. Anyone who believed otherwise was considered a lunatic. Columbus believed the world was round. He publicly debated the flat world theory. Columbus set sail to prove his belief. Today hardly anyone believes the world is flat. The tide began to turn because Christopher Columbus refused to back down from his belief that the world was round.

Stephen was a faithful Christian and one of the first deacons. He was distinguished as a man full of faith. As a child of God his passion was to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the lost. His efforts to share the gospel did not endear him to those who embraced false gospels. They were not satisfied just to debate Stephen’s beliefs; they sought to silence the messenger. Stephen was warned to stop proclaiming his beliefs or face dire consequences. Those threats caused him to be even bolder to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even as Stephen was being stoned to death, he continued to preach the gospel.

The world seems sensitive to every religious tenet except the truth. Those who proclaim the truth are often persecuted for their faith. If persecution causes Christians to remain silent in proclaiming the gospel, Satan has gained the victory. Christians must contend for the faith whatever the cost.

JUST A THOUGHT: *If Christians do not contend for the faith, who will?*

Marc Shultz

Saul Contended for the Faith

KEY VERSE: “But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ,” Acts 9:22.

Saul had been both a persecutor of Christians and defender of the faith. Before his conversion, Christians despised his efforts to hinder the preaching of the gospel. After his conversion, they wondered about his sincerity. How could a man who had done so much to hinder the proclamation of the gospel become a preacher of that same gospel? Saul proved his sincerity by faithfully proclaiming the gospel in spite of intense persecution.

Much about Saul changed after his conversion. His name as well as his outlook was changed. He put the same effort in proclaiming the gospel as he did in persecuting Christians. As the apostle Paul, he faced the same persecution as a preacher of the gospel that he meted out as an unbeliever in the gospel. The more persecution he faced, the more determined he was to proclaim the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Saul of Tarsus silenced the voices of many Christians in proclaiming the gospel. The apostle Paul refused to be silenced.

Christians face many obstacles in proclaiming the gospel. Some localities have passed laws restricting where and when they may publicly share their faith. Such obstacles should not silence the voices of Christians. Too much is at stake not to proclaim the gospel. Christians should not be timid to share the gospel.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Someone is depending on you to tell him or her what he or she must do to be saved.*

Marc Shultz

Strive Together for the Faith

KEY VERSE: “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,” Philippians 1:27.

The Marine Corp Silent Drill Team is a marvel to watch. Team members perform close order drills without vocal cadence. They perform as a team and not as individual team members. They perform in such close proximity that one team member out of step would cause the whole team to falter.

Christians are to be unified in their demeanor. They are to be unified in their belief and adherence to the Word of God. The Bible is God’s standard of faith and practice for His children. Christians who adhere to the standard of God’s Word become a positive influence on others. Timothy’s mother and grandmother both had a positive influence on his spiritual life. The Christian lifestyle is living proof of the power of God and benefits of His Word.

Christians are members of God’s team. While they do not perform the same tasks, they work for a common goal. They do not serve for their own interests but for God’s will. They do not seek adulation for themselves but the glory of God. They do not seek credit for what they have done but to please God by their faithful service.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The world may not appreciate what Christians do for the Lord, but it is for the benefit of the world.*

Marc Shultz

Be Bold with the Gospel

KEY VERSE: “But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention,” 1 Thessalonians 2:2.

Nathan Hale was an American patriot of the early colonial days. He was captured by the enemy and hanged for his efforts to win the Revolutionary War. In his final moments of life, he did not express regret that his life was coming to an end in a violent way. Nathan Hale expressed pride in the cause by saying, “I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country.”

The same ones who could have benefited from the proclamation of the gospel persecuted the message bearers. The message brought conviction. Rather than obeying the message, they sought to silence the messenger. Men like John the Baptist, Stephen and the apostle Paul were martyred because they dared to preach the gospel. While their tongues fell silent, others were encouraged by their boldness and began to proclaim the gospel. The messengers of the gospel may die in defense of the gospel, but the message will survive.

Christians should not regret whatever sacrifice they make to proclaim the Word of God. Everyone who lives for God and serves Him will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Rather than regretting what they must suffer for the Lord, they should remember what the Lord suffered for them. Boldness for the Lord will bring a great reward.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The Lord worth loving is the Lord worth serving.*

Marc Shultz

Hold Fast the Faith

KEY VERSE: “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus,” 2 Timothy 1:13.

A certain pastor was helping entertain the children playing outside the church building during Vacation Bible School. They were sitting on the steps of the building as he told them a Bible story when suddenly his pet Labrador retriever came running around the corner. The kids began to run toward the dog, so the pastor yelled out to them to sit down. The Labrador also obeyed the command and sat down. The black Labrador remembered its training.

The Bible is the Christian’s guide to faith and practice. Christians who obey the commands of the Bible will live a joyful and peaceful life. Obedience to the Word of God is a daily duty. To fail to obey the Word of God will be subject to divine judgment. Christians who have the Word of God in their hearts will remember its instructions during times of trouble. Having witnessed the benefits of obedience to the Word of God, they will continue to obey its instructions.

Christians should never consider not abiding by the instructions of God’s Word. Biblical instructions have never failed and will never fail. Only those who fail to obey the instructions of God’s Word do not receive its benefits. Be steadfast in obedience. Read the Word, obey its precepts and discover its benefits. A Bible not read cannot pass on its benefits.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Read God’s Word; remember God’s Word; apply God’s Word.*

Marc Shultz

Keep the Profession of Your Faith

KEY VERSE: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession,” Hebrews 4:14.

When American soldiers become prisoners of war, they are often used for propaganda purposes. Extreme torture is often used against them to get them to make slanderous statements against the American military and government. Soldiers who make such propaganda statements often feel guilty for failing their code of honor and giving in to the torture.

Part of the Christian’s code of honor should be to live the testimony he professes. When a person professes Christ as Savior, he is to live according to higher standard than nonbelievers. He is to obey the instructions of God’s Word and to follow the will of God. To fail that high standard is to sin against God. To fail to live a consistently godly life will hinder the Christian’s service to the Lord.

Jesus set the example of living a consistently righteous life. The Lord knew His duty was to accomplish the will of the Father. He refused to be distracted from that focus. He refused to give in to temptation. Christians will be tempted to live contrary to God’s will and their profession of faith. To fail to do so not only brings dishonor on themselves but also upon God.

JUST A THOUGHT: *It is much easier for a person to be steadfast in his or her profession of faith when times are good. It is as necessary when times are difficult.*

Marc Shultz

Reward for Keeping the Faith

KEY VERSE: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing,”
2 Timothy 4:8.

It is a summer Saturday and lawn mowing day. Part of your childhood chores are to mow the yard. Your parents will be gone for the day, but they expect the lawn to be mowed by the time they return home. You keep putting off mowing the lawn so you can watch cartoons on television. You soon realize that your parents will return home at any moment, and the lawn is not mowed. Will you look forward to seeing them walk in the front door?

The apostle Paul took seriously his duty as a child of God. God had called him to preach the gospel. He endured great persecution to fulfill God’s calling. He preached the gospel to both kings and paupers. He preached in prison cells and in palaces. He preached the gospel in spite of his thorn in the flesh. He refused to allow his persecutors to silence his voice in proclaiming the good news. When Paul was nearing the end of his life, he knew he had given his best for the Lord. He looked forward to the rewards he would receive as a faithful child of God and preacher of the gospel.

JUST A THOUGHT: *If this were the day you come face-to-face with God, would you have any regrets?*

Marc Shultz

Perilous Times

KEY VERSE: “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come,” 2 Timothy 3:1.

At the time of this writing, the United States is facing a financial crisis. The collapse of the housing market has left many mortgage and investment companies insolvent. Congress passed a bill to help rescue these failing companies. The stock market averages have dropped over twenty percent from their highs. There is much uncertainty about what will be the ultimate result of the financial crisis. Americans are worried.

Conditions in the world are getting worse by the day. Immorality is the rule of the day. Sins that a generation ago would have been scandalous are the norm for the day. The institution of marriage is under attack, and the divorce rate is at an all-time high. Spiritual apathy is rampant. Churches are closing their doors, and those who preach the gospel are being persecuted. It seems the world has been turned upside down.

The perilous times should not come as a surprise. The times are an indication that the Lord could return soon. Christians should be praying for the Lord to return. Until the Lord does return, Christians should be faithfully serving Him. Many people have yet to accept Christ as Savior. It is the duty of Christians to tell them the good news of God's love. There must be a sense of urgency about the Christian's service to the Lord. The Lord should not return to have His people idle.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Difficult times should not preclude our faithfulness to God.*

Marc Shultz

Last Day Scoffers

KEY VERSE: “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,” 2 Peter 3:3.

Little Johnny was told he must eat everything on his plate or he would not be served desert. He had eaten everything except the green beans which he hates. Desert is apple pie a la mode, his favorite. He finally held his nose and ate the green beans.

A scoffer is one who holds his nose in disgust toward biblical doctrine. Some people do not like biblical doctrine because it convicts them of sin. Rather than changing their sinful ways, they ridicule the message. Some scoffers ridicule biblical doctrine on an intellectual level. For example, they ridicule the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea. They say such a feat is impossible; therefore, it did not occur. They exhibit no faith in God or the biblical message.

One of the most scorned biblical doctrines is that of the second coming of Jesus. Scoffers claim biblical prophecies concerning the Lord's return were not meant to be taken literally. Part of their skepticism stems from the fact the doctrine of the second coming has been proclaimed since biblical times and has not yet occurred. The Lord will return in a time known only by the Heavenly Father. Certain events suggest His return is soon, but no one knows exactly when it shall occur. Children of God should live every day as though that were the day Jesus returns for His children.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Scoffers ridicule biblical doctrine because of their lack of faith.*

Marc Shultz

The Word Builds You Up

KEY VERSE: “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified,” Acts 20:32.

A man sat on his bed wondering why his life was such a mess. He had been convinced to enter a rehabilitation center to conquer his alcoholism. He was only there because of pressure from his family. He could not wait until he could leave the facility. On the stand beside his bed was a Bible. There was nothing else to do, so he began reading the Bible. In fact, he read the Bible from cover to cover. With tears in his eyes the man asked Jesus to be his Savior. With a different attitude, he embraced the help that was offered him and conquered his alcoholism. His change began when he read the Bible.

Millions of dollars are spent each year on self-help books. These books give instructions on things such as financial management, health improvement and emotional well-being. These books are not perfect in their content. There is one self-help book that is perfect in content, the Bible. It gives instructions on how a person can accept Jesus as Savior. It instructs believers in the personal attributes and habits that will endear them to God and strengthen their emotional outlook. No one ever failed following biblical instructions. The Bible is God's instruction book for all humanity. Read it and obey it!

JUST A THOUGHT: *Biblical instructions lead to a well-balanced life.*

Marc Shultz

In Everything Give Thanks

KEY VERSE: “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you,” 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

A Jewish woman was imprisoned in a German concentration camp during World War II. The conditions were harsh, and the treatment was brutal from the German guards. At times the woman prayed to die rather than suffer the cruel treatment. The barracks she bunked in became infected with lice. This made her even more miserable. She then realized the guards were leaving the prisoners alone because they did not want to deal with the lice. Suddenly, what she thought was a burden became a blessing.

It is easy to give thanks for the good things in life. Even then, we neglect to remember to give thanks to God for providing those blessings. It is much more difficult to give thanks for the things we perceive as negative. Just moments before dying from cancer, a man said throughout his illness he learned how strong he was and how many friends he had. A woman whose child died soon after birth realized how blessed she was to have other healthy children. A man who lost his job realized how much stress the job was causing him. He found a new job that he enjoyed much more than the one he lost. God has promised to work all things for good (Rom. 8:28). Even the things we perceive as negative, God can work for the positive.

JUST A THOUGHT: *For a person to count his or her blessings, he or she must recognize he or she is blessed.*

Marc Shultz

Grounded in the Truth

KEY VERSE: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,” 2 Timothy 2:15.

Sam Rayburn was Speaker of the United States House of Representatives longer than any other person. He astutely knew how the House of Representatives worked. He knew all the rules and by-laws and how to apply them. As a young congressman, he studied the rules of The House so he could be able to get bills passed. The knowledge served him well as the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Timothy had one of the best spiritual mentors possible in the apostle Paul. He accompanied Paul as he preached the gospel and learned biblical doctrine from him. Timothy's journey to spiritual enlightenment was just beginning. Paul urged Timothy to take charge of his own spiritual training. Timothy was urged to study the Word of God. Not only was he to study the Word of God, he was to rightly divide the Scriptures. He was not to put his own spin on what he studied but seek God's intention in the Scriptures. By studying and applying the Scriptures to his life, Timothy would find favor from God. What Timothy learned served him well in his ministry.

Christians should be so grounded in gospel truth that they will not be deceived by false gospels. Being grounded in the truth does not come just by attending Sunday School and worship services. It comes through an intense study of God's Word.

JUST A THOUGHT: *It is an individual's responsibility to study and apply God's Word.*

Marc Shultz

Praying Always

KEY VERSE: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints,” Ephesians 6:18.

A man being interviewed for a job was offered the position. It was the job of his dreams. The salary was more than he expected. He had prayed for guidance from God when he first applied for the job. He prayed for God’s will to be done while waiting for the interview. The job was now his for the taking. The employer needed an immediate answer. His immediate impulse was to accept the job. The man asked for a moment to think it over and found a private place to pray one more time. In prayer he found the inner peace he felt he needed and accepted the job.

Prayer is always appropriate. There is not a circumstance that is not worth taking time to pray about. No situation is too insignificant to pray about. The object of prayer is to seek God’s will. It is proper to make requests to God during prayer, but it is improper to put selfish desires over God’s will. Prayers should also be offered on behalf of others. It is selfish to ask for the prayers of others and not be willing to lift them up in prayer. Patience should be exercised in waiting for God to answer prayer. Sometimes our requests are granted. Sometimes God denies our requests. Sometimes God will have us wait for His answer. In all cases His will is accomplished.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Pray for God’s will then accept His answer.*

Marc Shultz

Watch for Wolves

KEY VERSE: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock,” Acts 20:29.

The shepherd is the only line of defense between the sheep and the wolves. The wolves are predators who attack their prey without warning. The sheep have no sense of self-defense; therefore, it is up to the shepherd to protect the sheep. The shepherd knows where the wolves lie in wait and lead the sheep away from those places. If not for the shepherd the sheep would be defenseless against the wolves.

Paul was zealous in guarding the truth against heresy. He did not hesitate to identify heretics proclaiming false gospels. Paul was careful to teach only what he knew as the true gospel. Those under his ministry flourished in their spiritual growth because of his biblical exhortation. Paul proclaimed the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Paul knew the danger of the grievous wolves which would attack the flock of God. The wolves would attack young Christians who lacked spiritual maturity. Paul's desire was not to leave the flock defenseless against the wolves. Heretics with their ability to deceive with fancy ways of speaking would draw away immature Christians from the truth. Paul spent his time warning against false gospels and false teachers.

Satan's desire is to destroy the Lord's churches from within. Biblical doctrine is clear. Any doctrine that does not conform to the Word of God is dangerous and should be avoided.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The Word of God is the best defense against heretical predators.*

Marc Shultz