

# Devotional Quarterly

*Through-the-Bible Series*

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**Vol. 13, No. 2**

**March 1, 2003**

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## Churches in Action (Part 1)

*These daily devotionals present the empowerment, message, purpose, commission, persecution and victories of the early church started by Jesus during His personal ministry. Some of the daily happenings such as preaching, witnessing and giving are given to challenge church members to a closer daily walk with Jesus and fellowship with one another.*

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### **Personal and Daily Devotions for Spring Quarter, 2003**

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Prepared by Gene C. Smith, Marc Shultz  
and Mary McCalister

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## Read Through the Bible in a Year

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

The readings include a “Daily Reading” and the “Daily Devotionals.” The devotional for each day is based on the Scripture from the “Daily Devotionals” list. The “Daily Readings” cover other Scriptures not lesson related. By reading both passages every day, you will have read the entire Bible at the end of the year.

You may use the box beside the date to check when you have read the Scriptures for that day.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DAILY READINGS</b>	<b>DAILY DEVOTIONALS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> February 24	Numbers 32—34	Luke 24:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> February 25	Numbers 35; 36	John 20:19-23
<input type="checkbox"/> February 26	Deuteronomy 1; 2	Luke 24:46-48
<input type="checkbox"/> February 27	Deuteronomy 3; 4:1-40	Luke 24:49-53
<input type="checkbox"/> February 28	Deuteronomy 5; 6:1-3, 10-25	Luke 11:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> March 1	Deuteronomy 7—9	Luke 22:47-53
<input type="checkbox"/> March 2	Deuteronomy 10; 11	
<input type="checkbox"/> March 3	Deuteronomy 12—14	Joel 2:28-32
<input type="checkbox"/> March 4	Deuteronomy 15—17	Matthew 3:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> March 5	Deuteronomy 18; 19:14-21	Matthew 4:12-17
<input type="checkbox"/> March 6	Deuteronomy 20—22	Philippians 2:5-11
<input type="checkbox"/> March 7	Deuteronomy 23—25	Galatians 5:16-21
<input type="checkbox"/> March 8	Deuteronomy 26—28	Galatians 5:22-26
<input type="checkbox"/> March 9	Deuteronomy 29; 30	
<input type="checkbox"/> March 10	Deuteronomy 31; 32; 34:9-12	Romans 2:1-11
<input type="checkbox"/> March 11	Joshua 1—3	2 Corinthians 4:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> March 12	Joshua 4—6	2 Corinthians 4:7-18
<input type="checkbox"/> March 13	Joshua 7—9	2 Corinthians 5:14-21
<input type="checkbox"/> March 14	Joshua 10; 11	2 Corinthians 8:1-5
<input type="checkbox"/> March 15	2 Samuel 5; 6	Revelation 20:11-15
<input type="checkbox"/> March 16	2 Samuel 7:1-7, 18-29; 8	
<input type="checkbox"/> March 17	2 Samuel 9—11	Psalms 2:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> March 18	2 Samuel 12; 13	Jeremiah 1:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> March 19	2 Samuel 14—16	Matthew 10:23-33
<input type="checkbox"/> March 20	2 Samuel 17—19	2 Timothy 4:14-22
<input type="checkbox"/> March 21	2 Samuel 20—22	2 Timothy 3:13-17
<input type="checkbox"/> March 22	2 Samuel 23:8-39; 24	2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> March 23	1 Kings 1; 2	
<input type="checkbox"/> March 24	1 Kings 3—5	Genesis 39:13-23
<input type="checkbox"/> March 25	1 Kings 6:15-38; 7	Jeremiah 38:7-13
<input type="checkbox"/> March 26	1 Kings 8; 9	Daniel 6:16-24
<input type="checkbox"/> March 27	1 Kings 10; 11	Matthew 14:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> March 28	1 Kings 12; 13	Mark 15:16-26
<input type="checkbox"/> March 29	1 Kings 14; 15	2 Timothy 4:6-13
<input type="checkbox"/> March 30	1 Kings 16—18:1-16, 22-46	
<input type="checkbox"/> March 31	1 Kings 19; 20	Exodus 18:13-27



## April Scripture Readings

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DAILY READINGS</b>	<b>DAILY DEVOTIONALS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> April 1	1 Kings 21; 22	Numbers 11:16-25
<input type="checkbox"/> April 2	2 Kings 1—3	Mark 3:13-19
<input type="checkbox"/> April 3	2 Kings 4—6	1 Timothy 3:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> April 4	2 Kings 7—9	1 Timothy 3:8-13
<input type="checkbox"/> April 5	2 Kings 10; 11	Colossians 4:7-18
<input type="checkbox"/> April 6	2 Kings 12—14	
<input type="checkbox"/> April 7	2 Kings 15; 16	Genesis 12:1-9
<input type="checkbox"/> April 8	2 Kings 17—19	Genesis 37:28-36
<input type="checkbox"/> April 9	2 Kings 20—22	Exodus 1:1-14
<input type="checkbox"/> April 10	2 Kings 23—25	Exodus 3:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> April 11	1 Chronicles 11—13	Exodus 13:17-22
<input type="checkbox"/> April 12	1 Chronicles 14; 15	1 Kings 6:1-14
<input type="checkbox"/> April 13	1 Chronicles 16—18	
<input type="checkbox"/> April 14	1 Chronicles 19—21	Romans 1:14-17
<input type="checkbox"/> April 15	1 Chronicles 22—24	1 Corinthians 1:18-25
<input type="checkbox"/> April 16	1 Chronicles 25; 26	1 Corinthians 3:9-15
<input type="checkbox"/> April 17	1 Chronicles 27—29	2 Corinthians 4:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> April 18	2 Chronicles 1—3	Galatians 1:13-19
<input type="checkbox"/> April 19	2 Chronicles 4—6	1 Peter 1:17-25
<input type="checkbox"/> April 20	2 Chronicles 7—9	
<input type="checkbox"/> April 21	2 Chronicles 10—12	Ephesians 1:3-12
<input type="checkbox"/> April 22	2 Chronicles 13—15	Colossians 1:20-29
<input type="checkbox"/> April 23	2 Chronicles 16; 17:10-19; 18	1 Timothy 1:11-16
<input type="checkbox"/> April 24	2 Chronicles 19—21	2 Timothy 1:6-11
<input type="checkbox"/> April 25	2 Chronicles 22—24	Colossians 3:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> April 26	2 Chronicles 25; 26	Hebrews 3:7-16
<input type="checkbox"/> April 27	2 Chronicles 27—29	
<input type="checkbox"/> April 28	2 Chronicles 30—32	1 Thessalonians 4:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> April 29	2 Chronicles 33—36	1 Corinthians 15:1-11
<input type="checkbox"/> April 30	Ezra 1; 2	Romans 11:11-25



## May Scripture Readings

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DAILY READINGS</b>	<b>DAILY DEVOTIONALS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> May 1	Ezra 3—5	Galatians 2:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> May 2	Ezra 6—8	Ephesians 2:11-18
<input type="checkbox"/> May 3	Ezra 9; 10	Ephesians 3:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> May 4	Nehemiah 1—3	
<input type="checkbox"/> May 5	Nehemiah 4—6	Matthew 6:5-8
<input type="checkbox"/> May 6	Nehemiah 7; 8	Matthew 6:9-15
<input type="checkbox"/> May 7	Nehemiah 9—11	Matthew 7:7-11
<input type="checkbox"/> May 8	Nehemiah 12; 13	Luke 18:9-14
<input type="checkbox"/> May 9	Esther 1; 2	Luke 22:39-46
<input type="checkbox"/> May 10	Esther 3; 4	Revelation 6:12-17
<input type="checkbox"/> May 11	Esther 5; 6	
<input type="checkbox"/> May 12	Esther 7; 8	Matthew 28:16-20
<input type="checkbox"/> May 13	Esther 9; 10	John 1:6-15
<input type="checkbox"/> May 14	Job 1—3	John 4:35-43
<input type="checkbox"/> May 15	Job 4—6	Revelation 3:14-22
<input type="checkbox"/> May 16	Job 7—10	Revelation 14:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> May 17	Job 11; 12	Revelation 22:17-21
<input type="checkbox"/> May 18	Job 13—15	
<input type="checkbox"/> May 19	Job 16—18	2 Chronicles 17:1-9
<input type="checkbox"/> May 20	Job 19—21	Romans 1:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> May 21	Job 22—24	Romans 10:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> May 22	Job 25—28	Luke 10:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> May 23	Job 29—31	Ephesians 3:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> May 24	Job 32; 33	Revelation 2:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> May 25	Job 34—36	



Luke 24:1-12

Monday, February 24

## The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

**KEY VERSE:** “He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,” Luke 24:6.

Even before Jesus was arrested, He told His disciples about His impending crucifixion and His subsequent resurrection from the dead. (See Luke 18:31-34 and 24:7, 8.) However, when He was buried in Joseph’s new tomb (John 19:38-41), it seemed that the disciples had forgotten His words or failed to understand their purport.

The women who had prepared spices to anoint the body of Jesus came to the tomb of Jesus “early in the morning” on the “first day of the week (Luke 24:1), found the “stone rolled away from the sepulchre” (verse 2) and the body of Jesus gone (verse 3). An angel appeared to them (Matt. 28:5) and told them that Jesus had risen from the dead (Luke 24:4-6). This event transpired even as Jesus had told them it would (verses 7, 8).

The women then ran and told the other disciples. Some of them believed their message and hastened to the empty tomb. Looking inside, they beheld the linen grave clothes, but they did not see the body of Jesus. The empty tomb is an evidence of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. That day became the most glorious day in the history of the world.

On December 14, 1967, this writer had the joyful experience of visiting the empty tomb of Jesus Christ outside the city of Jerusalem. I did not go there expecting to see the bones and body of Jesus Christ. I had put my faith in Him as my Savior at the tender age of twelve. I had also preached His death, burial and resurrection for many years. However, my faith was verified as I beheld the empty tomb.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus is not on the cross, neither is He in the tomb near Jerusalem, but He is in Heaven where He is making intercession for us. (See Romans 8:34.)*

Gene C. Smith

## The Gathering of the Church

**KEY VERSE:** “Then the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you,” John 20:19.

On Sunday night after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, some of His disciples were assembled together in an upper room in Jerusalem. They had shut, and perhaps barred, the doors for fear of the Jews. Suddenly and unexpectedly the risen Christ appeared in their midst and spoke peace to their troubled hearts. Jesus had a glorified body, and He could suddenly appear inside the room even though the doors were shut and locked. Such an appearance frightened the assembled disciples. Jesus, therefore, spoke words of peace to quiet the fears of their troubled hearts.

The resurrected Lord showed those disciples His hands and His side. They could see the scars in His hands made by the driven nails. He pulled back His tunic and showed them the wounds in His side inflicted by the Roman soldier who pierced His side. The wounds identified Him as the crucified Christ.

Having seen the evidences of Jesus’ crucifixion, they were fully convinced that He was really alive again. When they saw the hands and the side of Jesus, they were filled with joy because He had risen from the dead.

This evidence rekindled all their hopes, dreams and longings that seemed to have been crushed down to the dust of the earth by His death.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *This incident reveals an example for us to follow—the gathering at church on Sunday night. (See John 20:19.)*

Gene C. Smith

## The Commission To Evangelize

**KEY VERSE:** “And ye are witnesses of these things,”  
Luke 24:48.

Two of Jesus’ disciples left Jerusalem on the morning of His resurrection and started to the village of Emmaus about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem (Luke 24:13). As they walked along, they were talking about the events of the last few days in Jerusalem (verse 14). The risen Lord joined them, but they did not recognize Him (verses 15, 16). Jesus inquired as to why they were so forlorn and sad. Cleopas told Him how disappointed they were because of the death of Jesus (verses 17-24).

Jesus chided them for their unbelief (verses 25, 26). Jesus then expounded the teachings of the Scriptures concerning these things and revealed Himself to them (verses 27-30).

There were some ten different appearances of the risen Christ to His disciples. In this chapter Luke sets forth the fifth appearance of Jesus to His disciples. He appeared to the ten apostles—Judas was dead and Thomas was absent (verses 36-45) and the tenth and final appearance was to the entire church assembled in Jerusalem.

It was at this final appearance that the risen Christ commissioned His church. This commission was for His church to take the gospel to the unsaved masses of all nations, beginning at Jerusalem and extending worldwide (verses 46-48). We operate under the same marching orders today. We must not have a tunnel-vision view but see all mankind in need of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Crown Him as sovereign. Bow before His throne and worship Him. (See Luke 24:52.)*

Gene C. Smith

## The Ascension of Jesus Christ

**KEY VERSE:** “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven,” Luke 24:51.

No gospel writer recorded all ten of Jesus’ appearances after His resurrection. Luke recorded only three of them—the fourth, fifth and tenth. After making these appearances, Jesus told His disciples that He would send the promise of the Father upon them. This promise was that they would be “endued with power from on high” (verse 49). This is a reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church to empower it to take the gospel to the entire world and to direct it in this endeavor. (See Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4.)

Jesus then “led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them” (Luke 24:50). Afterward He separated Himself from them and was “carried up into heaven” (verse 51). The word ascension means “to go up, or to be taken up.” Jesus went up into Heaven—the abode of God the Father. He is there at the right hand of God interceding for us (Rom. 8:34). This episode in the life of Jesus can be viewed in the Passion Play at Eureka Springs, Arkansas, and other places.

The church in Jerusalem continued to worship Jesus. It met “in the temple, praising and blessing God” (verse 53). Some people seem to serve God for a while and then quit. There is never a right time to quit serving God and worshipping Jesus.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus is the Creator and the Lord over all the earth. Worship Him as the preeminent One. (See Colossians 1:16-18.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Jesus' Teaching on Prayer

**KEY VERSE:** "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples," Luke 11:1.

Jesus was a man of prayer. This is evidenced in the New Testament by the many references to His praying. Jesus was "praying in a certain place" (verse 1). As the disciples observed Jesus in prayer, they wanted Him to teach them to pray. Jesus then gave them the Model Prayer by which His followers could pattern their prayers (verses 2-4). Jesus then gave two parables to show that, to obtain the blessing in prayer, it is necessary to persevere in prayer to the heavenly Father.

Jesus first introduced the parable of the importunate friend (verses 5-10). His design was solely to show the necessity of being importunate or persevering in prayer to God—the Father. The word importunity denotes troublesome perseverance or continued disturbance and refusing to take any denial. The man continued to knock and ask until his friend got up and gave him what he asked for. After giving the parable, Jesus gave the application to it. He stated that, to obtain what we desire in prayer, we must "ask, seek and knock" (verse 9). Continuous asking, seeking and knocking is the way to secure God's blessings through prayer.

In the next parable Jesus spoke about fatherhood (verses 11-13). In this parable Jesus used the example of a good father giving good gifts to his children to illustrate how the heavenly Father (God) gives good gifts to His children. Try Jesus' instructions on prayer and see that they really work.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *To walk with God, one must talk with God. (See Matthew 7:7, 8.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Jesus' Betrayal by Judas Iscariot

**KEY VERSE:** "But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" Luke 22:48.

This passage sets forth the fact of Jesus' betrayal by Judas Iscariot. The name Judas is usually always used with reference to the man who betrayed Jesus Christ. It is a name that is used with hypocrisy, hatred and ignominy because of what Judas Iscariot did in disgrace as he betrayed Jesus Christ.

The betrayer of Jesus is here identified as Judas Iscariot (verses 47, 48). The religious leaders of Israel wanted to capture Jesus and kill Him, but "they feared the people" (verse 2). Then suddenly one of Jesus' apostles, Judas Iscariot, appeared to become their henchman. He went to the "chief priests and captains" and "covenanted" with them for money to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3-6). The bargained price was for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15), the price of a common slave in those days. From that time, Judas sought for an opportunity to betray Jesus. He finally got his chance. Jesus and His disciples left the upper room in Jerusalem and retired to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. (See Matthew 26:30-36 and Luke 22:39.) Judas knew that Jesus and His disciples often went there to pray. So he, along with a band of officers and servants, went there seeking Jesus (See Matthew 26:47-56.) When they found Him, Judas drew near to Jesus and kissed Him.

By the sign of that kiss, Judas was to reveal Jesus to the captors. The kiss was also to be a signal to them to arrest Jesus. The "multitude" arrested Jesus and led Him away to an unjust trial. (See Luke 22:54-71.)

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The thirst of the spirit will never be quenched by material things. Judas is a prime example. (See Matthew 27:3-7 and Acts 1:15-20.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Joel's Prophecy

**KEY VERSE:** "And it shall come to pass afterward, *that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions,*" Joel 2:28.

The book of Joel is attributed to the prophet Joel, the son of Pethuel (Joel 1:1). Unlike most other prophetic books, no information is given in the opening verse that establishes the time limits of his prophetic ministry. He probably exercised his ministry during the reign of Joash in Judah. (See 2 Chronicles 22:1—24:27.) In his youth he may have known Elijah, and he certainly was a contemporary with Elisha. These two Old Testament prophets were definitely empowered by the Holy Spirit and were also led by Him. The same was true with the prophet Joel. The Lord announced to the prophet Joel that His "day" (Joel 2:1) would be accompanied by an outpouring of His Spirit on all people (verse 28).

The word afterward (verse 28) means "in the last days." It has both a partial and continuous fulfillment during the "last days," which began with the first advent of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:2), but the greater fulfillment awaits the "last days" as applied to Israel. (See Acts 2:17.)

Peter quoted Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) and showed that it was partially fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). We can, therefore, understand Joel's prophecy in light of what happened at Pentecost. It was the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower His church (Luke 24:49). The one hundred twenty disciples comprised the sum total of the then existing church. They were not only the first church but they also stood for the church of all ages because the basic fact of Pentecost was the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit's filling. He came upon the church. The Holy Spirit is here now because He came then.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Every believer is to be a Spirit-filled Christian! Are you? (See Ephesians 5:18.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Ministry of John the Baptist

**KEY VERSE:** “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,” Matthew 3:1.

In Bible times when a king planned to visit a certain place, he always sent an advance agent to prepare the way for his coming. Likewise, before the President of the United States visits a city, the secret service men go before him to see that all necessary security measures are being taken. Jesus had the greatest advance agent of all times—John the Baptist. John was a rugged individual as is evidenced by the name and title of John the Baptist. God selected him and sent him to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Matthew wrote nothing about the conception and birth of John the Baptist but introduced him at full age as he was preaching in the “wilderness of Judaea” (verse 1). John’s message was simple and easily understood. It was a message that demanded the people to do something. It called for an action on their part. This action was for them to “repent” (verse 2). To repent means “to change one’s mind.” John called upon the people to change their minds about God, Christ and their own sins. True repentance demands a complete “about-face,” a turning from sin to the Savior.

The work God had for John the Baptist was to prepare a people for the Lord when He came. Actually, he prepared the constituency for the first church, and later Jesus came and established it with the people who had accepted Him as their Savior and who had been baptized by John the Baptist. Thus, John was the forerunner for Jesus Christ who prepared the way for His coming.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *John summed up his own personality in one sentence when he said, “He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).*

Gene C. Smith

## Jesus Begins His Ministry

**KEY VERSE:** “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” Matthew 4:17.

In this Devotional reading we see Jesus as He left the city of Nazareth where He grew up. He traveled about twenty-five miles northeast in Galilee to the city of Capernaum. This city was located on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus established His headquarters there and operated from there during His ministry in Galilee. It is noteworthy that about four-fifths of His ministry was carried out in Galilee.

Jesus’ message had a familiar ring to it. He preached the same message that John the Baptist preached. As Jesus began to preach, He called upon the people to repent for the “kingdom of heaven is at hand” (verse 17).

Jesus then began to form His gospel team by calling out His disciples. Let your imagination work as we view Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee and summoning His disciples to follow Him (verses 18-23).

Jesus’ disciples were simple, everyday working men, but Christ saw something in them that He desired in His followers. They were workers—busy men. They were fishermen, but He called them to a higher task—fishing for men. They were courageous, and He knew there would be dangers ahead for them. They were humble and willing to submit themselves to the Lord’s will and work. They were ready and followed Him willingly in “preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (verse 23).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus calls His workers today. If He calls you, do not offer excuses, but make a wholehearted commitment to Him (See Matthew 19:27-29.)*

Gene C. Smith

Philippians 2:5-11

Thursday, March 6

## Jesus, Lord and Christ

**KEY VERSE:** “And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father,”  
Philippians 2:11.

People can rob us of our joy, especially if we make our relationships with them our number one priority. Paul had problems with some of the people in the church at Philippi. He was concerned about them. He had received some bad news of a possible division in the church there. This was a threat to the unity of the church. So Paul wrote to them and appealed to them to have a single mind (Phil. 1:27). He used Jesus Christ as an epitome of humility and submission. Then he called upon the believers in the church at Philippi to have the same mind in them (Phil.2:5-8).

Because of Jesus' voluntary act of humility, God exalted Him to the highest possible rank and gave Him “a name which is above every name” (verse 9). At that name “every knee” will “bow” someday (verse 10), and “every tongue” will “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (verse 11). This means my knees, your knees, all knees shall bow before Him, and “every tongue” will confess His Lordship.

I was in Little Rock, Arkansas, recently on a business trip. As I drove down a certain street, I saw a church sign stating that the members were going to make Jesus Lord over Little Rock. I thought to myself, they cannot do that because He is already Lord over Little Rock, the United States and the whole world.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Someday Jesus Christ is going to return to planet Earth. He will then execute His sovereign authority over all the earth. (See Acts 2:36.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Walking in the Spirit

**KEY VERSE:** *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh,” Galatians 5:16.*

At the close of an important speech to Congress on January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt shared his concept of the kind of world he wanted to see after the war was over. He envisioned four basic freedoms to be enjoyed by all citizens. They were freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear. To some degree, these freedoms have been achieved on a broader scale than in 1941, but our nation needs another freedom, a fifth freedom. The citizenry of the United States needs to be free from the tyranny of the sinful nature. This involves a walk on the part of believers and a work by the Holy Spirit of God.

The command to “walk in the Spirit” (verse 16) refers to the everyday conduct of the Christian. It means to act under the Holy Spirit’s guidance or to live daily as He leads. Paul had shown the Galatians that there was nothing in the Law system to perfect them (verses 1-6), but it contained merely negatives against immorality. Man is depraved in the flesh, and following the Law could only show him the miserable failure he is when it comes to directing his own life. He must follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and in so doing he will be “walking in the Spirit.”

The word flesh refers to one’s own fleshly nature, which is a sinful nature. The word lust refers to the sinful desires of any kind. Because the fleshly nature is depraved, it desires the sinful things of the world (verses 17-21). It is easy to give in to the cravings of the flesh, but, as a Christian walks in the Spirit, he will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Some people would not tolerate what is preached against their sins—except they feel that others need to hear it so badly. (See Galatians 5:13.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Fruit of the Spirit

**KEY VERSE:** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,” Galatians 5:22.

Paul, in writing to the churches of Galatia, here changes the figure from “works of the flesh” (verse 19) to the “fruit of the Spirit” (verses 22, 23). The fruit of the Spirit may be defined as the normal outcropping of the Holy Spirit in a believer. It is a beautiful tree of fruit that Paul pictured here with nine luscious fruits on it. They are listed as three categories consisting of three fruits in each category.

First is the fruit of love, joy and peace (verse 22). These set forth the characteristic or the inward state or condition of a believer who allows the Holy Spirit of God to produce these fruits in his life. When one lives in the sphere of “love,” then he experiences “joy”—that inward “peace” and sufficiency that is not affected by outward circumstances.

Second, the next three are “longsuffering, gentleness, goodness.” They express the manward aspect of the Christian life. “Longsuffering” refers to a courageous endurance without quitting. The modern term patience expresses this characteristic. “Gentleness” marks a person who shows kindness to others. “Goodness” is love in action toward others. The Christian who is “longsuffering” will not avenge himself on those who oppose him. He will be kind and gentle and will sow goodness where others sow evil.

Third, the final three qualities are expressed toward God. “Faith” refers to one’s faithfulness, dependability, trustworthiness or reliability. “Meekness” refers to the right use of power and authority or power under control. Meekness is not weakness, for Jesus Himself said, “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). “Temperance” denotes “self control” or curbing the fleshly impulses.

Taken together all nine of these make a beautiful tree of fruit that the Holy Spirit alone can produce in one’s life.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh, and they live and walk in the Spirit. (See Galatians 5:24, 25.)*

Gene C. Smith

Romans 2:1-11

Monday, March 10

## Repentance Urged

**KEY VERSE:** “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” Romans 2:4.

A man I read about was a heavy drinker. Almost every night he would go to a local bar and drink with the fellows who gathered there. His wife remained at home, night after night. She took in washing and ironing to buy food for the family. One night while on a drinking spree, this man stumbled into a rescue mission by mistake, but he quietly listened to the sermon by the director. At its conclusion he accepted Jesus as his Savior. He continued to attend the services night after night. He noticed that the men wore beautiful sweaters with red writing on them. He wanted one like theirs. He asked his wife to make him one. She did, but being unable to read she copied the words on a store sign across the street that read, “Under New Management.”

A similar event occurs in one’s life when he realizes he is a sinner, repents of his sin and accepts Jesus Christ as Savior. He then lives his life under new management –that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul, in the Key Verse, declared that God in His goodness leads lost sinners to repentance. Repentance involves a change of mind. It is an “about-face” for an individual who, in his mind, wants to leave the pathway of sin, accept Jesus as his Savior and begin a new life in Christ. When this happens in one’s life, he then comes under the authority of Christ and He manages his new life.

God’s goodness will lead one in accomplishing true repentance. Once genuine repentance has occurred in a repentant sinner’s heart, he belongs to Christ and enjoys a new life in Him.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *All people are sinners before God; therefore, they do stand in need of His salvation. (See Romans 6:23.)*

Gene C. Smith

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Tuesday, March 11

## Preach Christ Jesus

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

In Paul’s course of action under the Holy Spirit’s leadership, he devoted four chapters (3-6) to his ministry in the city of Corinth. (See also Acts 18:1-17.) In today’s Devotional reading, Paul disclosed that his ministry in Corinth was one of complete honesty.

In the Key Verse, Paul declared, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.” By this statement, Paul reveals that he understood the mission of Jesus Christ and the significance of the cross. Paul was involved in many things that he might have found personal satisfaction and pride (2 Cor. 11:16—12:13). But in his letter to the churches of Galatia he wrote, “But God forbid that I should glory [boast], save [except] in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). Paul had not handled “the word of God deceitfully” (2 Cor. 4:2). He preached the truth about Christ and what He did on the cross. When we understand what Jesus did for us on the cross, we, too, will be humbled. We will also see that our feeble efforts are nothing and that His atoning work on the cross is everything in achieving salvation.

When Jesus bore our sins on Calvary’s cross (1 Peter 2:24), the cross took on a new significance. For centuries before Jesus died, the cross was an instrument of torture and death. It was the Roman way of executing the worst of criminals. But, when Jesus died on the cross, He, “through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20), made it possible for us to escape judgment and be reconciled to God (Col. 1:21). It is no wonder Horatius Bonar, the hymn writer, wrote the song, “Hallelujah for the Cross!”

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *On the cross, Jesus Christ bridged the gap between sinful man and a holy God, making salvation possible. (See 1 Timothy 2:5).*

Gene C. Smith

## Treasure in Earthen Vessels

**KEY VERSE:** “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us,” 2 Corinthians 4:7.

In the Key Verse there is an allusion to vessels of earthenware that were made in the city of Corinth. The people kept their precious jewels in them. The treasures were very valuable while the vessels containing them were of little value. The “treasure” refers to the ministry of the gospel of Christ by the apostle Paul. The “earthen vessels” refers to the weak human beings who minister the gospel to others. God has committed the gospel ministry to frail human beings to punctiliously carry out. This ministry is not to be executed in the power of the flesh (human efforts) but in the power of God through the Holy Spirit. In this manner, others may know that the efficacious power is divine (Eph.1:13, 14) and not in the “earthen vessels” or in those who minister to others. The glorious power of the gospel is altogether “of God, and not of us.” This truth is something many people do not understand, but it remains the truth.

How could anyone read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 and preach a health and wealth gospel? Notice how Paul suffered for Christ. He was “troubled on every side,” but not “distressed.” He was “perplexed, but not in despair” (verse 8). He was “persecuted, but not forsaken.” Paul was often “cast down, but not destroyed” (verse 9). These things happened many times during Paul’s ministry, but he never did give up or quit. A vivid example of this is recorded in Acts 14:19, 20 where Paul was stoned and left for dead, but by the grace of God, he got up and went back into the city to minister again.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God made us what we are, and He is able to empower us to do whatever He called us to do for Him. (See Acts 1:8.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Motive for Ministry

**KEY VERSE:** “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead,” 2 Corinthians 5:14.

The apostle Paul continued to write to the Corinthian church in this great chapter. He wrote some more about his ministry. In the Key Verse, he gives the motive for his ministry and the real motive for any ministry. That motive is the “love of Christ.” It constrains or motivates those who minister. The word constraineth suggests the idea of control, compelling, or motivating. When Jesus Christ saves a person, He puts His love in the heart of that individual. Having Christ’s love in him, he is controlled by it and is impelled or motivated by it to serve his Lord.

Why would Paul live that way? Because Jesus Christ had lived that way while He walked here on earth. He willingly became incarnate and followed the path of obedience, even to His death on the cross. (See Philippians 2:6-8.) By faith Paul was identified with Jesus in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-6). Thus, Paul lived with the same selfless abandon the Lord Jesus Christ had. Christ’s love, by which Paul was converted, then became the compelling force in his ministry

Likewise, all those who by faith entered into the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice should respond by living selflessly and being involved in the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). Believers are “ambassadors for Christ” (verse 20).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *To live for Christ should be the motive of all believers. (See Galatians 2:20.)*

Gene C. Smith

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Friday, March 14

## Collection for the Poor

**KEY VERSE:** “How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality,” 2 Corinthians 8:2.

During the first century after the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, the area around Jerusalem experienced a severe drought. It continued for several years, reducing the people of that area to a level of poverty.

Paul, in his missionary travels, informed God's people of this situation and urged them to help the poor saints at Jerusalem. They responded generously to Paul's appeal as is viewed in the Devotional reading.

Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth (2 Cor.1:1), used the example of the churches of Macedonia in their liberality to motivate the Corinthian church to give freely to this needy cause.

The churches of Macedonia (2 Cor.8:1) included the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. On those churches God bestowed a special grace. This grace was a special favor causing them to be liberal in giving to aid in the relief of the suffering saints at Jerusalem. The circumstances of the churches in Macedonia was one of “deep poverty.” Yet, they gave liberally to this cause (verse 2). They gave beyond their ability because they were willing to do so (verse 3). They begged Paul and his companions to receive their gift and thereby minister to the poor saints at Jerusalem (verse 4). They were enthusiastic in this endeavor for they “first gave their own selves to the Lord” (verse 5). The loving dedication of the Macedonian churches encouraged the church at Corinth in the same grace of giving.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God's people should ever be mindful of the needs of others around them and open their hearts to them. (See 2 Corinthians 8:7.)*

Gene C. Smith

Revelation 20:11-15

Saturday, March 15

## Doom of Unbelievers

**KEY VERSE:** “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire,” Revelation 20:15.

The awesome scene pictured here presents the judgment of all the unsaved of all ages. Keep this in mind as you read this Devotional, for it will be exactly as is described here.

First, note the solemn view (verse 11). John, in vision, “saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it.” The throne is described here as being “great,” suggesting that its pronouncements are final. It is “white,” denoting absolute purity, holiness and justice are to be meted out. The word throne speaks of God’s right to judge. The One sitting on the throne is none other than Jesus Christ. (See John 5:22, 27, 30 and Acts 17:31.) This will be a solemn view indeed. Some of you may be there!

John also saw the unbelieving dead, both “small and great” of all ages as they were gathered around the throne to be judged (verse 12). They will be there to be judged “according to their works” (verse 13). I could describe it no better than what the Word of God says here. Indeed it will be an awesome scene!

Second, note the serious volumes. Verse 12 states that “the books were opened.” These books are, no doubt, the record books of all the sinful deeds of these unbelievers, for they are judged “according to their works” (verse 13). The Word of God will probably also be there as a witness against the unbelievers. They will be “judged out of those things which were written in the books” (verse 12). The book of life will be there to reveal that, where their names should appear, there will be one big blank (verse 15).

Third, note the sober verdict (verses 14, 15). They will be “cast into the lake of fire.” This will be the eternal hell—the abode of all unbelievers.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Where will you spend eternity—Heaven or hell? (See Luke 16:22, 23.)*

Gene C. Smith

## The Raging World

**KEY VERSE:** “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” Psalm 2:1.

The times we now live in are marked by terroristic threats and overt acts of violence. Our nation was terror-stricken on September 11, 2001, when some terrorists crashed two airplanes into the World Trade Center in New York City, causing two of the towers to crumble to the ground killing thousands of our fellow Americans. What took place in New York is being done on a broader scale all over the world as is seen in Israel, Syria, Afghanistan, India and many other places. Why all this terrorism one might ask? Psalm 2 has some answers to this question. Please note the following truths:

One, man’s rebellion (verses 1-3). These verses set forth the tumult of mankind as this age nears its end. Their final confederacy and rebellion against the authority of God and His Son are tantamount. The word heathen (verse 1) refers to non-Christian people. They “rage” against the Christian nations.

Two, God’s attitude toward man’s rebellion (verses 4-6). God laughs (verse 4), He speaks (verse 5) and finally announces His own plans for the rulership of the earth (verse 6).

Three, God’s decree (verses 7-9). Christ Himself is here viewed as He declares God’s decree that His own Son (Jesus) shall be the ruling monarch.

Four, an exhortation and warning (verses 10-12). These are given to the world powers—the kings and the judges. This psalm ends with a stated blessing upon “all they that put their trust in” Jesus Christ—God’s Son (verse 12).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Some people may reject Jesus now, but one day every knee will bow before Him, and every tongue will confess His lordship. (See Philippians 2:10, 11.)*

Gene C. Smith

Jeremiah 1:1-10

Tuesday, March 18

## Be Not Afraid

**KEY VERSE:** “Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD,” Jeremiah 1:8.

We are introduced here to a great man of God by the name of Jeremiah (verse 1). His name means “one raised up by the Lord,” and it signifies that the Lord had called him to be a prophet for Him (verses 4-7). The Hebrew word for prophet means “one who is inspired of God.” Thus, a prophet was simply a divinely inspired preacher. A prophet was a forthteller of God’s message to His people, and a foreteller in that he foretold future events. The following are some lessons to be learned from the life and ministry of the prophet Jeremiah.

One, he began his ministry at an early age (verse 6). When God called Jeremiah to the office of a “prophet unto the nations” (verses 4, 5), Jeremiah sought to excuse himself by objecting that he was only a child—a term often applied to young men (verse 6). Jeremiah’s age is not given, but possibly he was in his late teens or early twenties by this time. Therefore, he could say that it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. (See Lamentations 3:27.)

Two, he felt his weakness and inability to do what God wanted him to do (verses 6, 7). Yet, when God laid His hand upon Jeremiah, he was ready to prophesy for the Lord (verses 8-10).

Three, Jeremiah had no easy life in doing God’s work. Instead, he had to live a sad and lonely life of suffering and finally to die for God. In spite of all this, his loyalty to God was unquestioned.

Four, Jeremiah’s life should be an inspiration to every person who dedicates his life to God that it might count for Christ.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God’s people, like Jeremiah, are not to fear those who oppose them but fearlessly proclaim God’s message. (See Psalm 56:3, 11.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Disciple Like Master

**KEY VERSE:** “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell,” Matthew 10: 28.

The word apostle means “one sent forth” and is, therefore, synonymous with the word messenger. Jesus named twelve men to be His apostles (verses 1-5). As Jesus sent them out to be His messengers, He gave them a code of conduct. Today’s Devotional reading is a part of that code. Jesus did not send forth these messengers without first seeking to prepare them for the things they would encounter.

Jesus first spoke about the persecution they would encounter (verse 23). Persecution has plagued the Lord’s workers from the out calling of the apostles to the present time. A study of church history will disclose the various ways believers have been persecuted by non-believers. While we, the followers of Jesus Christ, are persecuted, Jesus informed us not to “fear” those who persecute us (verses 23-28). We trusted Him for our salvation, and we must trust Him for His protection.

Two small “sparrows” were sold for a farthing—about one or two cents (verse 29). We, God’s people, are of “more value than many sparrows” to Him (verse 31). Therefore, we are not to “fear” those who seemingly work against us. As we follow this course of action, we, His disciples, will learn that we are not above our Master—Jesus Christ (verse 24). We are to openly “confess” Christ before men (verse 32) and not “deny” Him (verse 33).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *It pays to serve Jesus for He will reward His own for their faithful service. (See 2 Timothy 4:8.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Paul's Persecution

**KEY VERSE:** "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works," 2 Timothy 4:14.

Perhaps none of Paul's writings reflects as much of the pathos and tenderness as these last words to Timothy. These are the last recorded words of this great apostle. They apparently were penned shortly before the trial that brought the death sentence upon Paul. There in the bleak loneliness of the Roman prison, the apostle almost despaired, but he had the assurance that, though others forsook him, the Lord would stand by him.

Paul mentioned "Alexander the coppersmith" and the evil deeds he did toward Paul (verse 14). We are not told what those evil deeds were or how they affected Paul's life. Without doubt they hurt the apostle in some way. Rather than making a tirade against Alexander, Paul left vengeance in the hands of the Lord. This is an excellent example for us to follow. Rather than getting back or getting even with those who harm and hurt us, we ought to leave it in the Lord's hands to make the necessary response to them.

Paul also revealed how, in the midst of all his persecution, the "Lord stood with" him (verse 17). He had placed a supreme confidence in the Lord's sovereign control over his life. Paul knew that the Lord would take care of him and "deliver" him "from every evil work." He would also "preserve" Paul "unto his heavenly kingdom" (verse 18). He was secure in the hands of the Lord. The Lord was able to give the needed help to His humble servant—the apostle Paul.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *All of God's people are secure in His strong hands. (See Deuteronomy 33:3.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Evil Men

**KEY VERSE:** “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived,” 2 Timothy 3:13.

In reading the first part of this chapter, one may ask, will things get better in the world? The answer is an emphatic no. In fact, they will get worse. The word evil denotes the active exercise of a vicious and wicked disposition in opposition to that which is good. In the last days men will become “evil” (verse 13), that is, they will develop a wicked disposition that is in opposition to the truth.

There will also be “seducers.” This is a colorful word. Originally it was used of professional mourners who went wailing before a funeral procession. There was no grief felt in their hearts, but they cried and wailed long and loud over the deceased. The word came to mean “a deceiver, an imposter, a wizard, or a sorcerer.” In the present time many deceiving false teachers, imposters and wizards have arisen. They are deceiving many people who have no foundation for fundamental truth. They will “wax worse and worse.”

The word wax denotes an increase or to make progress. The expression worse and worse literally means “to the worst stages.” The idea is that evil, pernicious men and imposters shall increase and make progress to the worst stages. Not only will these deceive many who will follow them but they will also be deceived themselves.

God’s people are not, however, at their mercy. We have the resources of the “holy scriptures.” Therefore, we are “to continue” or remain in harmony with what the Scriptures teach (verses 14, 17). By so doing we will not be deceived by false teachers.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The Word of God has been tried and proven. Stay with it and you will not be deceived. (See 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Comfort in Persecution

**KEY VERSE:** “Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you,” 2 Thessalonians 1:6.

The believers in Thessalonica evidently had received a forged letter as being from the apostle Paul, teaching them that they were already in the day of the Lord. They were undergoing severe persecutions, and they interpreted these as being indicative that they were already in the day of the Lord and suffering from God’s judgment. They knew, however, that Paul had taught them that they would be translated before the day of God’s judgment. Thus, they were troubled in their minds about what was happening. Paul wrote to them (verse 1) to let them know that the day of the Lord was still future.

Paul promised them that God would “recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (verse 6). The word recompense means “to give something back in return for something received.” Thus, it is a righteous thing, by any standard of right and wrong, that God would give back in return to those who afflict and persecute His children. This repayment does not always come in this life, but it will surely come in the future life.

The saints in Thessalonica had suffered greatly from wicked and ungodly men, and Paul wanted them to know there was coming a day in which God would repay them for what they had done to His people. Paul’s promise to them was that God would surely punish these trouble-makers (verses 8-12). He pointed them to the day of vengeance when God pours out His wrath upon the unbelieving world.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Christians are to be patient in the midst of persecution, knowing that God is a righteous God and that He will punish those who persecute His people. (See Romans 12:19.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Joseph Imprisoned

**KEY VERSE:** “But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison,” Genesis 39:21.

I well remember a daily event that took place in our home when I was just a lad. Following the evening meal that we called supper, Dad would take the family Bible and read us a Bible story. Sometimes he would ask us what we wanted to hear. I resounded in tones true and clear that I wanted to hear the story of Joseph. It was my favorite Bible story. Dad read it to us many times, and I have never forgotten those special times we had together as a family around the Word of God.

Joseph comes before us as a man of impeccable character. In Egypt, Potiphar’s wife enticed Joseph to have an affair with her. The Lord was with Joseph even in those times of adversity, and he did not yield to her temptations.

In her persistence, she tempted him adamantly (Gen. 39:10-13). When Joseph resisted her, she accused him of trying to rape her (verses 14-19). The end result was Joseph’s imprisonment (verse 20). Joseph maintained his integrity, however, as he languished in prison.

The Lord was with Joseph—even when he was imprisoned. He showed him mercy and gave him favor with the keeper of the prison (verse 21). Joseph was soon elevated to the position of prime minister in Egypt following his release from prison.

Joseph’s organizational skills enabled him to help the Egyptians to prepare for the forthcoming drought. (See Genesis 40:1—41:44.) His position in Egypt ultimately proved beneficial in preserving his entire family. (See Genesis 41:45—50:26.)

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Life is never hopeless when one’s hope is in the Lord. (See Romans 12:12.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Jeremiah in a Dungeon

**KEY VERSE:** “Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin,” Jeremiah 38:7.

Jeremiah was a prophet of God during the reign of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34—24:6) and Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17-20) in Judah. Jeremiah had prophesied that the king of Babylon would come and destroy Judah. (See Jeremiah 36:29.) Jeremiah was accused of treason and cast into prison. He was ultimately to be executed (Jer. 37:1-21). However, God had other thoughts and would not permit His servant’s martyrdom.

Zedekiah, the king, allowed Jeremiah to be imprisoned in a dungeon. The officials took Jeremiah and put him in the dungeon of Malchiah (Jer. 38: 1-6). This dungeon was a large pit cut into a rock and covered with plaster. It was used to catch rainwater in the winter for use during the dry summer. This cistern was so deep they had to lower Jeremiah into it by ropes. The cistern had no water in it due to a prolonged drought. It did have a muddy bottom and Jeremiah sank down into the mire and was left there to starve to death.

Many of Jeremiah’s countrymen wanted to kill him. The only official who cared enough to intercede on his behalf was Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian (verse 7). He went to the king’s house and pled for Jeremiah’s release (verses 8, 9). The king authorized him to take a force of thirty men and get Jeremiah out of the dungeon (verse 10). Jeremiah was then pulled up with ropes, freeing him from the cistern (verses 11-13).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jeremiah suffered greatly from varying circumstances, but he remained faithful to God. (See Romans 8:18.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Daniel in the Lions' Den

**KEY VERSE:** "Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast *him* into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee," Daniel 6:16.

Daniel is another hero of the faith who maintained his integrity in the face of much opposition and ridicule. Daniel was a Jewish captive exiled to a foreign land as a teenager (Dan. 1:1-21). He was brought into favor with the king by interpreting his dream (Dan. 5:1-13). He was elevated as a president over the one hundred twenty princes and was preferred above all the others (Dan. 6:1-3). Jealousy clouded their thinking, and they devised a plan to get rid of Daniel. A document was drawn up that forbade anyone to make a petition to "any God or man for thirty days" (verses 4-9). They knew Daniel to be a man of prayer and that he would pray even in view of this law. He would then be cast into the den of hungry lions, killed and eaten by them. They would then be rid of him once for all.

Daniel, knowing the petition to be in force, went to his chamber, opened his windows and prayed three times a day as he had previously done (verse 10). Being in violation of the statute, Daniel was cast into the den of lions. The king was disturbed about this action. However, he believed Daniel would be delivered by his God (verse 16).

The king spent a restless night, fearing what might happen to Daniel (verse 18). He arose early in the morning and hastened to the lions' den (verses 19, 20). He was delighted to hear Daniel's voice and to learn of his protection from the hungry lions (verses 22-24).

Daniel was a person of integrity. This may have come about because he had "an excellent spirit" in him (verse 3).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Daniel was not corruptible, but trustworthy and diligent in his prayer life. (See Daniel 6:4.)*

Gene C. Smith

Matthew 14:1-12

Thursday, March 27

## John the Baptist Murdered

**KEY VERSE:** “And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison,” Matthew 14:10.

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He came to prepare the way for Jesus' arrival. In spite of his commitment to God's assigned task, John experienced a tumultuous life. His life was not always free of problems. He experienced the pain of much tribulation as he ministered in his life for Almighty God. His life ended at the hands of Herod, the tetrarch (governor) of Galilee, when he had John beheaded at the request of Herodias, Herod's wife. Please take note of the following qualities that graced John's life. These may serve as an example to us.

One, John preached the truth (verses 1-4). Preacher, do you preach the truth even though it is not always popular to do so? Fellow-Christian, do you uphold your pastor when he preaches the truth? Are you concerned about the truth being preached?

Two, John stood for what was right and decent. He preached against the sin of adultery. Herod had married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. John rebuked him for this action, telling him it was not lawful for Herod to have her as his wife. We, as Christians, should, like John, ever stand for what is right and decent. However, it is not always popular to do so.

Three, John loved the Lord. They were probably cousins, but John's love for the Lord went deeper than a relative's relationship. He loved the Lord Jesus for who He is and for what He came to do. Thus, John committed his life to Jesus.

Four, John died a martyr's death. He gave his life for the Lord and His work. This is commendable in any life.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God give us more men and women whose goals will be to glorify the Lord in their lives! (See Hebrews 12:3, 4.)*

Gene C. Smith

Mark 15:16-26

Friday, March 28

## Jesus Crucified

**KEY VERSE:** “And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take,” Mark 15:24.

A visitor, sitting by the bedside of a woman who had suffered for many years, asked her, “Does Satan ever tempt you to doubt the love of your Lord?” “Oh, yes,” she replied, “he tries, but I take him to Calvary and, pointing to those deep wounds, I say ‘He loves me’—and he cannot stand to be reminded of Calvary, and he goes away every time.”

Crucifixion was the Roman way of executing the worst of criminals. It was the most horrendous death ever conceived in the mind of man. Mark’s account of Jesus’ sufferings is vividly set forth in the Devotional reading.

The Roman soldiers’ mockery of Jesus is here declared (verses 16-20). After the flogging of Jesus outside the public square in Jerusalem (verse 15), the Roman soldiers took Jesus, battered and bleeding, into the Praetorium—the palace or courtyard of the governor’s residence. Once inside, they summoned the whole company of soldiers (an auxiliary battalion of some 200-300 soldiers) to assist them in this act of mockery (verse 16). They dressed Jesus in a “purple” robe (the attire of a king) and pressed “a crown of thorns” on His head (verse 17). They then saluted Him as the “King of the Jews” (verse 18). All of this was done in hollow mockery (verses 19, 20).

They then led Jesus outside of the city of Jerusalem to crucify Him. This place is identified as Calvary or Golgotha—the place of a skull (verses 21-23). There they crucified the Lord of glory (verse 24). On the cross members above Him was the inscription, “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS” (John 19:19) (See Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38.)

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The centurion overseeing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ said, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” (See Mark 15:39.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Paul's Prediction

**KEY VERSE:** "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand," 2 Timothy 4:6.

It has been said that Caesar Borgia, in the last moments of his life, exclaimed, "I have provided, in the course of my life, for everything except death; and now, alas! I am to die, although entirely unprepared." This was not the case with the apostle Paul. He was about to be put to death. He had already gone through one trial and was awaiting his final trial. Shortly thereafter he was executed by having his head severed from his body by a guillotine, according to church history. His final message was that he was "ready" for it to happen (verse 6). The time of his "departure" was "at hand." Looking back over his life, the apostle related that he had "fought a good fight," had "finished" his course and had "kept the faith" (verse 7). As a result of his faithfulness to duty, Paul had no fear of facing the Lord, "the righteous judge" who would "crown" or reward him "at that day," the day He rewards His followers. He will on that day reward Paul and all those who "love his appearing" (verse 8).

Paul urged Timothy to hasten his coming to him (verse 9) because he evidently needed him. His need of Timothy was heightened in view of the fact that many of his co-workers had forsaken him (verse 10). Only Luke was with Paul at that time (verse 11). He had sent Tychicus to Ephesus to deliver his epistle (letter) to them (verse 12). This was probably the book of Ephesians.

Paul also instructed Timothy to go by Troas and the house of Carpus and bring his cloak (coat), his books and the parchments, or the Scriptures (verse 13). Paul could well use these items in his last days in the Roman prison.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Only one life, and it soon will pass, but what you do for Christ will last. (See 1 Corinthians 15:58.)*

Gene C. Smith

## Moses' Helpers

**Key Verse:** “And Moses’ father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest *is* not good,” Exodus 18:17.

Moses was doing more than one man was able to do. It seemed that every duty was placed upon his shoulders. One of his most trying responsibilities was to settle disputes among the Israelites. They would wait in line all day to have Moses inquire to God on their behalf (verse 13). It would be difficult to imagine the amount of stress that this put on Moses. It was physically, emotionally and spiritually draining upon him. His own father-in-law became concerned about him and urged him to share part of his responsibilities. Moses chose men of God who were grounded in truth and hated covetousness to be rulers (verse 21). They were given authority over groups of tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands. They were given the authority to judge with the most serious cases brought to Moses (verse 26). This type of court system shifted part of Moses’ duties to these faithful men. Moses was then able to serve the Lord more effectively.

Sunday night services were finished and the church parking lot was empty. A policeman on patrol noticed the lights still burning inside the church building and stopped to investigate. Inside he saw the pastor preparing to turn off the lights and secure the building. The officer asked him why he was performing this chore. The pastor answered, “Everyone else left without doing it.” It is better for ten people to do the work of one than for one person to do the work of ten.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Are you reluctant to share responsibilities with others?*

Marc Shultz

## Elders in Israel

**Key Verse:** “And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which *is* upon thee, and will put *it* upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear *it* not thyself alone,” Numbers 11:17.

One of the most moving pictures taken of President John Kennedy was one of him leaning over his desk in the oval office. He and a few of his advisors knew about the nuclear weapons that had been discovered in Cuba. This discovery had brought the world to the brink of war. President Kennedy's back was to the camera so the strain could not be seen on his face. He later stated he felt the fate of the world was in his hands during the Cuban missile crisis. The actions he took would determine if the world dissolved into nuclear war. The strain of leadership can be great.

Moses was feeling the strain of leadership. The burden was almost too much for him to bear. God instructed Moses to choose seventy men to become elders over the people (verse 16). They were to help Moses be a more effective leader by sharing in some of his duties. These seventy men were to be brought to the Tabernacle of the congregation to stand with Moses. As God spoke with Moses, He placed His Spirit upon Moses and the elders so that Moses would not have to bear the burden alone (verse 17). An effective leader has the ability to enlist followers. Moses set the example by following God's instructions.

**Just A Thought:** *A leader must know how to follow before he can lead.*

Marc Shultz

## Apostles Chosen

**Key Verse:** “And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth *unto him* whom he would: and they came unto him,” Mark 3:13.

The pulpit committee asked the membership what they wanted in a pastor. Based on the response, this is what they came up with. He must be a young man with fifty years of experience. He must have new ideas but never ask the church members to change tradition. He must be willing to accept a weekly salary of one hundred dollars, wear new suits, drive a nice car and give half of his salary in the offering. He must have a passion for young people but must spend all of his time nurturing the senior adults. These qualifications are unrealistic.

The Lord chose twelve apostles whom He desired to preach His word. They were by no means perfect men. They had particular personalities and character traits that not everyone could appreciate. Thomas was always expressing his doubts. Simon Peter always acted impetuously. Judas betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. The Lord saw something in them that others would not have noticed.

God uses ordinary people to do His work. He chooses people to serve Him that others might feel are unqualified. Noah built an ark even though he had never built a boat before. When others looked at David, they saw a shepherd, but God saw a king. God only requires Christians to do their reasonable service (Rom. 12:1). God is able to mold weak humans into great preachers, missionaries, evangelists, deacons and teachers. Christians should not doubt those whom God has called to serve.

**Just A Thought:** *God does not demand perfection but faithfulness.*

Marc Shultz

## Directions for Pastors

**Key Verse:** “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work,” 1 Timothy 3:1.

The pastor called upon one of the church members to lead the dismissal prayer. As usual, he prayed for God to call more men into the ministry. He suddenly stopped praying. For several seconds there was nothing but silence. Fearing something might be wrong, the pastor asked him if he was okay. He replied that he was okay but now believed God was calling him into the ministry. God answered his prayer by calling him to preach the gospel.

The ministry is a calling, not an occupation. The pastor not only must be a preacher of the gospel but also a leader of men. He is to lead the church as he is led by the Lord. Only a man called by God to be a pastor will be able to properly fulfill such a high calling.

The pastor must have a good reputation (verse 7). The qualifications of a preacher aid him in securing a good reputation. He must be of good behavior (verse 2). His manner of life should be suitable of one representing God. His ability to lead the house of God is seen in how he rules his own house (verse 5). If he cannot lead his own family, how can he lead the house of God? He should not be a novice lest he be tempted with pride and fall under the condemnation of the devil (verse 7).

**Just A Thought:** *How often do you pray for God to call more men into the ministry?*

Marc Shultz

## Directions for Deacons

**Key Verse:** “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus,” 1 Timothy 3:13.

The qualifications of a deacon begin with the word likewise. The qualifications of a deacon are similar to those of a pastor. The office of deacon is the only ordained office in the church other than pastor. The office of deacon was instituted to allow the pastor to faithfully do his work. They took care of secular duties, such as caring for widows and orphans, that had taken up so much of the apostles' time (Acts 6:1-4). The deacons took over this duty so the widows and orphans would not be neglected and the apostles could concentrate on prayer, study and preaching the Word of God.

The term deacon means “servant.” They serve at the discretion of the church. Their duties are both physical and spiritual in nature. As with the pastor, the deacon must be exemplary in his deportment (1 Tim. 3:8). He must have the ability to teach. He is also to be blameless, having a good reputation (verse 10). He must also rule his own household well (verse 12).

The man who serves the office of a deacon well will have a good standing with those whom he serves (verse 13). He will be bold in his faith and in his service to Christ. He serves for the glory of God and not self. God will reward him for faithfully serving as a deacon.

**Just A Thought:** *It would be wise if everyone fit the qualifications of the pastor and deacon.*

Marc Shultz

## Faithful Servants

**Key Verse:** “The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen,” Colossians 4:18.

After a difficult battle during World War II, a sergeant was reprimanding a private for not properly obeying orders. The officer ended his tirade by saying, “You are nothing but a private.” Within hearing distance was General Dwight Eisenhower. He called the sergeant over and chastised him. He reminded the officer that there were many more privates in the army than officers, and, if it were not for the foot soldiers, the war could not be won. Eisenhower was a hero among the enlisted men because he appreciated the common foot soldier.

Paul was extremely faithful to the Lord and expected others to show the same level of faithfulness. Paul was supportive of those who showed themselves faithful. He also was willing to give credit where credit was due. He praised them for their faithfulness to God. Paul gladly shared his responsibilities with those who had proved themselves faithful.

The apostle Paul led by example. He did not demand a level of faithfulness from others that he himself did not manifest. He had shown faithfulness to God during difficult situations. Paul’s life was constantly threatened because he preached the gospel, and he spent many days in prison for his faithfulness to God. He ended the letter to the Colossian church by asking it to remember his bonds. He wanted his suffering to motivate the members to greater service.

**Just A Thought:** *The bulk of the Lord’s work is not done by those who are considered great but by those who serve with little fanfare.*

Marc Shultz

## God's Call to Abraham

**Key Verse:** "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee," Genesis 12:1.

On December 7, 1941, war came to America! World War II had been brewing in Europe for years. America was now part of the fight. Billy had followed the war news through radio and newspapers and knew that the war would eventually involve America. With war declared, the call went out for able-bodied men to join the armed forces. Billy had not ventured far from his birthplace in small-town Texas. He knew immediately he would join the army. It was something he had to do. Others would wait until drafted, but the call to patriotism demanded that Billy volunteer. With suitcase in hand, he walked to town to catch a bus to travel to the nearest recruitment center. He had no idea where he would go for basic training or where he would be stationed after basic training. Billy knew in his heart that he had to go wherever his country needed him.

God called upon Abraham to leave Haran to journey to a place yet to be revealed to him. God's plan was that through Abraham's seed a great nation would be formed (verse 2). It required extraordinary faith for Abraham to leave his home, family and friends and go to a place he knew nothing about. Abraham took his wife, Sarah, and his nephew, Lot, and began his journey of faith.

**Just A Thought:** *Christians should live by faith and not by sight.*

Marc Shultz

## Joseph Sold into Egypt

**Key Verse:** “And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh’s, *and* captain of the guard,” Genesis 37:36.

A young pastor was on his way to a preaching appointment in East Texas. Traveling a rural road near Henderson, Texas, he began to have car trouble. It became evident he would not make his preaching appointment. He found a Missionary Baptist church and attended services. The church was without a pastor and invited him to fill the pulpit for the day. The church felt led of God to call him as pastor. He accepted the call and remained in that position for years. God moves in wonderful ways.

Joseph’s brothers were jealous about his special relationship with their father. They sold Joseph into slavery and told Jacob that a beast had killed him. Joseph’s brothers did not realize that God would use the situation for good. Joseph was eventually sold to Potiphar, an advisor to Pharaoh. In the process of time, Joseph found favor with Pharaoh and became second in command in Egypt. What Joseph’s brothers meant for evil, God used for good. Joseph used his position to help his father and brothers during a famine. God moves in wonderful ways!

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Life is filled with both joyful and sorrowful events. God can work all things for good and bring joy even in the darkest of situations.

**Just A Thought:** *God gives light even in our darkest days.*

Marc Shultz

## Israel's Bondage in Egypt

**Key Verse:** “Now these *are* the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob,” Exodus 1:1.

The Vietnam War divided Americans. One segment of public opinion supported the military's effort while others protested the nation's involvement in the war. Fifty thousand American fathers and sons lost their lives in the war. The Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. lists the names of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the war. It reinforces the reality that it was soldiers and not a faceless military that suffered the loss of life in Vietnam.

With harshness the Israelites were forced to serve in Egypt. Despite the severity of their forced labor, they grew mightily in strength and number (verse 7). The Israelites were a nation of families consisting of individuals. These were the individuals who served under the tyranny of the Egyptians. Their labor did not benefit themselves but the Egyptians. As the number of Israelites grew, there were concerns that they would become stronger and outnumber the Egyptians. The harder the Israelites were required to labor, the stronger they became. God was preparing them for the time they would leave Egypt and inhabit the Promised Land. They were resilient because of the promise of God that they would become a great nation and live in a land of their own. God gave them the courage and strength to endure the bondage. The suffering of the individual Israelites made them stronger as a nation. Their spirit and their strength could not be broken because God was on their side.

**Just A Thought:** *A nation that serves God is made up of individuals who serve God.*

Marc Shultz

## The Call of Moses

**Key Verse:** “And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” Exodus 3:11.

When Abraham Lincoln received word that he had been elected the sixteenth president of the United States, he was overcome with emotion. He had been raised in poverty and now stood poised to become the leader of a nation. He earned his living by being the poor man's lawyer. He had been defeated in his quest to become a United States senator. The nation was deeply divided and on the brink of the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln had doubts whether he was the right man to become president. It was the very circumstances that he considered liabilities that would serve him well as president. He was eulogized after his death with the words, “He belongs to the ages.”

Moses' path to greatness took him from rags to riches. The greater part of his life had been spent as a Hebrew raised in the house of Pharaoh. When he could no longer stand the tyrannical ways of Pharaoh, he turned his back on his life of privilege and identified himself with his Hebrew brethren. It was Moses' character that caused God to call upon him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses did not feel worthy of such an important task. He would not be alone. God promised to be with him as he led the Israelites (verse 12). Moses' humility made him a great leader because he looked to God rather than his own ability.

**Just A Thought:** *Effective leaders do not seek greatness but achieve it.*

Marc Shultz

## Israel's Deliverance from Bondage

**Key Verse:** "And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness," Exodus 13:20.

The shortest distance from point A to point B is a straight line. That does not mean it is always the best route to take. During World War II, Germany expected the Allied forces to invade France at Chalis at the narrowest part of the English Channel. The Allied commander decided to invade at Normandy at a much wider part of the channel. This location provided more room for support from battleships and caught the Germans by surprise. They were unprepared to repel the invasion. The easy way or shortest way is not always the best way.

When the Israelites left Egypt, God did not lead them out the shortest way through the land of the Philistines (verse 17). God was concerned the Israelites would become fearful of the Philistines and return to Egypt. God led them out by way of the Red Sea (verse 18). This seemed like a bad move. How would they cross the Red Sea? God led the Israelites this way to prove His power to deliver them. God divided the waters of the Red Sea and the Israelites crossed the sea on dry ground. The waters that granted the Israelites safe passage drowned the armies of Pharaoh.

God does not always deliver His people in the way they expect. He does not always take the obstacles away but gives them a way to overcome the obstacles. God's grace is sufficient for His people (2 Cor. 12:9).

**Just A Thought:** *The way God leads is not impossible, just exciting!*

Marc Shultz

1 Kings 6:1-14

Saturday, April 12

## Solomon Built the Temple

**Key Verse: “So Solomon built the house, and finished it,” 1 Kings 6:14.**

An evangelist was called to conduct a revival meeting for a rural church. When he arrived at the church building for the first service, he found it in disrepair. The floor was warped from a leaking roof. Broken window panes had been replaced with cardboard. The building looked as though it had not been cleaned in years. While driving to the church building, the evangelist had noticed that the church members lived in elegant houses. He pointed this out to the membership and mentioned that the house of God was in shambles. The evangelist challenged the church members to repair the church building because God deserved better.

King David first envisioned building the Temple. He did not think it proper that he lived in an opulent house while the Ark of the Covenant dwelt in a tent. God approved David's plan but decreed that his son Solomon would build the Temple. David did not feel cheated that he would not be allowed to build the Temple but praised God for blessing his family by allowing Solomon to build it. King David did all God would allow him to do to prepare the way for Solomon to build the Temple.

The Temple was a magnificent edifice without equal. Only the best materials were used and it was built by masters in their trade. They faithfully worked for seven years until the Temple was complete.

Whatever is done for the Lord should be done with pride because it represents Him.

**Just A Thought:** *God deserves the best you have to offer.*

Marc Shultz

## Debtor to All Mankind

**Key Verse: “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise,” Romans 1:14.**

A rural community did not have a doctor. If someone became ill, he had to travel almost one hundred miles to the nearest doctor or wait for the county nurse who came once a month. One of the young men of the community decided to become a doctor. The residents of the community agreed to help with his medical school tuition if he would return after graduation and set up a practice in the community. The money they gave him did not pay for all of his tuition, but it helped quite a bit. The young man excelled in medical school. After graduation he was offered a position at a prestigious university hospital at a great salary. He was tempted to take the offer but remembered his promise to return home. He felt indebted to keep his promise to the community.

When the apostle Paul professed Christ as Savior, God called him to preach the gospel. The man who once persecuted preachers was now one himself. He did not take his calling lightly. He considered his call to preach his primary obligation in life. The apostle Paul felt an obligation to preach the gospel to all people. His obligation to preach the gospel was no different from a legal debt he must pay. It was not only an obligation for him to preach the gospel but it was also a debt of honor. He considered it a privilege to preach the gospel.

**Just A Thought:** *Preaching the gospel is a debt for all Christians.*

Marc Shultz

## Preaching of the Cross

**Key Verse:** “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God,” 1 Corinthians 1:18.

I was friends with a young man in high school who professed to be an atheist. He was the salutatorian of our senior class with a grade point average a point shy of a perfect 4.0. He could explain in scientific detail any law or mathematical equation. He loved to discuss philosophy. He had worldly knowledge, but he did not have faith. He suggested I was wasting my time preparing for the gospel ministry and claimed the Bible was filled with myths that had no relevant application to real life. What seemed foolish to him was powerful to me because I had experienced God's saving grace.

The infidel considers the preaching of the cross foolish because he sees no benefit in the gospel and doubts the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The infidel is anemic to the gospel because he has not experienced saving grace. The preaching of the cross is not foolish but exposes as foolish the wisdom of the world (verse 19). The preaching of the cross may seem foolish to the world, but God uses its power to save people (verse 21). The foolishness of God is wiser than the greatest minds on earth (verse 25). Man's philosophy is not greater than the gospel of Jesus Christ. The cross is preached so that foolish man might know the wisdom of God and become His child.

**Just A Thought:** *If the preaching of the cross is foolish, why is so much effort spent to silence it?*

Marc Shultz

## Laborers Together with God

**Key Verse:** “For we are labourers together with God, ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building,” 1 Corinthians 3:9.

The church I pastor is in the process of building a new educational wing. The building site is alive with activity. The dry wall has been hung and insulation is being blown into the ceiling. The electrician, plumber and carpenters are waiting to come in and complete their work. Construction must be done in stages. Each workman has a particular trade. All work in unison toward the completion of the building. The carpenters took over when the foundation workers left. The plumbers and electricians added to the work the carpenters completed. Without the work of the tradesmen, all we would have would be the dream of a new building and not the reality of a completed facility.

It is the duty of all Christians to work in unison with God. They are to be as one with God in desire, purpose and labor. The body is the temple of God to be used to serve Him, as the house of God is a building to be used to worship Him. As servants of God, Christians are to fulfill His will. They are to serve for His glory and not their own. They are to work in unison with other Christians. The works of the pastor, deacons, teachers and church officers are not to be separate, unrelated labor. They are to work together for the cause of God. When working together, Christians can accomplish great things.

**Just A Thought:** *Those who serve in unity with God also serve in unity with each other.*

Marc Shultz

## The Gospel Hidden

**Key Serve:** “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,” 2 Corinthians 4:3.

David loved Debra very much and wanted to marry her. She let it be known that the only way she would agree to marry him was if he offered a proper proposal. David bought the engagement ring and planned his proposal. The problem was that he could not summon the courage to pop the question. Date after date went by and still no proposal. The engagement ring was in the glove compartment of David's car ready for him to put it on Debra's finger. Debra was anxious and about to give up waiting for David to propose. On one date she opened the glove compartment to look for a tissue and found the engagement ring. David finally popped the question and she agreed to marry him. The ring was of no benefit in the glove compartment. It needed to be on Debra's finger to finalize the engagement.

The power of the gospel is not a secret to those who have accepted Jesus as Savior. They have firsthand knowledge of its power to save. It remains a mystery to those who are lost. The power of the gospel is available to them but has no benefit because they have not accepted Christ as Savior. The power of the gospel is a mystery to the lost person because his mind is blinded by the wisdom of the world (verse 4). His darkened mind will be enlightened once he accepts Jesus as Savior (verse 6).

**Just A Thought:** *The mystery of the gospel is revealed to those who seek its power.*

Marc Shultz

## Paul's Call to the Ministry

**Key Verse:** "To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen," Galatians 1:16.

Walter had a troubled childhood. He was often in trouble with the law and rebelled against society. While attending church with his girlfriend, he realized he was lost and accepted Jesus as his Savior. Many people had difficulty believing that this juvenile delinquent could actually turn his life around for the good. While attending college, Walter realized the Lord was calling him to preach the gospel. He had planned to be a football coach but changed those plans to answer God's call. Because Walter knew the ways of the streets, he ministered to gang members. He led many of them to accept Jesus as Savior. This proves God can use anyone to preach the gospel.

The apostle Paul began life as Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of Christians. He was despised among Christians because of his evil ways. As a result of an experience with God on the Damascus Road, Saul of Tarsus accepted Christ as Savior. God called him to preach the gospel. Paul preached to kings and heathens. He preached to palace guards and prison guards. Only God could have known that a reprobate such as Saul could become such a mighty preacher of the gospel.

The fields are ready for the spiritual harvest, but there are not enough preachers and missionaries to go to the fields. Make it a matter of daily prayer that God will call more men into the ministry and that they will answer His call.

**Just A Thought:** *He that is forgiven more loves more.*

Marc Shultz

## Redeemed by the Blood

**Key Verse:** “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot,” 1 Peter 1:18, 19.

A generation ago almost every grocery store and gas station gave trading stamps with every purchase. These trading stamps could be saved and pasted in books and used to purchase merchandise. A person could take the trading stamps to the redemption center and trade the stamps for commodities. The customer would often redeem the stamps to purchase items he could not otherwise afford.

The cost of salvation would be too great a price to pay. There is no way to put a price on salvation that would equal its value. All the silver and gold in the world could not buy salvation. Such corruptible things would diminish the value of salvation. Salvation is the one thing that cannot be bought at any price.

The child of God is redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God without spot and blemish. The blood of Jesus Christ is the only blood that can wash away sin. Without the shedding of the Lord’s blood there is no remission of sin (Heb. 9:22). Jesus paid a debt He did not owe because man owed a debt he could not pay. The gift of God was paid for by the blood Jesus shed on Calvary. No other gift has cost so much.

**Just A Thought:** *Since salvation is free, why does mankind attempt to purchase it by works?*

Marc Shultz

## Accepted in the Beloved

**Key Verse:** “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved,” Ephesians 1:6.

A young lady was bringing her fiancé home to meet her parents for the first time. Before meeting him, her father had determined not to like him. He was coming to announce that he was taking his precious daughter away. No way was he good enough for her. He resolved to find something wrong with the young man. When they were introduced, her father shook the young man’s hand and at the same time searched for some fault. His eyes suddenly fell on his daughter and he saw in her eyes great love for her fiancé. Since she loved him, her father found himself doing the same thing. The climax of the meeting was when the young man asked her father for his daughter’s hand in marriage. The father gave his blessing and welcomed the young man into the family.

The child of God is adopted into the family of God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (verse 5). It is God’s determined will that whosoever accepts Jesus as Savior in repentance and faith will be saved. His redemption is purchased through the shed blood of Jesus Christ (verse 7). The child of God is not made acceptable unto God through his own righteousness but through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The Lord receives praise through those who trust Him, and He welcomes them into the family of the beloved (verse 12).

**Just A Thought:** *“Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).*

Marc Shultz

## Reconciling the Word of Christ

**Key Verse:** “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven,” Colossians 1:20.

A young man was trying to find peace of mind. He had a family he loved dearly and a job he enjoyed. Life was good. For some time he had known God was calling him into the gospel ministry. He had not answered the call because he felt it was unfair to ask his family to make such a sacrifice. His wife asked him what was wrong. He explained to her what was on his mind. He then explained to his children what God was calling him to do. The family gave him their blessing and gladly supported him in his call to preach. With his family in one accord he reconciled himself to surrendering to the ministry.

It was the heavenly Father's will that Jesus die on the cross, be buried in the tomb and rise from the dead the third day. Jesus was sent to earth in the form of the flesh to make this sacrifice. By dying on the cross Jesus was doing the will of the Father in Heaven. There was no other way the sin debt of humanity could be paid. By His resurrection from the grave He was assuring eternal life to all who would believe on Him as Savior. Only through Jesus can you have the peace of reconciliation with the heavenly Father.

**Just A Thought:** *Christians should be at one with Christ as Christ was with the heavenly Father.*

Marc Shultz

## Enabling Grace

**Key Verse:** “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,” 1 Timothy 1:12.

A new high school football coach was conducting his first practice. The team had always started the season strong but lost strength as the season progressed. On the first day of practice, the coach instructed the players to run the stadium steps. As had been their custom, they ran the stadium steps ten times from top to bottom. The coach blew his whistle and asked them why they quit. Running the steps ten times was not enough for this coach. He required them to run the steps twenty times. The players rebelled, stating there was no way that they could run the steps twenty times. The coach replied that anyone not running the steps twenty times could turn in his playbook and go home. At the beginning of each practice, the players ran the stadium steps twenty times which enabled them to build up their strength and finish the season strong.

The apostle Paul did not decide of his own accord to become a preacher of the gospel. He knew that God had called him into the ministry. God’s enabling grace gave him the strength to perform his divine calling. Only through divine grace could he have overcome his past mistakes to become an effective preacher (verse 13). Paul discovered that God’s grace was not only enabling but also exceedingly abundant (verse 14). God’s grace was more than sufficient, giving him the required strength to accomplish his divinely designated calling.

**Just A Thought:** *God’s grace is able when we are not.*

Marc Shultz

## A Holy Calling

**Key Verse:** “Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,” 2 Timothy 1:9.

Nelson Rockefeller was sailing on his yacht when he received a ship-to-shore phone call. The voice on the other end of the line was President Gerald Ford. President Ford had assumed office upon the resignation of Richard Nixon, leaving the nation without a vice president. Rockefeller had run for president three times and lost. He had grown tired of public service and returned to private life. President Ford asked him to become vice president of the United States. The last thing he wanted to do was be vice president. He reluctantly accepted the nomination because the president asked him to do so and a person does not turn down the president without a good reason.

There is a higher calling than the calling of government to civic duty. It is a higher calling than the calling of loyalty to family and career. The highest calling is the calling of God. God calls the lost to salvation. He is not willing that any person perish in condemnation but that everyone repent and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). He has called the saved to serve according to His ordained will (Eph. 2:10). God calls those who serve Him to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2). The servant of God should not serve Him in fear, but in strength, love and in a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7).

**Just A Thought:** *God's call is certain. One must be certain to follow it.*

Marc Shultz

## Seek Things Above

**Key Verse:** “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth,” Colossians 3:2.

Rusty enjoyed playing the field and dated many girls. He always bragged that no one girl would ever tie him down. All that changed when he met Beth. For Rusty it was love at first sight. He forgot about all his other girlfriends and set his attention on Beth. In his eyes no other girl measured up. She was a little bit more cautious and held him off for a while. Rusty refused to date any other girls while she dated other boys. His friends attempted to set him up with other girls, but he resisted their efforts. Beth was the only girl he would love. Rusty's patience finally won out and Beth fell in love with him. Rusty set his affection on Beth and won her over.

The child of God should not be passionate about things of the flesh but things of God. He should put to death his passions for the flesh, thereby depriving them of their strength to bring the temptation to sin (verse 5). The wrath of God will come upon the child of disobedience (verse 6). The person who is passionate about the lusts of the flesh will act upon these lusts and produce fruits of the flesh (verse 8). The fruits of the flesh hinder spiritual growth. The person who is passionate about the things of God will put on the new man which produces spiritual fruit (verse 10).

**Just A Thought:** *With the new man comes a new heart which has new passions.*

Marc Shultz

## Hardened Hearts

**Key Verse:** “Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness,” Hebrews 3:8.

A young man stood before the judge in juvenile court. He had spent more time in court than he had in the classroom at school. He was an angry young man. His mother told the judge she had lost control of her son and pleaded with him to do something to rescue him from the life he was living. The judge sentenced him to boot camp. Boot camp was a taste of military basic training. He would be put through a demanding physical regimen, challenged to improve his academics and given psychological help. The program worked. He softened his attitude, began to do better in his studies and learned to control his anger.

Sin tends to make mankind hardened and callous in his heart. A hardened heart robs a person of joy and makes him uncaring and bitter. The child of God is subject to a hardened heart by his evil thoughts and disobedience to God (verse 10). Christians should encourage one another daily so they do not become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (verse 13). The person who will hear and heed the guidance of God will not be affected by a hardened heart (verse 15).

It required forty years in the wilderness to soften the Israelites' hearts. It required three days and nights in the whale's belly to soften Jonah's heart. Hearts should be touched and not callused. What will it take for God to soften your heart?

**Just A Thought:** *Soften your own heart before God does it for you.*

Marc Shultz

## The Gentiles Knew Not God

**KEY VERSE:** “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness,” 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

Paul was able to look around him and see an entire culture, nations of people, who did not know God. The situation is not a lot different for children of God today. Take a long, hard look around you and what do you see? For instance, how many of the families on the block where you live attend church regularly? Notice next Sunday when you drive by how many of them are out mowing their lawns, washing their cars, loading their boats for a day at the river or lake.

Now, think about what Paul’s admonition was to those who do know God; they were to walk in such a way as to please God. This would have an effect on them and it would also have an effect on those with whom they came in contact. There is no greater testimony than that of godly living.

As you continue to meditate, think of what Paul says God has called you to. Certainly not uncleanness. Instead, He has called you to holiness. Then Paul gets specific. He mentions that we are not to defraud one another, but we are to be completely honest. I am honest, you say. But what about the other sins that Paul mentions? He specifically names sexual immorality and lust. Can we say in all honesty that we are avoiding these sins of the flesh? Or do we shrug and say that no one knows what I do, or that everybody’s doing it? Paul was earnestly beseeching and exhorting his readers to be careful about their lives.

**LIVING IT:** *Do not live a worldly life. Instead, live the kind of life which will be a testimony to the lost.*

Mary McCalister

## The Gospel Paul Preached

**KEY VERSE:** “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day,” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4.

There is only one true gospel, and Paul defines it very clearly for us.

1. It is something we receive.

To receive the gospel is to believe with our hearts. What are we to believe? That Christ died for our sins. That He was buried. That He rose again. This is the heart of the gospel.

2. It is something for which we stand.

It is important for us to take a stand for the gospel. Has anyone said to you, “Well, I am doing the best I can to go to Heaven. I hope it is enough.” What was your response? Did you present the true gospel to him? If not, you are not standing.

3. It is something by which we can be saved.

Trusting in Christ brings salvation. Peter said in Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

4. It is something we are to treat with great respect and reverence.

How can we show our reverence for the gospel? We show it by the way we live. Paul said he was the least of all the apostles, not deserving the grace of God. But he thanked God for that grace, knowing that it was the grace of God which accompanied all that he did and made it possible for him to be a witness of that grace to those who were lost. God’s grace made it possible for him to preach to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

**LIVING IT:** *There is only one gospel which can bring salvation. Make sure you are preaching the right gospel.*

Mary McCalister

## The Gospel for the Gentiles

**KEY VERSE:** “Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in,” Romans 11:25.

Paul deals with some difficult propositions in the book of Romans. Because the Jews stumbled and rejected the good news of the gospel, God extended the benefits of the gospel to the Gentiles. Does that mean no Gentiles had been saved up to that time? No. Remember Rahab the harlot was received by God and even became part of the lineage of Christ (Matt. 1:5). Remember Jonah’s mission to Nineveh, a Gentile city. These are only two examples of God’s grace reaching out beyond the scope of the Jews.

Paul is pointing out to the Gentiles that they should rejoice in the goodness and grace of God as He extended the hope of salvation to them. They were not to boast or gloat over the Jews and their failure, but they were to glorify God because of His grace to them. They should have said, with Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! . . . to whom be glory for ever” (Rom. 11:33, 36).

The blessing which God promised Abraham has been made available to all through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:14). In Him we are all one (Gal. 3:28). It is God’s intent that the Gentiles be offered salvation as were the Jews. In fact, it is His intention that all men everywhere receive salvation.

It is also His intention that all Israel be saved (Rom. 11:26). The time will come when this shall happen, and Israel will be restored to its relationship with God.

**LIVING IT:** *Are you grateful for God’s grace and goodness which brought you to salvation? Praise Him for it!*

Mary McCalister

## The Gospel Preached to the Gentiles

**KEY VERSE:** “And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles,” Galatians 2:2.

Second Peter 3:9 states, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” All people who trust Jesus as Savior are saved by God’s grace.

Paul encountered national prejudice as he entered into the ministry God had given him, the ministry of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. There were many Jews, yea, even those professing to have accepted Christ, who did not believe a Gentile could be saved unless he also became a Jew.

This was a serious problem for the Jews who were members of the churches of Galatia. Not only did they want to impose the law of circumcision on believing Gentiles, but they also sought to impose the restrictions of the Law upon Jewish believers. Paul asked them, “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3).

Are there vestiges of legalism present even in our own churches? We need to be careful to guard against this tendency. In another place Paul said, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient” (1 Cor. 10:23). So, what should our rule be? Again, we hear from Paul: “Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Let us continue to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).

**LIVING IT:** *Let us desire with God that all men come to repentance.*

Mary McCalister

## Christ the Hope of the Gentiles

**KEY VERSE:** “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ,” Ephesians 2:13.

Sometimes it is good for us to remember our roots. Paul was reminding the Ephesians of who they once were—afar off and alienated from God. With them, let us look at what we were before salvation. We were without Christ, aliens and strangers, hopeless and without God. The next time we want to be self-righteous about who we are now, we need to remind ourselves of that.

But now. What a wonderful phrase that is! Anytime you read that phrase, or the phrase But God, you can take the time to offer up a prayer of thanksgiving.

What is our condition now?

1. We are in Christ (John 14:20; 2 Cor. 5:17). To be in Christ is to be hid in Him, safe and secure for all eternity (Col. 3:3).

2. We have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). There is not much peace in the world today, but this need not affect us. We can be as the one the prophet Isaiah described, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa. 26:3).

3. We are reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10). To be reconciled is to be thoroughly changed so that we can approach God and stand before Him.

4. We have access to God through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16, 26, 27). God gives us the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and guide.

**LIVING IT:** *Never forget what you were before Christ, but always rejoice in what you are now in Him.*

Mary McCalister

## Gentiles To Be Fellow Heirs

**KEY VERSE:** “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel,” Ephesians 3:6.

Have you ever made the remark, well, that is a mystery to me? It may be clear to everyone else, but it is something you cannot explain. Paul used the word mystery in this passage to refer to what seemed to many to be a new doctrine. Remember the word as he used it meant “what is known only to the initiated.” Anything we do not understand can be a mystery to us.

Paul said this mystery was made known to him. That indicates it was something he had not known previously. This was because it was a new revelation, a revelation of Christ as the Savior of Gentiles. This mystery has now been revealed through the work of the Holy Spirit to Christ’s apostles and prophets (preachers).

What was revealed? The Gentiles should be fellow heirs and partakers of God’s promise in Christ. That is, the Gentiles were to hear the gospel and, as they heard it and responded to it, they would be saved the same as the Jews who responded. This bears out the truth that there has always been only one plan of salvation; that is, the innocent’s blood would be shed for the guilty and the guilty must receive that sacrifice for his sins.

Paul rejoiced that he was given the grace to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles. It is up to us to realize that we, too, can receive this grace, the grace of giving the gospel to all those who need it with no restrictions at all.

**LIVING IT:** *Let the world see Christ in your life so they may respond to the gospel and be saved.*

Mary McCalister

## The Prayer Closet

**KEY VERSE:** “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father,” Matthew 6:6.

Before you open your Bible to read this passage, get a piece of paper and pencil and spend a little time analyzing your prayer life.

Where do you pray?

When do you pray?

How often do you pray?

What do you pray for?

Now, read this passage and look at your list again. It would be good to remember that Jesus was giving instructions about private prayer, so let us retitle our list, “My Private Prayers.”

One of the most difficult things for a modern believer to do is to find uninterrupted time for prayer. It cannot be done in front of the television. Notice that Christ’s instructions were to enter your closet and shut the door. In other words, find a place where you can be alone with God.

When you have private prayer is entirely up to you. Some people like to pray first thing in the morning. Others pray at night before going to bed. It would do no harm to do both.

How often you pray is also up to you, but in His Model Prayer, Christ instructed us to pray for our daily bread. That indicates we should pray every day.

Is your prayer a list of vain repetitions? Christ said that is not the way to pray effectively. He reminded us that God knows what we need even before we ask Him. We ask because it shows our dependence on God and our obedience to Him.

**LIVING IT:** *Make prayer the key of the morning and the lock of the night.*

Mary McCalister

## The Model Prayer

**KEY VERSE:** “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name,”  
**Matthew 6:9.**

An anonymous author has expressed what we all need to know about prayer. It reminds me I cannot say:

“our” if I live only for myself.

“Father” if I do not endeavor each day to act like His child.

“which art in heaven” if I am laying up no treasure there.

“hallowed be thy name” if I am not striving for holiness.

“thy kingdom come” if I am not doing all in my power to hasten that wonderful event.

“thy will be done” if I am disobedient to His Word.

“in earth as it is in heaven” if I will not serve Him here and now.

“give us this day our daily bread” if I am dishonest or am seeking things by subterfuge.

“forgive us our debts” if I harbor a grudge against anyone.

“lead us not into temptation” if I deliberately place myself in its path.

“deliver us from evil” if I do not put on the whole armor of God.

“thine is the kingdom” if I do not give the King the loyalty due Him from a faithful subject.

I cannot attribute to Him “the power” if I fear what men may do.

I cannot ascribe to Him “the glory” if I am seeking honor only for myself, and I cannot say “for ever” if the horizon of my life is bounded completely by time.

**LIVING IT:** *Learn to pray as Christ teaches you how to pray.*

Mary McCalister

## Encouragement To Pray

**KEY VERSE:** “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you,”  
**Matthew 7:7.**

Can you find a greater encouragement to pray than the words of Christ, ask, seek, knock, in this passage? “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (verse 8). Do you really believe this, or are you like the person whom James described, “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2).

Perhaps you feel your prayers are not being answered. Jesus gave us further instructions when He told us, “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). James also expanded on this, saying, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

Asking in the name of Christ shows you recognize He is in charge. Christ showed this in His prayer in Gethsemane, “Thy will be done” (Matt. 26:42). If Christ recognized the will of His Father, how much more ought we to say, if it is His will?

We cannot pray for selfish reasons and expect God to answer our prayers. We must recognize our motives and measure our desires by what God would have us do in our lives.

Praying to God and asking for what may seem to us to be the little things is an acknowledgement of our close relationship with Him. What father does not try to give his children what they ask for? How much more can we count on God to give us the good things in our lives?

**LIVING IT:** *Make your prayer the response of your spiritual life to the presence of God.*

Mary McCalister

## Two Men Praying

**KEY VERSE:** “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner,” Luke 18:13.

Luke 18:1 tells us the main subject of Christ’s teachings—“men ought always to pray.” The gospel writer tells us very plainly to whom Christ was addressing this parable—“certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9). I find it difficult to believe that anyone fitting that category would be reading this Devotional. But who knows? Are you trusting in yourself? Do you think that you are righteous? Do you look down on others whom you think are inferior to you? If so, then Christ spoke this parable for your benefit.

There are two characters in this parable. One was a Pharisee. The other was a publican or tax collector. As you read the description of the Pharisee’s prayer, remember what you have already learned about prayer. He stood and prayed publicly. Christ taught that we should pray privately in our closet. The Pharisee bragged on himself. Christ taught that we are to glorify and honor God, not ourselves.

The publican prayed very differently. He stood afar off, out of sight of others. He would not look up to Heaven, but beat his breast as he prayed. His prayer was very different, too. The Pharisee’s prayer was full of I’s. The publican prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” He recognized his sinful condition and turned to God to change it.

Christ said the publican went down to his house justified, freed from the bondage of sin.

**LIVING IT:** *Learn to keep the I’s out of your prayers.*

Mary McCalister

## Jesus Praying in Gethsemane

**KEY VERSE:** “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground,” Luke 22:44.

The gospel writer tells us Christ went to the Mount of Olives, “as he was wont [habit]” (verse 39). The prayer you studied earlier this month incorrectly called the Lord’s Prayer is instead the Model Prayer. A few of Christ’s prayers are recorded in the gospels, but we can be sure He prayed many more prayers than were recorded. Christ had a habit of praying often and many times when He was alone.

Matthew’s account (Matt. 26:39-44) tells us Christ prayed three times. What was His prayer? He asked first, if it were possible, that the cup of suffering He faced pass from Him. But each prayer ended with His desire for the Father’s will to be done.

No human being can imagine the agony Christ suffered that night. Luke tells us that His “sweat was as it were great drops of blood.” What was the agony Christ was suffering? It was not the suffering which came with His crucifixion. It was that He, the sinless Son of God, was to take upon Himself the sins of the world (1 Tim. 2:6). As tied as we are to this fleshly nature, it is difficult for us to comprehend having such an abhorrence to the presence of sin. But Jesus endured that for our sakes.

An old hymn bears the title “In the Cross of Christ I Glory,” but perhaps someone should write a hymn extolling the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane. It better reminds us of all that Christ suffered and endured that we might have salvation.

**LIVING IT:** *Let this study of Christ’s passion in the garden make you even more grateful to Him for what He has done for you.*

Mary McCalister

## Praying to the Rocks

**KEY VERSE:** “And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,” Revelation 6:16.

Do you bow your head in a public place like a restaurant to pray for God’s blessing on your meal? Sometimes those who do get strange looks from those around them. I heard once of a person in a dire situation who fell on his knees to ask God’s help and deliverance. An unbeliever standing nearby scoffed at him. Actually, those who may question where God was on September 11 are scoffing in much the same way.

But the time will come when unbelievers will pray. They may not pray to God, but they will pray. Those who have been warned many times of an approaching doomsday will pray. As they may have prayed to idols and inanimate objects, they will pray to the mountains and the rocks.

These who pray will be from every strata of human existence: the kings, great men, rich men, chief captains (military men), mighty men, bondmen (slaves), freemen. All will call out to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and the wrath of the Lamb.

This will be a great and terrible day, the day of the wrath of God. Christians will get no satisfaction from seeing the wicked in such a state, but they will know it is the hand of God which brings on His wrath. Knowing this should cause us to be even more diligent in carrying the gospel to the lost.

**LIVING IT:** *The knowledge of this terrible time should make you even more of an evangelist.*

Mary McCalister

Matthew 28:16-20

Monday, May 12

## The Churches' Missionary Orders

**KEY VERSE:** "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," Mark 16:15.

Does carrying the gospel to the whole world seem like a daunting task? I am only one, you say, what can I do? You are not alone. When the eleven disciples met with Christ on a mountain just before His ascension to Heaven, Matthew reports "but some doubted" (Matt. 28:17).

It is easy to imagine their apprehension. Events almost impossible to believe had happened. What was next for them?

The all-knowing Christ, who knew and understood their thoughts, spoke words of reassurance to them: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (verse 18). After He had given them the commission, He gave them this promise: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (verse 20).

There was no reason for them to doubt or be afraid. If the all-knowing, all-powerful Christ was to be with them, they would be able to carry out the commission He had given them. Of course, they would not be able to do it without His power and presence.

There is no reason for us to doubt or be afraid we cannot carry out the commission Christ has given us. His promise to be with us is as sure as it was for the first church that received it.

Where do you start? Look around you. Do you have neighbors who plainly need the gospel? You know this is true because of their life-styles. That is a good place to begin. But they will not receive what I tell them. How do you know that? You must do the going and telling and let God take care of the rest.

**LIVING IT:** *Have faith and believe that Christ will be with you and enable you to do what He has told you to do.*

Mary McCalister

## Ministry of John the Baptist

**KEY VERSE:** “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe,” John 1:6, 7.

John the Baptist was born to an elderly couple, Zacharias and Elisabeth, about six months before Christ was born. Elisabeth was Mary’s cousin.

Today we would call John a loner. He spent his life in the desert wearing the plainest of clothing and eating the plainest of food. Without any fanfare he appeared on the scene preaching, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” (Matt. 3:2) as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 40:3, 4).

John’s ministry was to testify of Christ as the Light of the world. His testimony was very thorough. He told his hearers:

1. Christ was the true Light.
2. He made the world.
3. He came to His own (Israel), but they did not receive Him.
4. He saved those who received Him.
5. He became flesh so He could be the Savior.

The world would say that John was a failure. He ended up in jail and later was executed by Herod because he spoke the truth. But John accomplished what God had sent him to do. He preached repentance and baptized those who repented, preparing the material for the Lord’s church. John’s baptism was very important as Peter testified when he required that the apostle chosen to replace Judas was to have continued with them since the baptism of John.

**LIVING IT:** *God prepares His people for the ministry He wants them to be involved in.*

Mary McCalister

## Look on the Fields

**KEY VERSE:** “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest,” John 4:35.

Imagine that you have accepted a position as a salesman (or to be politically correct—a salesperson). What steps must you take to be successful? I do not mean to imply that preaching the gospel is the same as selling it. But the principles used in being a successful salesman can be applied to our task.

1. You must know your product. Do you know how to present the gospel to your hearer? If not, learn how to do that immediately. Become familiar with the Scriptures which contain the gospel.

2. You must know your prospects. Take the time to become acquainted with the person to whom you plan to witness. Jesus knew all about the Samaritan woman at the well, but you do not have His knowledge. You must take the time to learn some things about the target of your testimony.

3. You must have proved the value of the product you are selling in your own life. It is essential for you to have experienced the salvation that you want to present to your hearer.

4. You must be enthusiastic about what you are selling. If God has blessed your life by saving you, show that it means a great deal to you. Be a ready and enthusiastic witness.

It is not difficult to be a witness. The Samaritan woman testified, “He told me all that ever I did” (verse 39). What was the result? Many of the Samaritans of that city believed. You can learn as you go, beginning with the testimony of what Christ has done for you.

**LIVING IT:** *The important thing about witnessing is to do it.*

Mary McCalister

## A Lukewarm Church

**KEY VERSE:** “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth,”  
**Revelation 3:16.**

“I know thy works” (verse 15). It is important for us to realize Christ knows our church intimately. He knows what we do. He knows our motives.

Do you suppose the Laodiceans were ashamed when they were told Christ knew all about them? He knew the church was neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. Christ said their condition made Him sick to His stomach.

What characteristics and actions showed the church’s condition?

1. The members would not take a stand for anything. They tried not to offend anyone.
2. They shrugged their shoulders at sin.
3. They were satisfied with the status quo.
4. They carried out their religious activities halfheartedly.
5. They were Sunday-morning Christians, living for themselves the rest of the week.

Does this sound like any church you know?

The Laodiceans saw themselves as rich, increased with goods and in need of nothing. The reality was they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.

Was there any hope for this church? Yes, indeed. Although Christ had nothing good to say about this church, He offered it the remedy. He urged its members to get their eyes off the world’s goods and look for heavenly riches, to exchange their splendid robes for white robes of righteousness, to cure their spiritual blindness by anointing their eyes with spiritual eyesalve and to repent.

**LIVING IT:** *Have an ear to hear what Christ is saying.*

Mary McCalister

## The Everlasting Gospel

**KEY VERSE:** “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,” Revelation 14:6.

As you read this passage of Scripture, the question could be asked, Who are the 144,000? Many different scholars have many different opinions. The best opinion of who are the 144,000 is given in Revelation 14:3-5.

This was a group chosen by God who was faithful to God and spiritually pure. They sang a new song before the throne of God and they followed the Lamb wherever He went.

In verses 6 and 7 an angel flew across the heavens preaching the everlasting gospel to all who dwell on the earth, to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. This gospel the angel preached not only contained the plan of salvation as we know it but also called for what is the culmination of the gospel, the judgment of God.

The angel called for the people of the earth to fear God, give Him glory and worship Him. Is this not the final result of the gospel? We who hear the gospel and are saved certainly are to fear, reverence and honor God, to give Him glory and praise for our salvation and to worship Him as the Creator of Heaven and earth.

As we look about us today and see the effects of evil on the lives of men, we often call on God to send His judgment and stop the evil. That judgment is a part of the eternal gospel.

**LIVING IT:** *Realize that the message of the gospel and the results it brings will last forever.*

Mary McCalister

## The Water of Life

**KEY VERSE:** “And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely,” Revelation 22:17.

Food and water are essential to human life. Without them we will die. Just recently a couple were arrested because doctors found their children were dehydrated and malnourished. If the children had continued in this condition, authorities asserted that they would have died.

All of us know what it is to be hungry or thirsty, but few, if any, of us have experienced life-threatening hunger or thirst. People who have will do almost anything to have their hunger and thirst assuaged.

It is not surprising that Jesus used both food (bread) and water to refer to Himself: “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). When He witnessed to the Samaritan woman at the well, He said He could give her water “springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

How fitting that Revelation 22:17 gives the invitation, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” As we studied in yesterday’s Devotional, this is a part of the eternal gospel. The invitation is extended by the Holy Spirit, by the bride and by the one who hears and believes. The one who is thirsty is to respond to this invitation. When he does, he will receive the water of eternal life.

It is up to us to offer the remedy for spiritual hunger and thirst, the gospel story of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, to those who stand in need of it. In fact, it is the only thing we can offer which will help them avoid the death of spiritual malnourishment. We need to realize that eternal consequences are involved and make sure we witness as we should.

**LIVING IT:** *You hold in your hands the solution to the spiritual starvation of the world. Give it generously!*

Mary McCalister

## Old Testament Missionaries

**KEY VERSE:** “And they taught in Judah, and *had* the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people,” 2 Chronicles 17:9.

Did you think witnessing and doing mission work began with the New Testament church? Not so. Long before Jesus told His followers, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8), prophets, teachers and faithful followers of God did what amounted to mission work. God has always called on men to carry His message to the people. God told Israel, “Ye are my witnesses” (Isa. 43:10).

Most of us are familiar with the account of Jonah, who was a successful missionary to Nineveh. The scribe Ezra was used by God to bring His people back to His Word. Jehoshaphat, the central character of this Devotional reading, was a good king. His heart was centered on God. He called on his princes to teach in the cities of Judah. He sent Levites with them so they could read the book of the Law to the people. We are familiar with at least two of those whom he sent, Obadiah and Zechariah.

Obadiah’s message, a very short one, was directed toward the enemies of Israel and pronounced God’s judgment upon them. At the same time he delivered promises to Israel, saying that the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.

Zechariah’s message was that the people could turn to God and seek atonement for their guilt. He also told them that religious activities in themselves are worthless, but faith and faithfulness are everything.

**LIVING IT:** *We should listen to the messages God gives His missionaries.*

Mary McCalister

## Separated unto the Gospel

**KEY VERSE:** “Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ,” Romans 1:6.

Paul certainly put a lot more in his letter writing than we do. Most of us start with a “Hi, there”—not much of a clue about us or about the person to whom we are writing.

Notice how specific Paul was. He identified himself as a servant, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel. Then he went on to outline that the gospel was the fulfillment of the promises given in the Scriptures concerning Jesus. He identified Jesus as the Son of David according to the flesh but also the Son of God. Paul pointed out this truth was manifested with power and holiness and the resurrection from the dead.

Paul had a great desire to be with the church at Rome and commended it for its faith, which was spoken of throughout the whole world. We would all like to receive words of praise like that.

Paul showed his love and concern for the church at Rome, saying that he prayed for it constantly. All of us know how comforting it is when we know others are praying for us. We could take a cue from Paul and take the time to write to someone who is faithfully serving God, letting him know we are praying for him.

Paul knew that both he and the church would be blessed if they were able to meet together and that they would be able to mutually comfort, strengthen and encourage one another. You need to realize how important this fellowship is to you as a believer. Getting together with fellow-believers can be a great blessing to us in our Christian lives.

**LIVING IT:** *Learn to express thanks to those who are a blessing in your life.*

Mary McCalister

## Paul's Prayer for Israel

**KEY VERSE:** "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved," Romans 10:1.

We have a picture of Paul and his dedication to the ministry God had given him, the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. At the same time Paul had another burden which was as great, if not greater. He expresses that burden in this passage, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." Earlier he had even expressed the wish that he could give up his salvation if doing so would bring about the salvation of Israel (Rom. 9:3).

The obstacles the people of Israel faced which kept them from being saved are the same obstacles many people face today.

1. They have zeal for being religious but no knowledge of how to please God.

There is a lot of religious activity going on in the world today, but it cannot bring salvation any more than the Jews' keeping the Law could bring them salvation.

2. They are ignorant of God's righteousness, that is, what it takes to be righteous before God.

Depending on our own righteousness makes us blind to what true righteousness is.

3. They establish their own righteousness; that is, they become self-righteous.

The cure for self-righteousness is to repent and believe with the heart that God has raised Christ from the dead and to confess that Jesus is your Savior.

**LIVING IT:** *Pray for God to give you the same kind of burden for the lost that Paul had.*

Mary McCalister

## The Seventy Sent

**KEY VERSE:** “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come,” Luke 10:1.

This was a limited mission and unique in a number of ways. It was meant to prepare the way for Christ, for they were to go “into every city and place, whither he himself would come.”

1. They were to go out two by two.
2. They were not to carry any provisions.
3. They were not to stop and talk to anyone by the way.
4. They were to enter a house and, if welcomed, to stay there, being grateful for their hospitality.
5. They were to heal the sick.
6. They were to preach the kingdom of God.
7. If they were not welcomed, they were to leave, shaking the dust of that city off their feet.

What stands out as we read these instructions is the urgency of the mission. This was the last year of Christ’s ministry before His crucifixion. It was important that the gospel of the kingdom be preached to the Jews and that they be given every opportunity to receive it.

Though our commission is not like that of the seventy, there are some things we learn from it. We must recognize the urgency of getting the message out. It is far better that we go out in pairs and not alone. We are to trust God to take care of us as we go. The responsibility of receiving the gospel message is up to the hearer, not to us.

**LIVING IT:** *It is important to feel a sense of urgency about carrying the gospel message to the lost.*

Mary McCalister

## The Missionary's Testimony

**KEY VERSE:** “Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power,” Ephesians 3:7.

It is interesting to note Paul's phraseology in this passage. He did not say he was a prisoner of the Romans, even though he was in a prison in Rome. Instead, he said he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake of the Gentiles. That is, he considered himself in bondage to Christ for the purpose of carrying out his mission to the Gentiles. How much more effective would we be if we considered ourselves in bondage, sold-out, to Christ to carry the gospel to the lost? That kind of dedication would certainly enhance our witness.

Paul recognized he had been given this burden when he said that the gift of the grace of God had made him a minister. He further recognized that the power of his ministry came from God, not himself.

We can see that Paul marveled at his position when he described himself as less than the least of all saints. He did not glory in his position but glorified God for giving him that position. This kind of humility is an example for all of us to follow.

Once again Paul refers to the “mystery of Christ” (verse 4). What was this mystery?—that the Gentiles should be partakers of the promises in Christ by means of the gospel. We do not have much difficulty with this today because as the time of the end draws close, we can see the gospel being preached to every nation in the world. The only failing we have is that we do not take advantage of all the opportunities and open doors God is making available to us.

**LIVING IT:** *Consider yourself a prisoner in bondage to Christ to carry His message of salvation to a lost world.*

Mary McCalister

## Left First Love

**KEY VERSE:** “Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love,” Revelation 2:4.

When we study the book of Ephesians, it is difficult to believe that Christ would bring the indictment against them, “thou hast left thy first love.” Paul commended the Ephesians, saying he had heard of their faith in Christ and their love for all the saints (Eph. 1:15). In fact, even the words of Christ Himself make this difficult to believe. He commended them because of their works and labor, their patience and their intolerance for false teachers.

You may be wondering, if we are working as hard as we can, enduring trials with patience and not receiving false teachers, how could losing our first love be so important?

Let us look at it this way. Are your zeal and enthusiasm as strong as they once were? Or are you just going through the motions, carrying on all the same activities, but you are finding that your heart is not in it?

What is the danger lurking there? The next step is to abandon all the activities because you are not getting out of them what you want.

How can we get back to what we once were? Christ listed the steps. First, remember. We need to remember the closeness and joy we first felt in our service to Christ, remembering it with enough zeal that we want to go back to it. Second, repent. We need to seek Christ’s forgiveness for our straying away from Him. Third, we need to return, doing the deeds we first did, with the same love we first felt. I am sure we all want to be useful vessels in the Lord’s service. Let us practice these three R’s.

**LIVING IT:** *Let God restore to you the joy of His salvation.*

Mary McCalister

## Prayer Requests

## Notes