

Devotional Quarterly

Through-the-Bible Series

Vol. 13, No. 3

June 1, 2003

Acts 15—28

These Daily Devotionals will challenge members of the Lord's churches to study the Word of God more diligently, follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit more closely, support the cause of missions faithfully and lead the lost to Christ regularly because of their loyalty and obedience to Christ.

**Personal and Daily Devotionals
for
Summer Quarter, 2003**

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and Marc Shultz

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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 the “Daily Readings” 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 each 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.

DATE	DAILY READINGS	DAILY DEVOTIONALS
<input type="checkbox"/> May 26	Job 37—39	Psalms 119:9-16
<input type="checkbox"/> May 27	Job 40—42	Galatians 3:19-29
<input type="checkbox"/> May 28	Psalms 3—6	Hebrews 5:11-14
<input type="checkbox"/> May 29	Psalms 7—10	Romans 4:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> May 30	Psalms 11—17	Galatians 2:2-9
<input type="checkbox"/> May 31	Psalms 18—22	Ephesians 4:17-24
<input type="checkbox"/> June 1	Psalms 24; 25:11-22	
<input type="checkbox"/> June 2	Psalms 26—30	Romans 8:11-17
<input type="checkbox"/> June 3	Psalms 31:1-11, 21-24; 32; 33	Romans 15:14-20
<input type="checkbox"/> June 4	Psalms 34:1-10, 19-22; 35; 36	Romans 8:26-30
<input type="checkbox"/> June 5	Psalms 38—41	2 Peter 1:15-21
<input type="checkbox"/> June 6	Psalms 42—45	Isaiah 59:15-21
<input type="checkbox"/> June 7	Psalms 47—50	2 Samuel 23:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> June 8	Psalms 51—53	
<input type="checkbox"/> June 9	Psalms 54—58	1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> June 10	Psalms 59—61; 62:9-12	1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> June 11	Psalms 63—67	3 John 1-14
<input type="checkbox"/> June 12	Psalms 68—72	Philippians 4:10-19
<input type="checkbox"/> June 13	Psalms 73—77	2 Timothy 2:19-26
<input type="checkbox"/> June 14	Psalms 78—81	1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
<input type="checkbox"/> June 15	Psalms 82—84	
<input type="checkbox"/> June 16	Psalms 85—88	1 Corinthians 1:1-9
<input type="checkbox"/> June 17	Psalms 89—91	1 Corinthians 1:10-16
<input type="checkbox"/> June 18	Psalms 92—97	1 Corinthians 1:17-25
<input type="checkbox"/> June 19	Psalms 98—103	1 Corinthians 2:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> June 20	Psalms 104—106	1 Corinthians 2:9-16
<input type="checkbox"/> June 21	Psalms 107—110	2 Corinthians 3:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> June 22	Psalms 111—114	
<input type="checkbox"/> June 23	Psalms 115—118	Ephesians 1:1-14
<input type="checkbox"/> June 24	Psalms 119:1-5, 17-176	Ephesians 5:1-17
<input type="checkbox"/> June 25	Psalms 120—125	Revelation 2:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> June 26	Psalms 127—132	Ephesians 6:10-18
<input type="checkbox"/> June 27	Psalms 134—137	Proverbs 3:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> June 28	Psalms 138—142	Psalms 133:1-3
<input type="checkbox"/> June 29	Psalms 143—149	
<input type="checkbox"/> June 30	Proverbs 1; 2; 3:11-35	Ephesians 1:15-21

July Scripture Readings

DATE	DAILY READINGS	DAILY DEVOTIONALS
<input type="checkbox"/> July 1	Proverbs 4; 5; 6:1-15, 20-23, 34, 35	2 Corinthians 1:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> July 2	Proverbs 7—9	Ephesians 5:19, 20
<input type="checkbox"/> July 3	Proverbs 10—12	Psalms 126:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> July 4	Proverbs 13—15	2 Thessalonians 3:10-15
<input type="checkbox"/> July 5	Proverbs 16—18	Ephesians 4:7-16
<input type="checkbox"/> July 6	Proverbs 19; 20	
<input type="checkbox"/> July 7	Proverbs 21—23	Luke 8:4-15
<input type="checkbox"/> July 8	Proverbs 24—26	Luke 9:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> July 9	Proverbs 27—29	Luke 9:23-26
<input type="checkbox"/> July 10	Proverbs 30; 31	Luke 24:46-48
<input type="checkbox"/> July 11	Ecclesiastes 1—3	Isaiah 6:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> July 12	Ecclesiastes 4—6	Revelation 22:12-17
<input type="checkbox"/> July 13	Ecclesiastes 7; 8	
<input type="checkbox"/> July 14	Ecclesiastes 9; 10	2 Timothy 4:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> July 15	Ecclesiastes 11; 12	2 Timothy 4:16-18
<input type="checkbox"/> July 16	Song of Solomon 1—3	2 Timothy 4:7-12
<input type="checkbox"/> July 17	Song of Solomon 4—6	Mark 2:13-20
<input type="checkbox"/> July 18	Song of Solomon 7; 8	Luke 23:1-5
<input type="checkbox"/> July 19	Isaiah 1:1-15, 20-31; 2; 3	Luke 23:6-12
<input type="checkbox"/> July 20	Isaiah 4; 5; 6:9-13	
<input type="checkbox"/> July 21	Isaiah 7—9	Philippians 2:17-25
<input type="checkbox"/> July 22	Isaiah 10; 11	Jeremiah 1:4-10
<input type="checkbox"/> July 23	Isaiah 12—14	1 Peter 2:13-17
<input type="checkbox"/> July 24	Isaiah 15—17	1 Peter 2:21-25
<input type="checkbox"/> July 25	Isaiah 18—21	1 Peter 5:7-11
<input type="checkbox"/> July 26	Isaiah 22—24	1 John 4:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> July 27	Isaiah 25—27	
<input type="checkbox"/> July 28	Isaiah 28—30	2 Corinthians 4:8-18
<input type="checkbox"/> July 29	Isaiah 31—33	2 Corinthians 5:14-21
<input type="checkbox"/> July 30	Isaiah 34—36	Isaiah 1:16-20
<input type="checkbox"/> July 31	Isaiah 37—39	Jeremiah 8:18-22

August Scripture Readings

DATE	DAILY READINGS	DAILY DEVOTIONALS
<input type="checkbox"/> August 1	Isaiah 40:6-31; 41; 42	James 4:12-17
<input type="checkbox"/> August 2	Isaiah 43—45	Psalms 23:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> August 3	Isaiah 46; 47	
<input type="checkbox"/> August 4	Isaiah 48—50	1 Corinthians 4:9-17
<input type="checkbox"/> August 5	Isaiah 51—53	Ephesians 4:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> August 6	Isaiah 54—56	Galatians 4:15-18
<input type="checkbox"/> August 7	Isaiah 57—59:14	2 Timothy 3:10-15
<input type="checkbox"/> August 8	Isaiah 60—62	Titus 3:8-15
<input type="checkbox"/> August 9	Isaiah 63—66	Philippians 2:5-8
<input type="checkbox"/> August 10	Jeremiah 1:11-19; 2	
<input type="checkbox"/> August 11	Jeremiah 3—5	John 8:26-32
<input type="checkbox"/> August 12	Jeremiah 6—8:17	1 Corinthians 4:1-9
<input type="checkbox"/> August 13	Jeremiah 9—11	Matthew 11:2-10
<input type="checkbox"/> August 14	Jeremiah 12—14	Romans 16:19-27
<input type="checkbox"/> August 15	Jeremiah 15—17	2 Corinthians 7:10-16
<input type="checkbox"/> August 16	Jeremiah 18—20	Philippians 3:10-14
<input type="checkbox"/> August 17	Jeremiah 21; 22	
<input type="checkbox"/> August 18	Jeremiah 23—25	John 8:54-59
<input type="checkbox"/> August 19	Jeremiah 26—28	Jonah 2:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> August 20	Jeremiah 29—31	Daniel 6:16-22
<input type="checkbox"/> August 21	Jeremiah 32; 33:10-26; 34	Jeremiah 33:1-9
<input type="checkbox"/> August 22	Jeremiah 35—37	Habakkuk 3:16-19
<input type="checkbox"/> August 23	Jeremiah 38:1-6, 14-28; 39; 40	Matthew 14:22-32
<input type="checkbox"/> August 24	Jeremiah 41; 42	
<input type="checkbox"/> August 25	Jeremiah 43—45	Psalms 25:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> August 26	Jeremiah 46—48	Psalms 31:12-20
<input type="checkbox"/> August 27	Jeremiah 49; 50	Psalms 34:11-18
<input type="checkbox"/> August 28	Jeremiah 51; 52	Psalms 46:1-11
<input type="checkbox"/> August 29	Lamentations 1; 2	Psalms 62:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> August 30	Lamentations 3—5	Psalms 150:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> August 31	Ezekiel 1; 2	

Value of the Word

KEY VERSE: “With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments,” Psalm 119:10.

Madalyn Murray O’Hair was the most widely known atheist in the USA in yesteryear. She aggressively devoted herself to attacking all religions, especially Christianity. The Internal Revenue Service confiscated her personal belongings to pay her delinquent taxes. Included in the Internal Revenue Service’s auction was a penny with the words In God We Trust scratched out. It sold for \$10.00. Her Bible sold for \$2000.00.

Indeed, the Word of God, which communicates the truth of God’s saving grace, is priceless.

The Psalms constitute the prayer and praise book of Israel. They are a revelation of divine truth in terms of human experience. They were written to lead people to the Lord. (See Psalms 25:5; 61:2.)

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, consisting of one hundred seventy-six verses. It is an acrostic arranged with, and in the order of, the Hebrew alphabet which has twenty-two letters in it. Today’s Devotional is the Hebrew letter Beth, which signifies a difference. The Word of God is different from any other book. This psalm conveys the thought that the Word of God contains everything man needs to know.

God’s “commandments,” when followed, will correct the errors that will come in one’s life.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The Word of God always points the believer in the right direction. (See Psalm 119:105.)*

Gene C. Smith

Purpose of the Law

KEY VERSE: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith,” Galatians 3:24.

The Law was not contrary or opposed to the promises of God. Law and promise operate in different spheres, each with a different function. The Law was given to condemn the guilty. The promise, grace, was given to justify and make righteous.

The Law was a schoolmaster—a pedagogue to bring the immature child (Israel) to Christ. The Law was not the teacher, but the slave entrusted with the responsibility of seeing that a child of the master might arrive safely at school. This illustrates how, when faith came, there was no further need of the schoolmaster.

One becomes a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ (verses 24, 26). That individual is then baptized with reference to Christ and in so doing puts “on Christ” (verse 27) and comes into conformity to His will. Baptism is described here as a kind of uniform which indicates that a vital relationship has already taken place (verses 26-29).

Two truths are to be firmly fixed in our minds. The first is that Jesus is the Savior—the only Savior of mankind. The second is that a believer’s baptism identifies him with Christ. An examination of one’s actions will cause him to be sure of his relationship with Jesus Christ. Having established a relationship with Christ and having followed Him in scriptural baptism solidifies in his mind exactly where he stands with Jesus Christ.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Open the Word of God prayerfully, read it carefully and obey it joyfully. (See Psalm 119:109.)*

Gene C. Smith

Words of Warning

KEY VERSE: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat,” Hebrews 5:12.

The symbol of the skull and crossbones on various containers warns people that the contents are harmful. When viewing this sign, we know to beware of the danger of the contents.

In like manner, the Word of God contains many warnings that must be heeded or else harm will come to those who ignore the admonitions. The Devotional reading for today is a striking example of God’s caution and dissuasion to His own.

This portion of Scripture is a part of a parenthetical passage that extends into the sixth chapter of the book of Hebrews. It describes the state or condition of those who had hardened their hearts against the truth of the gospel and had become “dull of hearing” (verse 11). The professing Hebrews were a case in point.

The writer states that he had many things to say to them about Christ, the High Priest, but they had become jaded in hearing and heeding the truth. They ought to have progressed to the point of being teachers, but they still needed to be taught the “first principles of the oracles of God” (verse 12), or the elementary things pertaining to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, they still needed the milk of the Word rather than the meat—the more nourishing food of the Word of God. They were like overgrown babies who desired milk when they should have progressed to a more nourishing diet. How is it in your life?

JUST A THOUGHT: *Life has many choices; eternity has only two—Heaven or hell. What is your choice? (See Hebrews 4:7.)*

Gene C. Smith

Justification by Faith Illustrated

KEY VERSE: “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness,” Romans 4:3.

An anonymous writer once wrote: “When reading God’s Word, take special care to find the rich treasures hidden there; give thought to each line, each precept hear, then practice it well with godly fear.” This is good advice to every person who opens the Word of God and starts to read the contents. It is the truth—trust it.

In Romans 4:1-4, the apostle Paul used Abraham as an illustration of how one is justified by faith before God without doing the deeds of the Law. Abraham lived some four hundred years before the Law was given; yet, he was justified in God’s sight when he believed the promise of God concerning his justification.

In verses 5-8, Paul revealed that justification before God comes to the one who believes or puts his trust in Jesus Christ, not to the one working to attain it. He used David as an example of one whose faith was counted for righteousness.

Salvation comes to an individual who believes in Jesus Christ as his Savior. (See Luke 7:36-50.) Salvation is not obtained by the good works one does but by a simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Ephesians 2:8, 9.) Jesus Christ is the Savior of all those who repent of their sins (Luke 13:3) and receive Him as Savior (John 1:11-13).

Have you accepted Him as your Savior?

JUST A THOUGHT: *No Bible teaching is of more importance than that of justification because it involves the whole method of the salvation of lost sinners. (See Romans 5:1.)*

Gene C. Smith

God's Work in Gentiles

KEY VERSE: “And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain,” Galatians 2:2.

This passage of Scripture deals with Paul's second trip to the city of Jerusalem following his conversion. (See Galatians 1:15-24.) When he made this second trip to Jerusalem, he conferred privately with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, lest his preaching be in vain. They found no fault with Paul's preaching, even accepting the Gentile preacher, Titus. (See Galatians 2:1.)

Titus, a Gentile, had never been circumcised. Of all the Law's tenets, circumcision seemed to be the one the Judaizers were most insistent upon. When they heard that Paul was in town and had brought an uncircumcised Gentile with him who professed salvation, they sneaked in some of their people to spy out the situation and contend for Titus' circumcision (Gal. 2:3-6). They failed to accomplish this feat. The Jewish apostles, James, Cephas (Peter) and John, then gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that they should go to the Gentiles with the gospel (verses 7-9).

This is vitally important to us today because we are Gentiles. Are the Gentiles to be included in the evangelization of the world? Most certainly we are. We who have been saved are to take the gospel to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Do you know someone, Jew or Gentile, who needs the Lord as Savior? Why not witness to that one today?

JUST A THOUGHT: *The gospel is good news for a lost and dying world—to both the Jews and the Gentiles. (See Mark 16:15, 16.)*

Gene C. Smith

Walk of a Believer

KEY VERSE: “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,” Ephesians 4:17.

The word walk suggests a progression from one place to another. In application, as in the Key Verse, it deals with an important truth in the life of a Christian. It reveals how we are to walk as Christians and how we are not to walk. This walk deals with our day-by-day conduct as Christians, which is distinctly different from the walk of unsaved people.

When one becomes a Christian, he enters into an entirely new sphere of experience. He is no longer free to conduct himself as he pleases or as he formerly did. In fact, he has a new nature that does not desire him to do so. This new nature, imparted in salvation, leads the child of God to “put on the new man” (verse 24) and to walk (conduct himself) as a Christian. He is not to walk as other Gentiles (unsaved) walk (verse 17). To achieve this, he must put off the old man (verse 22), which is governed by the sinful impulses of the depraved human nature.

Today’s Devotional reading sets forth one of the highest standards of Christian conduct to be found in the Word of God. If Christians would live by this standard, their lives would be enriched, and they could make a mark for God on the sinful society in which they live. Would you vow to do so as you finish this Devotional?

JUST A THOUGHT: *When one walks with the Lord, he will be out of step with the world. (See Ephesians 5:8.)*

Gene C. Smith

Led by the Spirit

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

The eighth chapter of the book of Romans has been called the mountain peak of this great book. It begins with “no condemnation” (verse 1) and ends with no separation (verses 35-39). Charles H. Spurgeon called the glorious doctrines of this chapter, “Golden stepping-stones through the slough of despond.” No doubt this fine disclosure came partly because this chapter sets forth the believer’s position in Christ. There are several aspects of this position.

One, there is “no condemnation” to those who are in Christ (verses 1-4), referring to those who have trusted Him for salvation.

Two, there is a conflict between the two natures of a child of God (verses 5-13), namely the flesh and the Spirit.

Three, the believer is a child of God and, as such, is “led by the Spirit of God” (verses 14-17).

Four, believers in Christ are kept in their relationship with Jesus Christ by the power of God (verses 18-39).

The Key Verse sets forth the truth that the “sons of God” are “led by the Spirit of God.” The Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit—the third person of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit leads God’s children by the Word of God, by the divine providence of God and by one’s heartfelt feeling of doing what God wants him to do. Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to lead you?

JUST A THOUGHT: *To ignore the Holy Spirit’s leadership is to invite trouble into a believer’s life. (See 1 Corinthians 3:1-4.)*

Gene C. Smith

Paul Led by the Spirit

KEY VERSE: “Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ,” Romans 15:19.

In writing to a people whom he had never met as a group (Rom. 1:1-11), Paul displayed admirable restraint in avoiding personal references to himself. He did, however, boldly remind the Roman readers that he had a special position in the Lord’s work that came as a result of God’s grace. (See Romans 15:14-16.) He was a “minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.” This ministry was carried out as a sacred thing by his proclaiming the “gospel of God” (verse 16).

Being led by the Holy Spirit, Paul’s ministry took him from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum (verse 19). Paul’s visit to Illyricum is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. This area, also known as Dalmatia, corresponds approximately to the modern-day Yugoslavia and even more accurately to Albania.

Paul was driven by his ambition to preach the gospel where Christ had not been made known or in virgin territory (verse 20). He did not want to build on another man’s foundation (1 Cor. 3:10). Paul’s desire was intensified by the Holy Spirit as he was “sanctified by the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 15:16). This means he was set apart for service to God and led by the Holy Spirit.

Ministers of the gospel must ever seek God’s guidance by the Holy Spirit as they proclaim the gospel to others. In so doing, they fulfill their ministry to others.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Following the Holy Spirit’s direction is always right but seldom easy. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:19.)*

Gene C. Smith

Holy Spirit's Omniscience

KEY VERSE: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,” Romans 8:26.

The Bible plainly teaches the Trinity of the Godhead. There is God—the Father, the Son—Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. (See Matthew 3:16, 17; 28:19.) The Holy Spirit is referred to nineteen times in the eighth chapter of the Roman epistle in His work in the life of a believer in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is omniscient (all-knowing) as is God the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit knows all about God's children. He helps our infirmities or weaknesses in our prayer lives. This refers to our inability at times to pray intelligently about certain matters. The Holy Spirit takes our feeble attempts to pray and intercedes to God the Father in keeping with His holy will (Rom. 8:27).

This has nothing to do with praying in an unknown tongue, as some suggest. The “groanings” (verse 26) are done by the Holy Spirit, not believers. It does not refer to the groanings of a believer in prayer, but to the Holy Spirit's groanings as He presents our petitions to Almighty God. This help is the Holy Spirit's intercession or His approach and His appeal to God in our behalf. God searches our hearts and knows (perceptively, intuitively) the mind of the Spirit as He intercedes for us. We, as believers, are sometimes unaware of what to pray for and how to voice our requests to God. Thus, the Holy Spirit does this for us.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God works all things together for the good of them that love God. (See Romans 8:28.)*

Gene C. Smith

2 Peter 1:15-21

Thursday, June 5

Holy Men Moved by the Spirit

KEY VERSE: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as *they* were moved by the Holy Ghost,” 2 Peter 1:21.

The “holy men of God” refers to the men who initially wrote the Scriptures. They wrote as they were “moved [borne along] by the Holy Ghost.” This shows the dual authorship of God’s Word—the Holy Spirit’s guiding and guarding the men involved in the actual writing of the Scriptures.

There were some forty of these men from varying walks of life. They lived on three different continents and wrote over a period of some fifteen hundred years. The Bible was initially written in three languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Syriac Chaldean. The New Testament was written in Koine Greek. There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. With all these variables there is not one contradiction or error in the sixty-six books of the Bible. The Holy Spirit guided the writers and made this production of the Scriptures possible.

In the process of producing the Scriptures, there were three aspects of their development. They were illumination (verse 19), revelation (verse 20) and inspiration (verse 21). God revealed the truths to these men, their minds were illumined to them, and they recorded them under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The human authors were guided by the divine author—the Holy Spirit. He did not dictate the message to them as a person might dictate a letter to a secretary. Neither did they write in a state of ecstasy; they were simply guided in this divine task by the Holy Spirit.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Thank God we have the Word of God. It always points us in the right direction. (See 2 Timothy 3:15-17.)*

Gene C. Smith

Holy Spirit Led Isaiah

KEY VERSE: “As for me, this *is* my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that *is* upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever,” Isaiah 59:21.

Jesus Christ is going to return to planet Earth someday. We do not know when He will return, but we can be sure He will return because He said so Himself (John 14:3). Isaiah, a prophet of God, spoke of Jesus’ return when he wrote about “the Redeemer” that “shall come to Zion” (Isa. 59:20). Isaiah’s prophecy looked beyond the first coming of the Redeemer (Jesus Christ) to the second coming of Christ.

The truth of God had failed in Israel (verse 15). The people had turned aside from God, and the evil ones made God’s people a prey. The Lord saw this and was displeased because there was “no judgment” meted out upon the evil-doers (verse 15). There was no one to intercede for the Israelites. Only God could save them (verses 17-19). Thus, the divine deliverer would come to Zion and save the people (verse 20).

The Holy Spirit was upon Isaiah as he received these words of God (verse 21). The Holy Spirit guided Isaiah as he received this divine revelation and recorded the same.

Are you prepared for the return of Jesus Christ? He could come at any moment. Therefore, it behooves us to be ready for His return. To be ready involves one’s salvation, baptism, church membership, godly living and service to the Lord.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Jesus could come at any time, so we should be ready all the time. (See Matthew 24:44.)*

Gene C. Smith

Holy Spirit Guided David

KEY VERSE: “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue,” 2 Samuel 23:2.

The last words of an individual are usually of prime importance. When death is near for a loved one, we tend to listen intently as he utters his last words. What is true today was also true in David's day. He stated, “Now these be the last words of David” (verse 1). In giving his last message, David expressed praise to God, the righteous ruler over Israel.

David also affirmed the divine inspiration of his writings (verse 2). The Spirit of the Lord spoke to him and gave him God's message. David, guided by the Holy Spirit, recorded by divine inspiration God's message. He spoke of God as the “Rock of Israel,” ruling over men (verse 3). He also declared that God was “as the light of the morning, . . . without clouds” (verse 4). Jesus Himself said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). Those who follow Him do not “walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” It is much easier to walk when one has enough light to see the way. Thus, it is a relief to know that, when we walk with the Lord, we have light on our pathway and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

David's last message centered on the Davidic Covenant by which God had chosen and blessed him (2 Sam. 23:5). God had made an “everlasting covenant” with David and his dynasty or house. This covenant guaranteed David's ultimate well-being. In contrast, the sons of Belial (evil men), like so many “thorns,” will be cast aside and consumed in the judgment of God (verses 6, 7).

JUST A THOUGHT: *God speaks to us through His Word—take time to listen. (See Psalm 119:130.)*

Gene C. Smith

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Monday, June 9

A Model Church

KEY VERSE: “So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia,” 1 Thessalonians 1:7.

Without doubt you have heard a minister say, “If you ever find a perfect church, please don’t join it. If you do, it won’t be perfect any more!”

Because local churches are made up of people, no church is perfect. But some churches are closer to the New Testament ideal than others. The church in Thessalonica was in that category. At least four times in this epistle, Paul gave thanks for the church and the way it responded to his ministry. (See 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 5:18.)

The record of the founding of the church in Thessalonica by the apostle Paul is given in Acts 17:1-9. Paul ministered there for “three sabbath days” and “reasoned with them out of the scriptures” (verse 2). As new converts, they constituted this great church. From the beginning of his ministry there, Paul looked to them with joy and gratitude as being worthy of the appellation of “ensamples” (1 Thess. 1:7).

They were examples in several areas. (1) They received the Word of God (verse 5). This was a work of faith on their part (verse 3). (2) They followed their spiritual leader (verse 6). (3) They suffered “much affliction” for Christ (verse 6). (4) They became an example to other churches, especially in mission work as they “sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place” (verse 8). This reveals that a church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be actively involved in missions. How is it with the church where you hold membership?

JUST A THOUGHT: *A recent survey of church growth indicated that seventy to eighty percent of a church’s growth is the result of people witnessing to friends and relatives. (See Acts 1:8.)*

Gene C. Smith

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Tuesday, June 10

A Model Servant

KEY VERSE: “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts,” 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

Paul, the evangelist, is introduced to us in the first chapter of this book. Chapter 2 introduces us to Paul as a pastor. It explains how he cared for the new believers in Thessalonica and brought them to maturity in the Lord.

In the verses which compose this Devotional reading, Paul reminded them of the kind of ministry he had as he taught them and cared for the young church. Three pictures of his ministry emerge.

The first is that of a faithful steward (verses 1-6). A steward is one who owns nothing but possesses and uses everything that belongs to his master. Paul had been “put in trust with the gospel” (verse 4). It was not a message that he made up or that he received from men. God had called Paul into the ministry and commanded him to preach the gospel. Paul considered himself a steward of God’s message. He gave the new believers the message that he received from God.

The second is that of a loving mother (verses 7, 8). The emphasis of the steward is faithfulness, but the emphasis of the mother is gentleness. Paul was a man of authority as an apostle, but he always used his authority in love. He was, indeed, like a loving mother who cared for her children.

The third is that of a concerned father (verses 9-12). Paul considered himself a spiritual “father” (verse 11) to the new believers in Thessalonica. The father not only begets the children but he also cares for them. Paul taught them how to “walk” as born-again believers in Jesus Christ (verse 12).

JUST A THOUGHT: *A pattern of church growth is possible when we consistently stay in the Word of God. (See 2 Peter 3:18.)*

Gene C. Smith

Ministering Brethren

KEY VERSE: “We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth,” 3 John 8.

The battle for truth is fought not only in the homes of believers but also in the local church. This letter of John is the shortest New Testament epistle in the original Greek. It gives us a glimpse of a local church, its people and its problems. As you read this short letter, you come to the conclusion that times have not changed much. We have similar people and problems as those to whom this letter was written.

As you read this short book, consider the men named in it and note the kind of Christians they were.

Gaius was an encourager (verses 1-4). He is identified here as the “wellbeloved” (verse 1), a spiritually healthy believer (verse 2), one who walked in truth (verse 3) and one who provoked John to rejoice (verse 4). WOW! What a Christian! John loved him dearly.

The ministering brethren (verses 5-8). The unnamed brethren were fellow-helpers to the truth. They opened their hearts and homes to traveling missionaries.

The domineering Diotrephes (verse 9-11). Most churches have some members, like Diotrephes, who insist on being the boss and having their own way.

The good Demetrius (verses 12-14). Demetrius was exemplary in his conduct—a worthy example for one to follow.

JUST A THOUGHT: *There is a need for more men like Gaius and Demetrius and for a fewer number like Diotrephes. (See 1 John 2:15-17.)*

Gene C. Smith

Missionary Church

KEY VERSE: “Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only,” Philippians 4:15.

The church in Philippi was special to the apostle Paul. His second missionary journey took him to the continent of Europe. (See Acts 15:36—16:34.)

Shortly after he and his missionary companions arrived in Philippi, they began preaching the gospel there (Acts 16:12-34). Several converts were baptized, and a church was established with these believers. They became ardent supporters of Paul’s missionary enterprises. Upon Paul’s departure from Philippi, the Philippian church “communicated” with him in “giving and receiving” (Phil. 4:15). It became an outstanding missionary church, giving liberally to Paul’s missionary endeavors.

Many modern-day Christians live on a ragged financial edge. After paying their bills and meeting their basic needs, they have little money left. The remaining portion of disposable income is somewhat scanty. Perhaps that is why some recoil when they hear the pastor talk about tithing and giving to missions. Many seem to see little need to support the missionaries out on the mission field who are striving to win people and build churches.

But think about this: Whenever God speaks of giving, He always couples it with a blessing. (See Malachi 3:10 and Luke 6:38.)

JUST A THOUGHT: *If you are not giving your tithe to God, start someplace—whatever the percentage—and watch God work. (See Philippians 4:19.)*

Gene C. Smith

Vessels of Honor

KEY VERSE: “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour,” 2 Timothy 2:20.

God’s goal for our lives is an unconditional surrender to Him. Man’s definition of surrender is “defeat.” God’s perspective of surrender is “victory.” From His viewpoint, surrender is the doorway to blessings, fulfillment and spiritual triumph.

An unconditional surrender means that one is willing to obey God’s call—even if it involves painful sacrifices. It is a yielding of one’s life to the complete control of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God knows that as long as a person retains control of his life, he will do what he thinks is best for him without acknowledging Jesus as his Lord. But God sees the big picture—from the beginning to the end. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of His children. He promises that all He does is for our good and His glory. Therefore, whenever He calls upon us to submit, we can trust Him completely, knowing He is working everything for our best. (See Romans 8:28.)

An example of unconditional surrender is found in today’s Devotional reading. False prophets had arisen in Paul’s time, spreading their false doctrine. Paul directed all true believers to depart from those evil ones and their practices (2 Tim. 2:19-21). In so doing they would then be identified as vessels of honor, or instruments for a noble purpose—the work of the Lord. In Paul’s day, two kinds of vessels were used in a household—vessels of gold and silver and earthen vessels. Some were used for noble purposes and some for ordinary purposes. All of God’s children are to strive to be noble vessels for God’s use.

JUST A THOUGHT: *No one can serve God on a basis of compromise; an unconditional surrender is needed to bring spiritual victory. (See Luke 6:46.)*

Gene C. Smith

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Saturday, June 14

Crown of Rejoicing

KEY VERSE: “For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*” 1 Thessalonians 2:19.

The apostle Paul was not ashamed to declare his affection for the members in the church at Thessalonica. He had been separated from them for a “short time,” but he had not forgotten them and longed to see them again (verse 17).

Paul made every effort to return to them, but “Satan hindered” him from doing so (verse 18). However, Paul did not look back and give in to regret and remorse. Instead, he looked ahead and rejoiced (verse 19). For the believer, the best is yet to be. Paul looked ahead by faith and saw his fellow-believers in the presence of Jesus Christ in glory. He referred to them as being a “crown of rejoicing” to him when they arrived in the presence of Jesus Christ in glory (verse 19).

In times of trouble and testing, it is important that we take the long look of life. Paul lived in the future tense as well as in the present tense. His actions were governed by what God would do for him in the future. He knew that Jesus Christ would return to planet Earth and reward him for his faithful ministry. On that day, the saints of God from Thessalonica would bring glory to God and joy to Paul’s heart.

What a day that will be when we all arrive in the presence of God in glory. The first person I want to see is Jesus Christ—my Redeemer. I also want to see my father, mother, grandparents and other kindred who are there or will be there. I will also stand in awe as I behold Almighty God in all His power and glory.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Do not give up or turn aside! Lay hold on the spiritual resources available to you and serve God diligently. (See 2 Timothy 4:7.)*

Gene C. Smith

Church Enriched

KEY VERSE: “That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge,” 1 Corinthians 1:5.

First century Corinth was an important commercial center with a population of 100,000 to 700,000. Paul visited this city during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18) in about AD 50. While there, he preached the gospel, people were saved and a New Testament church was established. Some years later, Paul wrote this first epistle to the Corinthian church from the city of Ephesus.

Paramount problems such as envy, strife, divisions and various other problems plagued the church, dividing it into warring parties. From his innermost being, Paul wanted the members to be “enriched” in everything by Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:5).

The word enriched is a fascinating word that means “to make rich” and refers to spiritual enrichment. Paul wanted to redirect their attention from a state of confusion to a focus on spiritual enrichment by Jesus Christ. Christians need this same focus in the present time. How may this be accomplished?

Here are a few suggestions. Read the Bible daily and understand what is read; make your prayer life more meaningful; attend church consistently and continue to make Jesus the first love of your life. As one follows these directives, his life will be “enriched” by Jesus Christ. In turn, he will be enabled to glorify God. Try it and see!

JUST A THOUGHT: *Do not be misled. Real life is found in Jesus Christ—an inexhaustible, boundless life for you, forever. (See Proverbs 8:35.)*

Gene C. Smith

Diverse Opinions

KEY VERSE: “For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house of Chloe*, that there are contentions among you,” 1 Corinthians 1:11.

Paul launched into the main body of his first letter to the Corinthian church with a strong, yet touching appeal for unity. Please note the following three pleas he made to them. (1) “That ye all speak the same thing”; (2) “That there be no divisions among you”; (3) “That ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (verse 10). Paul made this plea in “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 10). This was a powerful and tender appeal to the hearts of believers in Christ. To be in compliance to this appeal would result in a reverence for Christ’s authority and a love for His cause.

The reason for Paul’s passionate plea came as a result of his having heard about the “contentions” among them (verse 11). The word contentions does not refer to a mere difference of opinions; it speaks of open quarreling and wrangling. The church members at Corinth not only had diverse opinions but their opinions also became the source of open wrangling and warfare with one another.

The perversion of Christian liberty caused the Corinthian church to split into parties and cliques, grouping themselves around various human leaders (verses 12-16). Many modern-day churches are plagued with some of the same problems exhibited in the church at Corinth. Such a state or condition brings a shame to the cause of Christ and hinders a church’s outreach to others.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Wherein you fall short, ask for God’s help. Wherein you respond positively, thank God for His grace and continue to be an obedient Christian. (See Ephesians 4:12.)*

Gene C. Smith

Missionary Preaching

KEY VERSE: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect,” 1 Corinthians 1:17.

The apostle Paul was a great preacher of the cross of Christ, and the message of the cross was never needed more at any place than in the wicked city of Corinth. The message was set against a church situation where there was envy, strife, division and confusion. This situation came about because the members focused on their own desires rather than the message of the cross.

The word preaching (verse 18) means the “word” or the “message.” This reference is not on the act of preaching, but on the substance of the preaching—the message of the cross and all that it entails. Note the twofold response to the preaching of the cross. (1) The attitude of the unbelievers (verse 18). To them the preaching of the cross was mere “foolishness.” Unsaved people are blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4); therefore, they fail to see their need of the Savior. They regard salvation by the cross as an absurdity. (2) The attitude of the believers (verse 18). Those who are saved find the preaching of the cross to be the power of God that can change one’s life and destiny. The triumph of the preaching of the cross is set forth in verses 21-25.

The missionary message of the present day is the same as that preached by the apostle Paul. The message is simply the preaching of the gospel. The purpose of the missionary endeavors is not to be an effort to change the life-style of foreign people to our life-style, but to give them the good news that Jesus saves from sin.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The main purpose of mission work is to preach the gospel, win people to Jesus and build indigenous churches. (See Acts 13:3-5.)*

Gene C. Smith

Missionary Purpose

KEY VERSE: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified,” 1 Corinthians 2:2.

The same thing that occurred in the church at Corinth is happening in some churches today: men are mixing philosophy (man’s wisdom) with God’s revealed message, and this causes confusion and division. Therefore, Paul explained the three fundamentals of the gospel message and urged his readers to return to these basic principles.

Paul’s approach in Corinth is explained in 1 Corinthians 2:1, 2. Paul did not go to the city of Corinth to glorify himself or to start a religious “fan club.” He went there to glorify God and to preach Christ and His crucifixion. This resulted in people being saved and a church being established. When preachers only want to glorify themselves and display their abilities, they fail to glorify God and preach about Christ being crucified.

Paul’s attitude is seen in verses 3 and 4. Although Paul was an apostle, he went to Corinth as a humble servant of Jesus Christ. Paul did not depend on himself. He depended on the power of the Holy Spirit. He realized his weaknesses and inabilities; therefore, he depended on the power of the Holy Spirit to empower his message.

Paul’s aim is set forth in verses 5-8. He wanted the Corinthians to trust in God and His power and not in the preacher who came to deliver God’s message to them. Their faith was to be anchored in the Lord and not in Paul. He did not use “enticing words” (verse 4) or flowery speeches. He humbly told them about Christ and how to be saved from their sins. The Holy Spirit empowered Paul and his message, which resulted in their salvation.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Knowing Jesus Christ gives meaning to life; obeying Him gives purpose to life. (See Malachi 1:6.)*

Gene C. Smith

Missionary Spirituality

KEY VERSE: “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” 1 Corinthians 2:9.

Paul had so emphatically declared that the gospel message was not based on the wisdom of man (1 Cor. 2:5) that some might have concluded that it contained no wisdom of any kind. Such is not true. So Paul proceeded to reveal that there is a higher wisdom than the human—the wisdom of God (verse 7). Spiritual truths are, therefore, not discovered by human wisdom, but God has revealed them by His Spirit (verses 10-12). The natural (unsaved) man does not, and indeed cannot, receive the things revealed by the Holy Spirit “because they are spiritually discerned” (verses 13, 14). The spiritual man, however, is enabled by the Holy Spirit to put all spiritual truths in a proper perspective (verses 15, 16).

Who knows what the future holds? Economic hardships or prosperity? Marital intimacy or discord? Peace or war? New opportunities or lost ones? Herein lies our confidence—God, our heavenly Father, knows the answers to all these questions. He, therefore, is carefully, wisely and deliberately orchestrating all things according to His timetable and eternal design. Our God is in full control of all things. Our confidence is not founded in our abilities, but in God’s omniscience, patience and presence. This truth is made known to us by the Holy Spirit of God. Walk with God daily and watch Him work in your life.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The Holy Spirit is the believer’s power supply. (See Romans 8:9-11.)*

Gene C. Smith

Missionary Joy

KEY VERSE: “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men,” 2 Corinthians 3:2.

Paul had no need of letters of recommendation to the Corinthians. The Corinthian Christians themselves would serve as most excellent commendatory epistles (letters) for his ministry (verse 2). Paul’s letter of recommendation was not written with pen and ink or graven in stone; it was written in human hearts. As a missionary, Paul rejoiced to see the change in the lives of those who had been saved.

It was this writer’s privilege some time ago to visit our missionaries in Korea. I stayed in the homes of the missionaries and lived as they lived for almost a whole month. I taught the missionaries and other workers the Word of God each day. On the weekend we visited the mission churches.

What a joy it was to preach to the Koreans. They were so open to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I saw people accept Christ as Savior in every service I conducted. I had the privilege of baptizing those new converts, even though this was usually done in a mountain stream of ice-cold water. It was an experience I shall not soon forget.

When it was time to come home, about fifty of the Korean missionaries and other workers came to the airport to see me leave. They brought gifts for my family and me. We prayed together. As I boarded the plane, I looked back and saw them waving goodbye and weeping over my departure. Recently, I saw one of the Korean missionaries at our national meeting. We hugged each other and rejoiced together again.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The happiest people on earth are those who invest their lives in Heaven’s work. (See Psalm 126:5.)*

Gene C. Smith

Letter to Ephesus

KEY VERSE: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus,” Ephesians 1:1.

The apostle Paul was the writer of this short book. He wrote it from Rome in about AD 64, and it is the first in order of his prison epistles. From the narrative in Acts 19:1-10 and Acts 20:17-38 we learn that Paul spent three years in this capital city of Asia Minor. Ephesus was a center of heathen worship; yet, Paul experienced a profitable ministry there. The immediate result of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was a tremendous spiritual awakening. (See Acts 19:19, 20.) Some four years later, Paul wrote this supernal message to them while he was imprisoned in Rome.

The need of the hour is for a spiritual awakening, a revival of renewed interest, in the Lord’s churches. A warning system operates properly when the problem that precipitated the peril is effectively resolved. Thus, the spirit of man acts as God intends when it responds to the truth of God’s Word. Therefore, before revival returns to the Lord’s churches, there must be a return to the preaching, the hearing and the heeding of God’s Word.

When the Word is proclaimed, a fire can be kindled in the hearts of God’s people if they will heed the message and do as God directs. The spiritual alarms are buzzing all across America. Let’s do something about the spiritual condition that exists so that revival may come. If these alarms are ignored, the spiritual climate will not change much.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God will use you as His divine tool when you are prepared to follow His instruction manual—the Bible. (See Romans 12:1, 2.)*

Gene C. Smith

Ephesians Admonished

KEY VERSE: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children,” Ephesians 5:1.

In order for one’s mind to become God’s inner witness to truth and error, He must program it. He does so by two means: the input of God’s Word and the illumination by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God unveils the truths of God so that we can understand God’s ways. He does not leave us confused or in the dark. The Holy Spirit applies these truths to our personalities and our personal circumstances. This is why we are directed to be “followers of God” as His “dear children” (verse 1).

Paul also gave us instructions on how we are to “walk” as Christians. (See verses 2, 8, 15.) The Christian “walk” refers to our day-by-day conduct as Christians. We are to walk differently from the walk of unsaved people. When one becomes a child of God, he enters into an entirely new sphere of experience. He is no longer free to conduct himself as he pleases or as he formerly did; in fact, he has a new nature that does not desire him to do so.

This new nature, imparted in salvation, leads the child of God to “put on the new man” (Eph. 4:24) and conduct himself as a Christian. To do this, he must put off the old man (Eph. 4: 22) that is governed by the sinful impulses of the depraved human nature. When this change begins to take place in the heart and life of a believer, he can experience a walk with God such as Enoch, Noah and others have done in times past. Try it and see if your walk with God is improved.

JUST A THOUGHT: *A believer in Jesus Christ has the ability to discern right from wrong and to make appropriate choices. (See Joshua 24:15.)*

Gene C. Smith

Revelation 2:1-7

Wednesday, June 25

Message to Church in Ephesus

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

The city of Ephesus was the most important city of the district in which the seven churches of Asia were located. It served as the capital of Roman Asia Minor. It was a famous city because in it was located one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Diana that required two hundred years to build. Diana was the goddess of Ephesus. It was reported that her statue fell down from heaven (Acts 19:35), so they built this temple in her honor. It came to be a place of ill repute.

The apostle Paul went to this city on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21), and an extended ministry of over two years transpired during his third missionary journey. (See Acts 18:18-28; 19:1-41; 20:17-38.) It was during this time that the church at Ephesus was established. Paul spent a total of three years ministering to them. (See Acts 20:31.)

The apostle John, reportedly, pastored this church over an extended period of time before being banished to the Isle of Patmos from where he wrote the book of Revelation.

The risen Lord made only one charge or complaint against the church in Ephesus, but it was a serious one. He charged it with having left its first love (Rev. 2:4). This “first love” was a love for the Lord. The people who constituted the church in Ephesus had not fallen into shameful sin; however, their love for the Lord had begun to wane. They allowed other things to come between them and the Lord.

Examine your relationship with the Lord and see if He has first place in your heart and life.

JUST A THOUGHT: *A warning is sounded out here that no believer should allow his love for the Lord to grow cold. (See Matthew 22:37.)*

Gene C. Smith

Believer's Warfare

KEY VERSE: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," Ephesians 6:11.

You are in the army now! I heard these words repeatedly after having been inducted into the army during the Korean War. We are presently at war with other nations. We all have our own personal battles to fight. None are free from the warfare with the devil and his cohorts. Thus, you are in the army now—the Lord's army.

The Devotional reading for today introduces us to the warfare that believers experience with the devil and other foes.

The Christian warrior's power or strength is set forth. We are admonished to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (verse 10). Many people are into competitive bodybuilding, but only a few derive spiritual power and strength from the Lord. This comes by putting on the "whole armour of God" (verse 11).

A Christian is to take a stand for the Lord by putting on all the armor of God and fighting the enemies of the Christian fellowship. This armor is described in verses 12-17. Some Christians want to argue, fuss with each other and cause trouble in a church's fellowship, but only a few really take a firm stand for the Lord and His work.

Prayer is the Christian warrior's resource (verse 18). We are to pray "always with all prayer and supplication." We are also admonished to pray "in the Spirit," to watch as we pray and to pray "for all saints." Prayer is a fertile resource for our spiritual strength. How is your prayer life?

JUST A THOUGHT: *Only through prayer can a Christian take up and put on the whole armor of God, making it his own in actual experience. (See Ephesians 6:24.)*

Gene C. Smith

Trust in the Lord

KEY VERSE: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding,” Proverbs 3:5.

The good life is continually promoted by the dream makers of our day. There is the good life advocated by the Madison Avenue crowd. Their idea is that the more you have, the better your life. But the question is asked, How many good things must one have before experiencing the good life? There is no obvious answer. Certainly, nice things make life more comfortable, but they can never bring true satisfaction.

The good life according to the Wall Street gathering focuses on investments or capital. Security is their promise, but it is a false security. Some despot can wipe out immense fortunes with sudden fury, causing others to lose large sums of money.

Main Street defines the good life in terms of a comfortable house, a good job and a supportive family. These are beneficial, but even the best mother or father living in a nice house with well-behaved children can suffer severe emotional and spiritual pain. How superficial the good life is when prescribed by these terms.

There is nothing wrong with nice things, profitable investments and healthy families. But, if our well-being is founded on these factors, the good life will be quite unpredictable. Therefore, we must seek out something that will give us the security that we are looking for. The admonition of the Key Verse provides the information for us that we need. “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

JUST A THOUGHT: *Do not be deceived by the worldly crowd. The real life is in Jesus and Jesus in you. (See John 6:35.)*

Gene C. Smith

Dwelling in Unity

KEY VERSE: “Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Psalm 133:1.

One of the great deceptions of our media-saturated society is that one has to be prominent or visible to be influential. Jesus taught quite the contrary. Standing on a rural hillside with some simple farmers, fishermen, carpenters and other common people, He pronounced them as the “salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13) and the “light of the world” (verse 14).

Jesus brings the same message to you. You are valuable and worthy in His eyes, created as His workmanship for a lifetime of good works that will demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God to a blind and captive world.

Realize your worth in Christ. You were not created and saved by accident but by His design to be used for His purpose that will result in eternal consequences.

Each day, on the bus, in the office, at school and over the fence, you influence others for Christ. They see either your love or your irritability. They hear your gracious comments or sarcastic remarks. The presence of the risen Christ is either reflected or obscured in your daily life.

Some Christians participate in quarrels, complaints and other abusive actions at varying times and places. This would seem to be inappropriate behavior for God’s children because such actions usually hurt someone else and hinder the work of the Lord. What a difference it would make if a change of attitude could take place in their minds. God’s people are to “dwell together in unity,” creating a harmonious and pleasant atmosphere.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Whoever you are, whatever you do, wherever you are, Christ can use you today. (See 1 Peter 2:12.)*

Gene C. Smith

Thanks for the Ephesians

KEY VERSE: “Wherefore I also, . . . cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers,” Ephesians 1:15, 16.

There were some things about Paul's character that people did not like, (he was not universally loved by the church at Corinth), but he exhibited great wisdom in the manner in which he wrote to the churches. He might have had some criticisms about their behavior, but he always started his letters with words of praise and encouragement for them.

Paul praised the Ephesians for their faith and for their love to all the saints. This must have meant a lot to them because they had great love and respect for their missionary. Paul recognized this, and his love and respect for them increased.

We often receive requests to pray for the special needs of missionaries, and we dutifully add them to our prayer list and, hopefully, remember to pray for them from time to time.

Paul did better than this. He said he never ceased to give thanks for them and to mention them in his prayers. It is comforting to know that missionaries, though they are busy in the Lord's work, take the time to pray for those who support them.

What Paul prayed for the Ephesians, we can hope that godly men are praying for us as well: that we may know God in the hope of His calling, that we may know His riches and His power. With this kind of knowledge of God, He will enable us to demonstrate the connection we have with God through Jesus Christ.

Living it: *Missionaries pray for their supporters. Their supporters should pray for the missionaries.*

Mary McCalister

Comfort in Tribulation

KEY VERSE: “And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation,” 2 Corinthians 1:7.

Paul used four key words in his introduction to his second letter to the church at Corinth: grace, peace, blessed and comfort. First, he expressed the hope that the grace of God, His favor and spiritual blessing would be experienced by his readers. Then, he wished them peace, a peace that can come only from God.

He did not fail to praise God, “blessed be God,” giving us an example of how we should always praise Him as well. Next, Paul identified God as “the God of all comfort.” This is a form of the same word used to describe one of the functions of the Holy Spirit—one who comes alongside to help in time of need. The comfort Paul described is the kind that only God can give, the kind which will see us through any trial or tribulation.

Perhaps you have asked, Why is this happening to me? Paul gave us one answer: “That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble”(verse 4). Someone who has experienced a particular trial is well able to extend comfort and understanding to another person who is suffering.

Paul reasoned that, although the sufferings of Christ abounded in the believers, we should not think that suffering is a bad thing. If Christ suffered for us, we should be willing to endure suffering for Him. Paul went on to say that, even though sufferings abound, as an example, consolation, comfort and encouragement from God also abound.

Paul gave himself as an example, testifying that he knew God was able to deliver him.

Living it: *Look to God for comfort when bad things happen.*

Mary McCalister

Giving Thanks Always

KEY VERSE: “Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Ephesians 5:20.

There is a lot of discussion in the religious community about being filled with the Spirit. Most of what worldly religion gives that label to is far from the truth. Notice what Paul says is a sign of being Spirit-filled: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Where is one of the best places to do this? In our church services, of course. The music in our services is extremely important and should be used to communicate with one another in a special way.

What happens when we do this? We find it is much easier to give thanks to God always for all things. The joy that comes to our hearts when we sing of God’s love and grace toward us will always cause us to give thanks. This is not a joy that comes because of circumstances; it is a joy that is felt even in spite of circumstances. This joy makes it possible for us to always give thanks to God for His goodness to us. This joy makes it possible for us to thank God for whatever happens to us, whether good or bad.

It is always good to remember that the devil gains the victory when the child of God complains. The Spirit-filled child of God gains the victory over the devil when he gives thanks and glorifies God in his life.

Paul said of himself, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11). None of us has suffered the trials Paul did, so we should find it easy to thank God for our circumstances.

Living it: *Remember the two A’s of giving thanks—always and all.*

Mary McCalister

Bearing Precious Seed

**KEY VERSE: “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy,”
Psalm 126:5.**

Though this is a psalm dealing with the return of Israel from captivity, there are some points we can apply to our lives as children of God. As the Israelites were released from the bondage of their oppressors, we have been released from the bondage of sin.

Notice how they expressed their joy. They laughed. They sang. They praised God, saying He had done great things for them. It is such a blessing to see the joy that comes into the life of a believer when he has accepted Christ as his Savior. All of us can share in that joy with him.

Did the Israelites just sit down and enjoy their freedom? No, they knew they must get busy sowing their crops and restoring their land. We can imagine the sowers going out with their precious seed, weeping as they sowed, asking God for a bountiful harvest.

Likewise, the child of God needs to immediately become active in the spreading of the gospel to others who need it. It is a serious task, and weeping tears, as we carry it out, is perfectly acceptable to God.

Notice the steps to take: going forth, weeping, bearing the precious seed. We cannot sow the seed of the gospel if we do not go. We need to have a heartfelt concern for the lost, even to the point of weeping.

What is God’s promise to the faithful sower? He will “doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” This is a sure promise of God, and we can depend on Him.

Living it: *You must sow the seed of the gospel if you are to reap the harvest of souls.*

Mary McCalister

Be Not Weary

KEY VERSE: “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing,” 2 Thessalonians 3:13.

The Jones family had responded to a call by the deacons for the members to come out on Saturday and do some much needed spring-cleaning around the church grounds. They arrived early so the father said, “We might as well get started. The sooner we get started, the sooner we’ll get done.”

Everyone pitched in with diligence, and soon they could see the results of their labors. The church grounds were taking on a much neater, more attractive appearance. Soon, however, they began to see something else—no one else had responded to the call for help. The children said, “Why do we have to do all the work? Why isn’t anyone coming to help?” Mother and father shrugged, not having an answer to their questions. They said, however, “We’re not responsible for what others don’t do, only for what we do. Just keep on working and we’ll soon be through.” An hour or so later, the Jones family gathered up their tools and loaded into their car, anxious to get home to a hot shower.

The father said, “I really appreciate your sticking to it, kids. How about a trip to the malt shop?”

The Jones children learned what it meant to become weary from doing well, but they also got a lesson in not becoming weary in doing well. There are a lot of times in the Christian life when it seems as if we are the only ones working. It is sometimes easy to become discouraged and say, Well, if no one else is going to do this, then I am not going to either. There is no place for this kind of discouragement in the Christian life.

Living it: *Do not be discouraged by those who are doing nothing, but continue in doing well.*

Mary McCalister

Ministry Gifts

KEY VERSE: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ,” Ephesians 4:15.

Many believers get hung up on the concept of ministry gifts. They accept that there are special callings for preachers, evangelists, pastors and missionaries, but they limit the ministry gifts to these. They cheat themselves and others by not understanding that every talent and ability we possess are gifts of God. It is our responsibility to use these gifts in God's service.

Should skilled teachers limit their teaching to secular education? Should skilled musicians give their talents to the devil for him to use to lead people astray? Or should we recognize that these talents should be dedicated to the service of God? Should those who are skilled in counseling use a worldly approach to those in need of help? Should the gardener use his skills only for making a living and never contribute to the care and upkeep of church facilities? Can skilled construction workers contribute anything to the well-being of their church family?

Examine the effects of letting God use the gifts we have. Ministering to each other brings unity to a church. Sharing our talents with others can bring about a growth of the love of a church. As all the parts of a human body work in harmony, causing the human to grow up into a strong and healthy human being, so the exercise of our ministry gifts will help our church grow up into spiritual maturity. All the parts work together in harmony and the love which is produced helps a church grow and abound in love.

Living it: *Use the gifts God has given you to help you grow up as a mature Christian.*

Mary McCalister

Reception of the Gospel

KEY VERSE: “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience,” Luke 8:15.

Giving parables was one of the methods Jesus used in His teaching. He was not always easily understood, but His disciples were wise enough to ask: “What might this parable be?” Jesus explained the parable of the sower, using examples with which they were familiar.

He likened the seed which was sown to the Word of God. Then, He described what happened to the seed. The seed sown by the wayside was like those who heard, but the devil came and took the Word out of their hearts, so they did not believe. We have all encountered this response. That sounds good, but not today, people will say.

The second response we encounter is what seems to be an enthusiastic acceptance, but soon they fall away. For them, it is just too difficult to be a Christian.

The third response is as if people say, I am just too busy to serve God. The cares and riches of the world and the pleasures of this life are too important to them. This is one of the greatest of Satan’s tools, and we can see the results all around us.

The fourth response, and a welcome one, is that they hear the Word, receive it, keep it and produce the fruits of salvation. How we as Christ’s witnesses long to see this response!

Our responsibility is to sow the seed of the Word. We must trust God to prepare the ground so that the message will be received in “an honest and good heart.”

Living it: *It is our responsibility to sow the Word of God. He is the One who produces the results.*

Mary McCalister

Sent To Preach

KEY VERSE: “And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick,” Luke 9:2.

It is interesting to take a look at the first men whom Jesus chose to preach His gospel. None of them occupied places of honor in the Jewish hierarchy. None of them came from the Levitical priesthood. Most of them were from the laboring class. The sons of Zebedee might have been considered to be well-off, but they were fishermen as were Peter and Andrew.

Judas Iscariot may well have been from a more refined culture, but look how he turned out! Matthew was a tax collector, so he may have been a man of some wealth, but he certainly was not respected by his fellow Jews. All the others—Philip, Nathanael, Thomas, James, Thaddaeus and Simon the Zealot—are mostly unknown to us. Perhaps we remember Thomas because of his doubt, but little is known about the others.

It is easy to wonder why Christ chose such an unremarkable group to be His followers. And, if we look at their personalities, the wonder grows. Some were impulsive; some were temperamental; some were easily offended; and some were harshly prejudiced. All of them were a reflection of the society in which they lived.

What, then, made them successful? The key to their success was that they had been with Jesus. They were His disciples, and now He was ready to send them to make disciples. Their first commission was a limited one, but Christ sent them with the power to preach the gospel of the kingdom and to heal the sick.

Living it: *God has given you a mission in life. Be willing and ready to obey Him.*

Mary McCalister

Test of Discipleship

KEY VERSE: “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me,”
Luke 9:23.

Luke recorded a most interesting occurrence. First, he gave Peter’s confession: “[Thou art] the Christ of God” (Luke (9:20). Jesus charged His disciples that they should tell no man what Peter had said. Then, Luke revealed that Jesus gave a concise prophecy of His future (verse 22). Immediately, Jesus followed with the instructions which form this Devotional passage.

He listed three steps the believer is to take to follow Him:

1. Deny himself. What does it mean to deny yourself? It means to count yourself as dead to sin (1 Peter. 2:24). Paul said that our old man, the sin nature, is crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6).

2. Take up his cross daily. Does this puzzle you? I once thought the teaching about the cross must have arisen from the crucifixion of Christ. But Christ used a picture which was familiar to His hearers. They were accustomed to seeing condemned criminals walking the streets carrying the cross on which they would be killed. Everyone who saw them identified them as dead men. We are to take up our cross, the symbol of our death to sin, so that everyone will know we no longer serve sin. This is something we must do daily.

3. Follow Me. We are to follow Christ, bearing our cross. This means we are identified with Him. We are His disciples. It also means He is always with us, and He will help us bear our burdens. He will never let us stumble or fall.

Living it: *Being a successful disciple happens when you put yourself last and Christ first.*

Mary McCalister

Commission To Evangelize

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

What were the things the disciples were witnesses of? They were witnesses to the truth that Christ came to suffer and die and to rise from the dead so that those who believed in Him would be saved.

Because they were witnesses to these great truths, it became their responsibility to evangelize the world, beginning at Jerusalem.

Evangelism calls on us to become friends of all people. One of the accusations made against Christ was that He was the friend of publicans and sinners. We need not participate in the world's activities, but we cannot separate ourselves from those we want to win.

How do you think a foreign missionary is able to win the people to whom he ministers? He moves into their neighborhoods, lives as they live, learns their language and learns to eat their food. When he has gained their confidence, they will listen to him when he tells them of Christ and their need of salvation.

Many people shy away from evangelism today saying they are not good at it; it is not their gift; or they do not enjoy doing it. No, it is not necessarily enjoyable, but is that enough reason not to do it?

When we study God's Word, we learn quickly that it is God's will for us to be His witnesses, His evangelists. It is not something we can choose to do or not to do. If we do not do it, we will be disobeying the will of God. Every disciple should be an evangelist.

Living it: *Everyone who receives and believes the gospel is to be a witness, bearing the good news of the gospel to others.*

Mary McCalister

Isaiah's Vision

KEY VERSE: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here *am* I; send me,” Isaiah 6:8.

Isaiah's experience at the beginning of his ministry was incredible. He was allowed to get a vision of the majesty, holiness and splendor of God. One other Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, was privileged to experience a similar vision.

Yet, there was a reason for Isaiah's vision. Every person who is to be God's witness must get a picture of God as He really is. God gave these prophets special visions, but we can get a true picture of God by studying His Word.

The effect of seeing God as He is makes us see ourselves as we are, unclean and unworthy to stand in God's presence. If that is as far as we go, we are of no use to God. But if we cry out as Isaiah did, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips,” there is hope for us. God will give us the cleansing we need to make us fit for His service. Only when we are weak can we be strong through the strength and power of God. Only when we empty ourselves of self can the marvelous grace of God flow through us. Only when we are nothing can He be our all in all.

God gave Isaiah a difficult mission. He was to go to a people who thought they were God's people when they were not. He could not expect them to welcome his message when he gave it. It is the same with us. We will not always be received with open arms, but that should not keep us from being ready, willing, yea, even eager to answer God's call, saying: “Here am I; send me.”

Living it: *Seeing God as He is will help you see yourself as you are.*

Mary McCalister

Last Invitation

KEY VERSE: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely,” Revelation 22:17.

The invitation which ends this passage is the only invitation the lost world receives today. It is to be extended by the bride, Christ’s agency here on earth. This invitation must be accompanied by the Holy Spirit, who convicts the world of sin (John 16:8) as the gospel is preached.

Then, those who hear the gospel and respond in faith can also share the invitation with others. By God’s grace and through the preaching of the gospel, sinners become aware of a spiritual thirst, and they are called to come. Jesus said, “Let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37).

The final aspect of the invitation is “whosoever will.” No matter how a person learns of the gospel and his need for salvation, God is ready to receive him if he will come.

The urgency must be on our part. Why must we call sinners to come to Christ? Go back to Revelation 22:12 to find the answer: “Behold, I come quickly.” We do not know when Christ shall return. We do not know how much time we have to witness and evangelize. We do not know how much time sinners have to repent.

Jesus Himself said no man knows the day or the hour of His coming. He commanded us to watch and be ready.

Living it: *Share the invitation as God instructed, and you can be an effective witness.*

Mary McCalister

A Faithful Servant

KEY VERSE: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine,” 2 Timothy 4:2.

Paul loved Timothy, his son in the ministry, so it is no wonder he was explicit in his letter to Timothy how to carry out his ministry. We can apply this admonition to our own lives. Paul’s admonition was “preach the word.” Preach it because it alone is inspired. Preach it because it alone is infallible. Preach it because it is the truth. Preach it because it is the wisdom of God. Preach it because God promises to bless the one who does.

Next, Paul told Timothy, and us, to “be instant in season, out of season.” We are to be ready to preach the Word at all times, whether the opportunity is favorable or unfavorable, convenient or inconvenient, welcome or unwelcome. Even if people do not receive our message, we are enjoined to be faithful in preaching it.

Another responsibility Paul pointed out was the necessity to reprove and rebuke. No one likes to be told he is doing wrong, but the message must be given. However, the spirit in which it is done is important. Not only are we to reprove and rebuke but we are also to exhort and encourage “with all longsuffering [patient instruction] and doctrine.” It is easy to become impatient when those to whom we witness do not readily accept the truths which are so important to us, but we can only remember how patient and loving God is with us and extend that same attribute to those we deal with.

Living it: *Use the Word as Paul admonished, and you can be an effective witness.*

Mary McCalister

Supreme Confidence

KEY VERSE: “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom,” 2 Timothy 4:18.

Paul became personal in this conclusion of his letter to Timothy. His remarks tell us that he was not above being hurt and disappointed by those who claimed to be his friends. He mentioned Demas, Crescens and Titus, who had all left him. He mentioned Alexander the copper-smith, who had done him much evil, and warned Timothy to be on guard against him. Finally he said, “All men forsook me.”

This could be a sad note if not for Paul’s next words, “Notwithstanding the Lord.” Today we would say, But the Lord. But and and are both conjunctions that have different meanings. And merely adds to what has already been said. But indicates something completely opposite, a contrary opinion.

“The Lord stood with me,” Paul said. This tells us that God is with us and will sustain us, even if all men fall short of filling our needs.

Did Paul face the lions in the Roman amphitheater? Perhaps he was referring to Nero, the Roman emperor who persecuted the Christians. Whatever it was, the Lord delivered Paul from the peril.

Paul had confidence in God’s protection in the future. Sometimes being delivered from the workers of evil may mean being delivered by death into God’s heavenly kingdom. Even that prospect can be a blessing for us if we have served the Lord faithfully, trusting Him to care for us in all circumstances.

Living it: *Have confidence that God is able to overcome all the hindrances and obstacles you face.*

Mary McCalister

Finished Course

KEY VERSE: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,” 2 Timothy 4:7.

Paul used examples of different kinds of athletic competitions, so I suppose I could use one example that came from my childhood. My family always went to town every Fourth of July to participate in various activities there. One thing I learned to enjoy watching was horse racing. I did not know anything about betting on the horses, but I enjoyed the races. Sometimes I would choose a horse that I thought should win. Perhaps he started off strong, but near the end of the race, he would slow down. He could not stay the course, so he would lose.

Those of us who have watched the Olympic games have seen the same thing. Athletes got off to a strong start, but they could not finish at a winning pace. They did not have enough stamina to stay the course.

As an athlete in the Christian faith, Paul said that he had played by the rules and had given it his best. He had not cheated. He said he had finished his course. That is, he had remained true to the path that God had laid out for him to follow. He had not deviated from it at all. Last, Paul said he had kept the faith. He had remained true to the doctrines and teachings which had been entrusted to him. He never wavered from God’s purpose for him, and he put his life on the line, facing death many times because he would not compromise or give in.

What reward did Paul have to look forward to? He knew he would receive a crown of righteousness. He also said this crown would be given to all those who love Christ’s appearing. Is this enough incentive for you?

Living it: *It is not how strong you start but how strong you finish that is important.*

Mary McCalister

Call of Matthew

KEY VERSE: “And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him,” Mark 2:14.

Have you ever had the thought—I cannot see what the Lord will do with him—about some man who surrendered to preach? Undoubtedly, some people had thoughts like that when they heard that Jesus had called Matthew, also known as Levi, to be one of His disciples. That tax collector! they may have exclaimed. To the Jews the tax collectors were at the bottom of the list. They used a discouraging word, publicans, always in hatred and derision when referring to them.

Jesus knew Matthew better than anyone else. First, he immediately responded to Christ’s call, leaving everything behind to follow Him. Then, he hosted a dinner for Christ to celebrate his new life, to show he was abandoning his old life and to introduce all his family and acquaintances to Jesus. God placed His stamp of approval on Matthew by choosing him to be the human author of one of the gospels. Matthew presents Christ as the King and reveals truths to us about His kingdom. Matthew’s gospel contains all the kingdom parables.

Humility was a true mark of Matthew’s commitment and consecration. Not one time does he mention himself in the gospel which bears his name. Look at the qualities which distinguished Matthew’s ministry and resolve to add them to your life: willingness to respond to Christ’s call, evangelizing those around you, humility which puts Christ first and yourself last. Yes, there is much we can learn from this disciple.

Living It: *When God calls us to service, we should respond with eagerness.*

Mary McCalister

Jesus Before Pilate

KEY VERSE: “Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man,” Luke 23:4.

It hurts to be wrongly accused. Jesus, of course, is our best example of how to handle wrongful accusations. When brought before Pilate, Jesus responded in such a way to cause Pilate to say, “I find no fault in this man.” Can anyone say that about us?

Peter went to great lengths to deal with wrongful treatment and how we should handle it (1 Peter 2:19-24). He said we should be thankful if we suffer wrongfully. We should take wrongful suffering patiently because this is what brings glory to God.

Then Peter pointed out a great truth examined in this Devotional reading: “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (verses 21-23).

Make a list of these characteristics, memorize it and make it a part of your life.

1. Do not yield to sin.
2. Always speak the truth.
3. Do not respond to wrongful accusations.
4. Bear suffering meekly.
5. Commit yourself to God, knowing He will judge righteously.

Paul said, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: . . . made himself of no reputation, . . . humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5, 7, 8).

Living it: *We do not stand faultless as Christ did, but we should not argue with those who accuse us wrongly.*

Mary McCalister

Jesus Before Herod

KEY VERSE: “Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing,” Luke 23:9.

None of us can comprehend the anguish that Jesus took upon Himself as He fulfilled God’s purpose for Him. We get some inkling of it in the account of His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: “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).

This, however, was not the end of His suffering. He was arrested, beaten and tormented. Then, He was brought before Pilate to be accused. When Pilate could find no fault in Him, he sent Jesus to Herod. Herod looked on Jesus as a mere vehicle of entertainment. He wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle. But, when Herod spoke to Jesus, He “answered him nothing.”

Adding to the anguish that Christ felt, Herod and his troops mocked Him, dressed Him in a royal robe and sent Him back to Pilate.

As Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but thine, be done,” so every minister and servant of God should accept whatever comes in his life, letting God be the One who answers for him and defends him. As humans, we tend to have an exaggerated respect for the rich and powerful, especially those who wield the powers of government; yet, if we are faced with the decision to either abandon our faith or lose our lives, the choice should always be the latter. Christ is our perfect example in making the right choice. Over fifty million martyrs have shown us the right choice to make. God can defend and deliver us, or He can take us home to be with Him. Either way, we can rely upon God to take care of us.

Living it: *It is better if we depend on God to defend us.*

Mary McCalister

Paul To Be Offered Up

KEY VERSE: “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all,” Philippians 2:17.

All true servants of God must come to realize that they are offering up their lives as a sacrifice to the work that God has called them to do. When Paul wrote, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31), he was telling his readers that he faced death daily and was not concerned about it; in fact, he rejoiced at being called on to face that challenge and called on his readers to rejoice with him.

If we are to reach the same level as Paul, then we must follow his admonition to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Once we do that, we can then state with confidence, as Paul did, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

We do not hear much about Christians’ being persecuted for their faith, though there is no doubt more of it going on than we hear about. But we need to realize that much of the world today is occupied by those of the Islamic faith, and one of their chants is “Death to the infidels.” Though almost the entire world seems to be open to the propagation of the gospel, this could change soon, and we could all be called on to take a stand for our faith. Our need is to be able to rejoice as Paul did when he faced death, knowing that this is the ultimate test of our faith.

At the same time, we must day-by-day live sacrificial lives which are our testimonies of our faith in Christ.

Living it: *Let your life be a living sacrifice which is acceptable to God.*

Mary McCalister

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.

Jeremiah is labeled by some Bible scholars as the reluctant prophet, the melancholy prophet, the grieving prophet. And with good reason. Jeremiah’s life was not a happy one. He was not even allowed to marry, so we could add loneliness to his list of character traits. The message God gave him to give to the people was not a cheerful one, and he was scorned and persecuted for his words, even to the point of being cast into an abandoned cistern and left to die.

Jeremiah’s first encounter with God was when he was still a young boy, perhaps twelve or thirteen years old. God’s call was direct, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (verse 5).

Jeremiah’s response was not much different from that of many young men today when they first realize God is calling them to a special ministry: “I cannot speak: for I am a child” (verse 6).

What a daunting challenge this was because God told Jeremiah that He would set him over nations and kingdoms. God’s purpose for him was that he would root out, pull down, destroy, throw down and then build and plant.

God showed His care for Jeremiah because He touched his mouth, saying that He had put His words in Jeremiah’s mouth. That is, God would tell Jeremiah what his message was to be. God’s promise was one which sustained Jeremiah in the darkest of times: “I am with thee to deliver thee” (verse 8).

Living it: *Resolve to believe that God will equip those for the task He has called them to do.*

Mary McCalister

Submit to Ordinance

KEY VERSE: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake,” 1 Peter 2:13.

Ever since the time of Martin Luther King, we have heard a lot about civil disobedience. He taught that, if you do not agree with the law, you do not have to obey it. Although he was called a Christian minister, his stand for civil disobedience cannot be justified by the Scripture. The standard the Christian is to follow is

1. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man” (verse 13). Submit to all forms of rightful human authority, whether you agree with that authority or not.

2. Do not use your liberty as a cover-up for evil. We have great freedom in Christ, but we are not to abuse that freedom and use it to justify wrong actions.

3. Honor all men. Develop the character trait of being courteous to all people. There is no room for rude behavior in the life of the Christian.

4. “Love the brotherhood” (verse 17). Show a special kind of love for “the brotherhood,” those of like faith. An old song says we will be known as Christians by our love.

5. “Fear God” (verse 17). To fear God is to show Him the reverence, honor and respect which are due Him as our Creator and heavenly Father.

6. Honor the king. Once again we are admonished to show respect for those in authority. Christians should not lead a revolt against established authority. We should endure persecution and leave it up to God to deliver us if it is His will.

7. “Servants, be subject to your masters” (verse 18). Today we would say that employees should be subject to their employers. Christian testimony in the workplace is important.

Living it: *You can serve God without disobeying man’s laws.*

Mary McCalister

Christ's Example of Suffering

KEY VERSE: "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth," 1 Peter 2:22.

Peter wrote that the Christian can expect to be called on to suffer. He had already said, "When ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:20). Then, Peter reminded us that Christ suffered for us, that He is our example and that we should endure suffering as Christ did.

What is Christ's example?

1. He did not sin.

We need to have the Christlike attitude that suffering is for a purpose and accept it.

2. He was without guile (deceit).

We are prone to blame someone else for what happens to us instead of accepting it as God's will for us.

3. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return.

The instinctive human response to abuse is to try to get even and to hurt in return for being hurt. This was not Christ's attitude or His example for us.

4. When He suffered, He did not threaten vengeance.

The song says, "He could have called ten thousand angels," but Christ did not seek vengeance against His tormentors.

Isaiah 53:7-9 gives a graphic picture of the sufferings of Christ. Though He was oppressed, afflicted and brought as a lamb for the slaughter, He did not open His mouth. In all His suffering, Jesus never reacted with violence nor did He practice deceit at any time.

None of us are able to respond at times as Christ did, but we should study His example and do our best at all times to follow it.

Living it: *If the sinless Christ suffered, we should not be surprised if we are called on to suffer unjustly.*

Mary McCalister

Cast Care on Him

KEY VERSE: “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you,” 1 Peter 5:7.

It is important for you to know that 1 Peter 5:6, 7 is all one sentence. Peter instructed us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. How, you may ask? We do this by casting all our care upon Him. A small child endears himself to his parent, saying, “Here, you do it. I cannot do it by myself.” We endear ourselves to God when we entrust ourselves completely to Him.

It is humbling to admit that we cannot solve our problems by ourselves. We love to feel that we are strong, self-sufficient and able to do all we need to do to be successful. When we feel this way, we are easy prey for the devil, the roaring lion, who looks for someone he can devour.

How do we gain victory over the devil? First, we must cast our care upon God. Then, we must resist all the devil’s wiles. James said, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Just say no. You do not have to give in to temptation. You do not have to commit sin. God can give you the strength you need to overcome the temptations of the devil.

The important truth is that you can say no to the devil and he will flee from you. He will not keep trying to lead a strong Christian astray. He would rather spend his time with those who are weak in the faith.

True, there will be trials, testings and tribulations, but God’s promise is that He will make you what you ought to be, establishing and grounding you securely, strengthening you and settling you in the faith.

Living it: *Have complete faith and trust in God to take care of you.*

Mary McCalister

Spirit of Truth and Error

KEY VERSE: “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world,” 1 John 4:4.

Young Christians often say, There are so many different teachings, and everyone who teaches them says he is led by God. How can we know if what we hear is right or wrong? Basically, this is a question that John answered in this passage.

John’s admonition was to try or test the spirits. How do we do this? We can test them by finding out what they believe about Christ. Do they believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh as the Son of God? We can test them to see if their teachings measure up to the truths of God’s Word.

Truth is not relative. Jesus told the believing Jews, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). He later prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The Word of God is to be our yardstick by which we measure what we hear.

Yes, as John warned us, there are many false prophets or teachers going about teaching their false doctrines. He also gave us a strong warning about the spirit of antichrist, saying those who teach error have the spirit of antichrist, not of God. It is interesting that this term is found only four times in the Bible, all of them in John’s letters. As we near the end of this age, it is more important than ever for us to know the truth of God’s Word. The only way we can do this is to become immersed in faithful Bible study so that we will be able to recognize what is truth and what is error.

Living it: *Judge all teachings by what the Bible says, not by how they make you feel.*

Mary McCalister

Troubled but Not Distressed

KEY VERSE: “*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair,*” 2 Corinthians 4:8.

When the Titanic struck an iceberg on its maiden voyage, it was doomed to sink. There were only enough lifeboats for half of the passengers. The call went out to man the lifeboats, women and children first. As the ship was sinking, there were two types of passengers—those who would be saved and those who would perish in the Atlantic. Those who boarded the lifeboats were perplexed. They wondered why the ship, which was advertised to be unsinkable, was sinking. Though they were perplexed at the situation, they were not without hope. Their lives would be spared. The other type of passenger, those doomed to perish, had no hope for survival.

The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures is the greatest hope of humanity. Apart from the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, there is no hope of eternal life in Heaven. Jesus willingly took upon Himself the sorrow and anguish of the cross so that anyone who called upon Him would be saved. The anguish of the cross led to the triumph of the resurrection and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The child of God will suffer persecution for Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 3:12). The persecuted Christian is not without hope. The light affliction suffered by the child of God will work toward a greater glory in eternity ((2 Cor. 4:17).

Just A Thought: *The security that the believer has in Jesus Christ gives him boldness to face whatever persecution he may suffer.*

Marc Shultz

Ambassadors for Christ

KEY VERSE: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God,” 2 Corinthians 5:20.

An ambassador is the highest ranking diplomat in a foreign country. He represents the interests of his federal government and citizens in that country. His words are interpreted as the official voice of the country he represents. His country is viewed honorably or dishonorably by his actions.

An ambassador for Jesus Christ represents the cause of Christ in the world. His thoughts, words and actions are not his own. They are reflected upon Christ because of his profession of faith. The world will judge not only his life but also his testimony for Jesus Christ by the places he goes, the words he speaks and the things he does.

The person who professes Christ as Savior is a new creature (verse 17). He no longer lives for himself but for God (verse 15). The child of God becomes an ambassador for Jesus Christ when he professes faith in Him as Savior. His life is judged in a new light because of his profession of faith. He has been reconciled to God by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Jesus was made sin for us so we could be made righteous through Him (verse 21). “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20).

Just A Thought: *How well do you represent Christ?*

Marc Shultz

Appeal to Reason

KEY VERSE: Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isaiah 1:18.

Police officers investigated a brutal murder. Blood stained the sidewalk outside the murder scene. Soon after the evidence had been gathered, it began to snow. The white snow covered the bloodstained sidewalk until the blood could no longer be seen.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sins (1 John 1:7). Through the shed blood of Jesus we are forgiven of all our sins, past, present and future. Without the shedding of the Lord's blood, there is no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22).

The cleansing of sin made available through Jesus Christ should cause the child of God to turn from evil (Isa. 1:16). The forgiveness of sin is not a license to sin. In true repentance, the child of God will turn away from sin and live for Christ. He should discipline himself to do good in both his physical and spiritual life.

To reason with God, man must admit he is a sinner. His deeds are evil and an abomination to God. Man must also admit that he is powerless to do anything about his nature. Man must then seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Man can know he has been forgiven, and he can have peace with God.

Just A Thought: *Man can only reason with God through faith in Jesus Christ.*

Marc Shultz

Why Some Are Not Saved

KEY VERSE: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved,” Jeremiah 8:20.

A pastor invited a casual acquaintance to the revival meeting at the church he pastored. Much to his delight, the man agreed to attend service the first night. The pastor visited the man the next day to talk to him about his spiritual condition. He replied that he had listened to the message and considered its content. He reasoned the message in his mind and decided against making a commitment to Christ. He would not consider the matter any further. He had the opportunity to accept Christ as Savior but decided against it. He remained unsaved by choice.

A farmer plows the field and plants the seed in the ground. He keeps the weeds out of the garden and waters the ground. He has done all he can. If the harvest does not come, he is not at fault; however, if he does not prepare the soil, plant the seed and tend to the ground, he should not expect to harvest a crop.

It is the duty of the child of God to share the gospel with the lost. Some will heed the message and accept Christ as Savior, but many will reject the gospel and remain lost. A lost person remains unsaved by choice. Whatever excuses the lost may have will not be accepted at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Just A Thought: *A farmer plants the seed in anticipation of the harvest. The gospel is preached in anticipation of the lost being saved.*

Marc Shultz

Uncertain Future

KEY VERSE: “Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away,” James 4:14.

It was a sad day. My grandparents had passed away and the time had come to sell their house. They both had lived over eighty years and had been married for over sixty years. A rental truck was backed up to the house and a lifetime of belongings were packed to move. All of their possessions were loaded into a fourteen-foot moving van. It was a reminder of the perspective of life. A person comes into this life with nothing and leaves with nothing. Whatever is accumulated in between is borrowed.

Nothing in life is certain. A person cannot guarantee life beyond the present moment. His plans and dreams are not likely to come true. He does not know what will happen in five minutes, much less tomorrow. All he has can be taken away in a moment; however, the uncertainty of life does not have to lead to despair.

The only way to face the uncertainty of the future is to trust in God. A person should not make plans without first considering God’s will (verse 15). God’s will is determined with the future in mind. Mankind makes his plans without knowledge of the future. A person should only do what God permits within His will. To know to do good and not do it is sin (verse 17). Doing God’s will makes the future bright.

Just A Thought: *The assurances man has of the future are death, judgment and the Lord’s return.*

Marc Shultz

My Shepherd

KEY VERSE: “The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want,” Psalm 23:1.

A young boy attempted to recite the Twenty-third Psalm. His rendition was a little different from the King James Version. He recited, “The Lord is my shepherd, what else could I want?” While his words were mixed-up, the message was the same. The Lord was his Shepherd, and he needed nothing else.

Sheep are not smart animals. They are totally dependent upon the shepherd for their care. The shepherd has to be extraordinary in his care for the sheep. The sheep are so familiar with their shepherd that they will not respond to the shepherd of other flocks. The sheep accept the care the shepherd gives them.

David spoke of the physical care of the Lord for His sheep. He leads them to the green pastures and still waters. “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

David also spoke of the spiritual care the Lord provides for His sheep. He restores their soul and leads them in the paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3). The Lord provides forgiveness and salvation for His sheep. He leads them in the paths of righteousness and away from the dangers of the world (verse 3). He provides courage in the valley of the shadow of death (verse 4). The sheep will experience goodness and mercy all the days of their lives (verse 6).

Just A Thought: *The Lord is your Shepherd. No one cares for you as He does.*

Marc Shultz

Fools for Christ's Sake

KEY VERSE: "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men," 1 Corinthians 4:9.

The weather was frigid at the college football game. The fans were clothed in warm clothing and heavy coats. In one end zone seat was a fan who had taken his love for the team to an extreme. He was not wearing a shirt. He had painted the school's name on his body and dyed his hair the school's colors. He had made a spectacle of himself in support of his favorite team.

The apostles made spectacles of themselves for Christ's sake. They were considered fools because of their belief in Christ. They were despised, reviled and considered out-of-step with society. They suffered persecution for Christ's sake (verse 12). They were considered the filth of the world (verse 13). They did not allow the defamation that they suffered to prevent them from being faithful to the Lord.

The world considers anyone who believes in Jesus Christ a fool. In its eyes, Confucius, Muhammad and Gandhi are superior religious personalities to Jesus. The world considers the person who serves the Lord a fool. He should serve his own interests because no one else will. The world considers it a waste of time to serve the Lord. The world considers anyone who lives a godly life-style a fool. It considers morality a personal choice. If these are foolish behaviors, then everyone should be a fool.

Just A Thought: *Be a fool for Christ and not wise in the world.*

Marc Shultz

Walk Worthy of Vocation

KEY VERSE: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,” Ephesians 4:1.

One of my first public jobs was in a men's clothing store. When I was hired, I was told the standard of dress and conduct expected of employees. A coat and tie were required dress. Courtesy with customers was of utmost importance. The standard of conduct also required that all employees do whatever the manager asked of them. One of the sales clerks lost his job because he refused to vacuum the floor at closing time as instructed by the manager.

The child of God is to conduct himself properly as he fulfills his divine calling. The Christian should be humble in his service to God. He is to exercise self-restraint while lifting up others in love (verse 2). He is to be unified with the Holy Spirit in purpose and peaceful in demeanor (verse 3).

The child of God is under observation by the world. His conduct is a reflection upon God, the church of his membership and his own testimony. The world is looking for an opportunity to find fault in his conduct. Christians must be on their best behavior even in less than ideal situations. They should glorify God with their lives even when they feel mistreated. They should conduct themselves in a godly manner even when they think no one is looking. They should conduct themselves in a godly manner because God is watching.

Just A Thought: *You either conduct yourself worthy or unworthy of God's calling. There is no middle ground.*

Marc Shultz

Enemy Because of the Truth

KEY VERSE: “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” Galatians 4:16.

During World War II, Western Union telegrams were used to relay messages to families about the fate of their loved ones in the armed services. Often the message was that the soldier had either been killed in action, wounded in action, taken prisoner of war or was missing in action. This was devastating news for the families. People would hate to see an approaching Western Union messenger for fear of what bad news he might bring.

The apostle Paul boldly spoke the truth of God. He was not ashamed of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16). Those who heard his message did not always appreciate his boldness of speech. They blamed Paul for the conviction brought on by the preaching of the gospel. Rather than conforming to the message of the gospel, they found fault with the messenger. They thought that everything would be all right if Paul would quit preaching Jesus to them.

The preacher of the gospel presents the message of God. The message of the gospel brings conviction to the unrepentant hearer. Only obedience to the gospel will ease the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The response to the preaching of the gospel should be to conform to the message, not to despise the message bearer. The preacher should be honored for declaring the truth of God's Word. “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Just A Thought: *Despising truth does not diminish a person's responsibility to obey it.*

Marc Shultz

Some Shall Suffer Persecution

KEY VERSE: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,” 2 Timothy 3:12.

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas. The Warren Commission concluded that the assassination was the act of one man. In the nation’s grief, many people blamed everyone in Dallas for the assassination. One man out of a population of three hundred thousand committed the crime; yet, everyone in Dallas was blamed. Citizens of Dallas who traveled outside the city were looked upon with disdain and innocently suffered in the aftermath of the assassination.

Paul stated that everyone who lives godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. They will be put to the test and made to contend for their belief in Christ. They will suffer physical pain and mental anguish for their faithfulness. They will suffer ridicule because of their moral lifestyle and godly demeanor. They will suffer for no other reason than their faithfulness to Christ.

Paul stated that he suffered persecution at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. He was not bragging about what he had to suffer. Paul was reporting on God’s faithfulness to deliver him out of his persecutions (verse 11). The child of God should not expect persecutions to cease. The world will get worse in its treatment of Christians (verse 13). The Christian response to persecution is to continue to be faithful to God in the midst of difficulty (verse 14).

Just A Thought: *The reality of persecution is not a reason to be unfaithful to Christ.*

Marc Shultz

Maintain Good Works

KEY VERSE: “And let our’s also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful,” Titus 3:14.

I learned to ride a bicycle on a friend’s bike. My first few attempts lasted just a few feet before I lost my balance and fell over. It was not until I learned to maintain my balance that I was able to ride for a distance.

A new convert to Jesus Christ is often filled with zeal to serve the Lord. He is faithful to witness to others about Jesus, to read his Bible and to pray. Before long that zeal begins to subside. He is no longer as faithful to the Lord as he was just after his conversion. He has not maintained his good works.

The person who has professed Christ as Savior should continue to do good works and serve the Lord (verse 8). He should avoid the foolish, vain and unprofitable actions that will rob him of his spirituality (verse 9). He should avoid people who would cause him to depart from the truth and to do unfruitful works.

The child of God is to continue to do the things which produce spiritual fruit. He should continue to witness to the lost, which will win people to Christ. He should continue to serve the Lord, which will cause the church of his membership to grow. He should continue to love others, which pictures God’s love for the world. He should continue to read his Bible and pray, which will cause him to grow spiritually.

Just A Thought: *A person cannot maintain good habits he has not cultivated in the first place.*

Marc Shultz

The Mind of Christ in Us

KEY VERSE: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” Philippians 2:5.

An actor portrayed the humorist Will Rogers on stage. Before each performance he would spend several hours in makeup being made to look like Will Rogers. He would wear clothes similar to those worn by Will Rogers. He would spend the last moments before the performance getting into character. He would imagine in his mind that he really was Will Rogers so he could act like him on stage.

Christians are to have the same reflective consciousness as Jesus had. On earth He was God made in the form of flesh. He had the mind and nature of God and the emotions of the flesh. The Lord's desire was to do the work of the Father who sent Him to earth. While He took upon Himself the form of flesh, He maintained the nature of God. He resisted the temptations of the flesh and lived righteously. Jesus maintained the example of godliness.

The mind of God is superior to the mind of man. God thinks upon spiritual matters while the nature of the human mind is to think on things of the sinful flesh. Jesus thought it not robbery to be equal with God (verse 6). In humility, He became a servant to the Father's will (verse 8). He was obedient to the point of death on the cross. In like-mindedness with Christ, the child of God should humbly do the will of the Father in Heaven.

Just A Thought: *To be like Christ, one must have the mind of Christ. Do you think like Christ?*

Marc Shultz

Jesus Pleased the Father

KEY VERSE: “And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him,” John 8:29.

My family was Christmas shopping in a bookstore. While looking for gifts for others, I came across a book I really wanted. It was on sale but still more than I usually spend on myself. I was tempted to buy the book but decided against it. We were shopping for others. A couple of days before Christmas a friend gave me a gift. When I unwrapped it, I was delighted to discover that it was the same book I had wanted to buy for myself. My friend had been in the same bookstore the same day. Because he knew my tastes, he thought I would enjoy the book. My friend gave me a gift that fit my tastes.

Jesus performed service fit for His Father. He knew what was expected of Him. Jesus always did those things that pleased His Father. The Lord's work was part of His Father's plan. He never did anything that violated His Father's will. He and His Father were one in thought, will and action.

Jesus spoke words pleasing to His Father (verse 26). He proclaimed the gospel to the lost and promised forgiveness to the penitent. He spoke of the necessity of loving God and others. Jesus did those things that pleased His Father (verse 29); He did nothing of Himself. He glorified His Father in all His life. Jesus said that everyone who followed His example would be His disciples.

Just A Thought: *Following the Lord always pleases God the Father.*

Marc Shultz

Faithful Stewards

KEY VERSE: “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful,” 1 Corinthians 4:2.

I once worked in a busy convenience store. Thousands of dollars of business were transacted each shift. The main responsibility of the employees was the money in the cash register. On one occasion the day’s balance was short several hundred dollars. The management’s investigation discovered that an employee had taken the money. Because I had been a faithful steward of my responsibility, I was not under suspicion.

A steward is someone who has been entrusted with something of value. He cares for it in place of the owner. He is responsible for the safekeeping and proper use of the item in his care. Every child of God will be held accountable for the abilities and blessings that God has given him (verse 1). He should be a faithful steward so that he will not be ashamed before God. A person will not judge himself but will be judged by the Lord (verse 4).

There is no better investment of your talents and resources than in the work of the Lord. Continually use your blessings for His work. The faithful steward has no reason to fear answering to God for his stewardship. The faithful steward will not abuse the blessings that he has been granted. He will not use them in any way that would bring dishonor to God. Consider the spiritual good that will be accomplished with your investment in the Lord’s work.

Just A Thought: *The faithful steward will not allow his blessings to go unused. He will use them for the Lord and not himself.*

Marc Shultz

Loyalty to Christ

KEY VERSE: “And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me,” Matthew 11:6.

I attempted to enlist a family into the services of the church I pastored. They had not attended church in over twenty years. The family called on me for counsel in a time of crisis. They had dropped out of church because a previous pastor had violated their confidence in a sensitive matter. I explained to them that their loyalty to God should be greater than their disappointment in people. The actions of an individual should not become a stumbling block to their service to the Lord.

The humanity of the Lord was a stumbling block to many believing on Him as the Son of God. They could not believe a common-looking man could actually be the Messiah. While in prison, John sent messengers to Jesus and asked if He was the One they were looking for or if they should look for another (verses 2, 3). Jesus told them to return and tell John of the things they had witnessed. The blind had been given sight, the lame made to walk and the deaf made to hear (verses 4, 5). Jesus answered John by deeds rather than words. His works were proof that He was the Son of God.

You should be loyal to the Lord because of what He has already done for you. He has saved you, has forgiven your sins and has blessed your life. What more could He do for you?

Just A Thought: *The Lord requires the same loyalty He has given you.*

Marc Shultz

Faithful Servants

KEY VERSE: “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,” Romans 16:25.

Doug was playing with his friends when his younger sister told him it was time to come home. He ignored her. Several minutes later she returned and said, “Mother said it is time to come home.” This time he heeded the instructions. Doug ignored his sister the first time because he thought it was just his sister talking. He listened to her the second time because she carried her mother’s authority. His mother’s authority established his sister’s words.

A child of God is also a servant of God. He is to serve the Lord in all things. A servant is not left to his own desires but to the will of his master. His work is mandated by the instructions of his master. The servant of God is not left to choose his own destiny in life. His work is to do the will of the Father in Heaven. The servant does not question the will of the master but humbly conforms to it. The servant of God is confident the Master knows best and follows God’s will.

The servitude of Christians removes personal will from consideration. What the servant wants is not important. His works are established in the will of God and empowered by the Lord. The servant of the Lord can do all things through Christ who strengthens him (Phil. 4:13).

Just A Thought: *The work of Christians must be established in God’s will.*

Marc Shultz

Obedient Christians

KEY VERSE: “I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all *things*.” 2 Corinthians 7:16.

Dad drove into the driveway in a new Buick Electra 225. It was the largest car Buick made. Dad tossed me the keys and told me to drive around the block. I had never driven a car that large before, and I was more than just a little nervous. This was a much more expensive car than the one I normally drove. What meant more to me than the opportunity to drive the new car was the fact that dad trusted me to drive it.

Christians should have the confidence of God in everything they do. They should have the confidence of God in the way they conduct their personal lives. They should not go anywhere, do anything, say anything or think anything that would not please God. They should have the confidence of God in how they conduct their spiritual lives. They should seek God's will in every decision they make. Once they have discovered the will of God, they should follow it. They should become spiritually minded through Bible study and prayer. The more confidence God has in a person, the more confidence he will have in himself.

The more confidence God has in a person, the greater his responsibility will be in the work of the Lord. God had great confidence in the apostle Paul because of his faithful service. He had endured many afflictions to serve the Lord. Paul had great confidence in Titus because of his faithfulness.

Just A Thought: *Do not betray the great confidence God has placed in you.*

Marc Shultz

Press Forward

KEY VERSE: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” Philippians 3:14.

In a bygone era the carousel was the favorite ride in most amusement parks. Passengers would ride hand carved wooden horses around the track of the ride. Those brave enough could attempt to get the brass ring to win a free ride. It was just beyond the reach of the average person. He would be forced to lean far off the horse to reach the prize. It was considered a great fete to snatch the brass ring.

There is also a prize for the child of God. It is the high calling of God. Unlike the brass ring on the carousel, this prize is attainable to everyone who reaches for it. It carries a reward unequalled in human experience. For the soul-winner, the prize is winning a person to Christ. To the faithful pastor, it is sharing the mysteries of God’s Word. For the cheerful giver, it is seeing a return for his investment in God’s work. For the servant of God, it is seeing spiritual fruit as a result of his labor.

Only the person who presses toward the prize will attain it. A person cannot press forward while looking backward (verse 13). Where a person has been is not as important as where he is going. A person cannot attain the prize without a vision of the goal. He must reach for the things that are before him. He cannot win the prize if he does not run the race. Without effort there will be no victory.

Just A Thought: *The goal that God has set before you is attainable.*

Marc Shultz

Jesus Saved from Stoning

KEY VERSE: “Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by,” John 8:59.

The pastor stood in the foyer of the church building greeting worshipers as they left that day’s service. Most shook his hand and told him that they had enjoyed the message. One man refused to shake his hand; instead, he shook his finger in the pastor’s face. Part of the message that morning stressed the need for Christians to abstain from drinking alcohol. The pastor did not know that this man was an alcoholic. He thought the pastor had singled him out in the message. In reality, his anger was misdirected toward the pastor. The pastor had preached the message God had laid on his heart. The Holy Spirit used the message to convict the man of his need to change his life-style.

Jesus went into the Temple to preach the truth (John 8:45, 46). The scribes and Pharisees took exception to His message. They did not accept Him as the Messiah. They sought to ridicule His message. The preaching of the gospel will bring one of two responses. The hearer will either accept the message as truth or reject its validity. Some people who reject gospel truth are hostile at its proclamation because of the conviction it brings.

The scribes and Pharisees sought to stone Jesus for preaching the truth. He fled their presence because He came to die on the cross, and His time had not yet come.

Just A Thought: *Without conviction, the preached Word has no influence on unbelievers.*

Marc Shultz

Jonah's Protection and Prayer

KEY VERSE: “And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*,” Jonah 2:10.

The man who made a public profession of faith in Christ had lived a rough life. For many years he was a member of a notorious gang. As a part of being a gang member, he had covered his body with vulgar tattoos. There was no way to remove the tattoos. All he could do was keep them covered with clothing. It was a reminder of his sinful past.

The three days and nights Jonah spent in the belly of the fish were not pleasant. (See Matthew 12:40.) In addition to the physical discomfort was the knowledge that he had brought judgment upon himself by not obeying God. Jonah prayed while in the belly of the whale and repented to God. The whale vomited him out onto dry land. The judgment of God would have been avoided if Jonah had obeyed God the first time.

The Lord spoke to Jonah the second time and told him to go to Nineveh and preach His message (Jonah 3:1). Jonah's attitude had not changed, but his spirit was broken. He still did not want to go to Nineveh, but Jonah realized that he had no other option. Although his heart was not right, Jonah preached God's message that the people should repent. The people believed the message, repented from their evil ways and God spared the city from destruction. Jonah, however, did not appreciate the blessing that God had bestowed on Nineveh.

Just A Thought: *The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).*

Marc Shultz

Daniel's Protection

KEY VERSE: “My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt,” Daniel 6:22.

The shark tank is a popular exhibit at the aquarium. One day several visitors were invited to view the sharks from the metal platform where the staff fed the sharks. The platform gave way under the weight, and everyone standing on it was thrown into the water. Normally, the sharks would have attacked the humans because of their predatory nature. Because the sharks had been well fed, they did not attack. Everyone was pulled from the shark tank unharmed.

Darius was king over Babylon. Daniel was one of his trusted advisors. Daniel was a man of God who served Him first. Other advisors of Darius did not like Daniel because he served the Lord. They convinced Darius to sign a decree that no one could ask any petition of God or any other person other than the king for thirty days. The offender would be thrown into the den of lions (Dan. 6:7). These advisors knew that Daniel would not obey the decree. They saw it as a way to get rid of him. Daniel knew the decree had been signed but prayed as he had before. He did not wait for the thirty days to end before he prayed. He did not pray in private. Daniel prayed in public and trusted God to work His will. Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den but was not harmed.

Just A Thought: *God protects His own, even in desperate situations.*

Marc Shultz

Jeremiah's Deliverance

KEY VERSE: "And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it," Jeremiah 33:9.

Basic training for military service is one of the most stressful events a person can endure. Little, if anything, the enlisted man has experienced in life will prepare him to be a soldier. In basic training he is stripped of his preconceived notions and habits and retrained to think and act like a soldier. After basic training he is more disciplined and better able to live life as a soldier.

The judgment of God is not just for punishing wrong doers. It is also designed to cause the sinner to turn from the actions which caused God's judgment. Many times God allowed His chosen nation to suffer captivity. The captivity was intended to cause the people to return to God. The captivity was harsh. It was not a pleasant experience to be under the control of a godless enemy. God had no favor for the captors. He used them to bring His people to their knees in repentance.

God told Jeremiah that there was a purpose to the captivity of Judah and Israel. God would allow their captivity so that He might rebuild them to their stature before disobedience caused divine judgment (verse 7). Future generations would know of God's power because He restored His nation (verse 9).

Just A Thought: *It is better to obey God before judgment comes.*

Marc Shultz

Doxology of Praise

KEY VERSE: “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation,” Habakkuk 3:18.

A man’s family and loved ones surrounded his hospital bed as he spent his last few minutes on earth. Disease was taking away his prime years of life. He had spent many days in the hospital taking treatments that proved powerless to restore his health. He spoke to his family in positive words. He rejoiced because God had helped him in the valley of the shadow of death. He spoke of how he had learned how much his family loved him. He left his earthly home rejoicing in the glory of God.

Every day of life is spent in the valley of the shadow of death. No one knows what calamity is just around the corner. He does not know of the pain and sorrow that life will bring tomorrow, or even if he will see tomorrow’s dawn. All a person can hope for is rest in the day of trouble (verse 16). No one can avoid all the trials of life. He needs to find the calm in the eye of the storm.

The Lord God is your strength in the trials of life. David stated that even though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he would not fear evil because the Lord was with him (Psalm 23:4). Walking through the valley makes the mountaintop view even more glorious. Knowing the Lord will help you through the tough times makes the good times even more joyful.

Just A Thought: *Christians should rejoice evermore, not just when times are good (1 Thess. 5:16).*

Marc Shultz

Jesus and Storms

KEY VERSE: “But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me,” Matthew 14:30.

The Lord’s disciples were in a boat when Jesus walked to them on the water. This should have suggested something to them. Because Jesus was able to walk on the water, the forces of nature were under His control. Simon Peter asked the Lord for the power to walk on the water to Him. It required faith for Peter to put his feet over the side of the boat and do what no other mere man had done before, walk on top of the water. It was only possible through the power of the Lord.

At first everything was fine as Simon Peter walked on the water. His eyes were fixed on Jesus and he had no fear. The darkness and the storm began to worry Peter. He felt the wind blowing against his flesh and the waves lapping at his feet. As a fisherman, Simon Peter was familiar with the severity of storms on the Sea of Galilee. In a moment of weakness, he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink into the sea. He should have remembered that Jesus had power over the storm and would not allow him to perish. Jesus stretched out His hand and saved Simon Peter from drowning. When they returned to the boat, the storm ceased. There is no reason to fear the storms of life because the Lord will help you through them.

Just A Thought: *Your faith in God should be greater than your fear of the storm.*

Marc Shultz

David's Plea

KEY VERSE: "Good and upright *is* the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way," Psalm 25:8.

The classified ad offered to sell a modern computer at a fraction of its cost. The owner was frustrated because he could not get it to work properly. A man phoned the owner of the computer but did not offer to buy it. He had been trained to run that type of computer, so he offered to teach the owner how to use it. The man was hired and soon the computer was utilized at peak efficiency. The owner just needed someone to teach him.

David asked God to teach him His ways (verse 4). The ways of God do not come naturally to man. He has to learn to deny his carnal flesh and to live righteously. God leads according to truth (verse 5). Truth leads to salvation and holiness. The ways of God must be learned in humility (verse 9). The humble person seeks to exalt God and not self. He will be willing to set aside his personal prejudice and ambitions and live according to God's plan.

The leadership of God is according to mercy and truth. Through truth, man realizes he is not what he ought to be. He is alienated from God because of his sinful nature. His ways are abhorrent to God. Through truth, he is led to divine mercy. Man is shown God's tender mercy and loving kindness (verse 6). Through mercy, man finds fellowship with God, and God teaches His children how to live for Him.

Just A Thought: *The person who desires the instruction of God must be willing to learn.*

Marc Shultz

In His Hands

KEY VERSE: “My times *are* in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me,” Psalm 31:15.

My junior high school arts and crafts class was working with clay. Everyone took a turn at the potter’s wheel to make something from his lump of clay. I was attempting to make a flower vase, but I was having difficulty. My teacher put her hands over mine and together we extended the lump of clay into a vase. With her help I was able to do what I could not do alone.

David compared himself to a broken vessel (verse 12). He suffered the slander of his enemies who sought to take his life (verse 13). In all the things he suffered, he trusted in the Lord (verse 14). He sought deliverance from his persecutors (verse 15). David put himself in the hands of God. He asked that the lies of his detractors be put to silence (verse 18). David knew that in God’s hands he would be secure from his enemies.

In the hands of God, broken vessels can be repaired. God can revive the backslidden, forgive the sinful and restore broken fellowship. In the hands of God, the Christian becomes a vessel of honor to God. His testimony will lead others to Christ, and his service brings glory to God. In the hands of God, the Christian discovers the decisive spirit that enables him to serve the Lord (Phil. 4:13). In God’s hands, the Christian does not have to worry about what man may say or do to him (Heb 13:6).

Just A Thought: *Clay is molded to the potter’s desire.*

Marc Shultz

God's Ears Open Unto Cry

KEY VERSE: “*The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles,*” Psalm 34:17.

A new mother worries about not hearing her baby cry in the middle of the night. She has nothing to worry about. A mother instinctively hears her child cry and will awaken to attend to the child.

The ears of the Lord are tuned to hear His children. He hears their cries in the midst of trouble and will be attentive to their needs. He will not ignore their peril but is concerned about their welfare. He will not turn a deaf ear to the cries of His children.

The child of God is instructed to be attentive to the voice of God (verse 11). Those who listen will learn to fear the Lord. The child of God should be attentive to the Lord's voice and heed His will. The person who listens to the Lord knows that He will hear his cry.

The child of God should call on Him in a contrite spirit (verse 18). He should not only cry unto God but should also seek His will. If he does not cry unto God with a broken heart, he will not be submissive to His will. The person who cries unto the Lord should be willing to follow His leadership.

God not only hears the cries of those with a contrite spirit but will also deliver them. God is sensitive to the needs of His people. He will not turn them away in the midst of their despair.

Just A Thought: *God hears the cries of His children because they are His.*

Marc Shultz

Help in Trouble

KEY VERSE: “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,*” Psalm 46:1.

I was beginning my first shift working at a busy gas station that had just been the scene of an armed robbery. That fact was in the back of my mind as I took my position behind the counter. My boss then pointed to a button located beneath the counter. It was a holdup alarm. In the event of a robbery, I was to give the robbers whatever they wanted. As soon as they left, I was to push the alarm. A signal would be sent to the police station and officers would be dispatched to the gas station. Fortunately, I never had to use the alarm, but it was comforting to know it was there.

It is instinctive for a person to call upon God in the time of trouble. It is comforting for the child of God to know that not only is God willing to help but that God is also able to help. His power is superior to whatever a person might face. No enemy can defeat Him. No problem is too great for God to solve. The most logical thing for a person to do when in trouble is to call upon God to help.

It is a sad fact that many people only seek God in time of trouble. God's power is supreme before trouble comes. He leads in paths away from trouble. The person who seeks God before trouble comes will find that troublesome times come less frequently. He will not lose hope when troubles do come.

Just A Thought: *God's help is available to those who seek it.*

Marc Shultz

Waiting on God

KEY VERSE: “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation *is* from him,” Psalm 62:5.

Russell wanted to get married. A friend introduced him to Kathy. They seemed to be compatible and began to make wedding plans. When it came time to announce their engagement, Russell backed out. After praying about the matter, he determined that Kathy was not the woman God had for him. Russell was about to give up any prospects of marriage when he met Sue. After they had dated for some time, he determined that Sue was the woman whom God wanted him to marry. He was glad he had waited for God's choice.

This is not a patient world. The seventy-mile-an-hour speed limit on major highways is not fast enough for many people to get to their destinations. It is not uncommon for a person to spend hundreds of dollars to make his computer work thousandths of a second faster. Customers fidget in line at the grocery store and fume when they have to wait five minutes to be checked out. Man does not like to wait because he does not feel as if he is master of his own destiny.

Waiting on God has advantages. God knows when the time is right to accomplish His will. Waiting on God stresses the importance of His work over personal will. Waiting on God provides victory over people and circumstances. Waiting on God provides the best that God has to offer rather than the worst the world has to offer. Waiting on God makes a person submissive to Him. Waiting on God creates stability in life.

Just A Thought: *Waiting on God is not time wasted.*

Marc Shultz

Praise the Lord

KEY VERSE: “Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD,” Psalm 150:6.

Granny was pleased to have her three grandsons sitting with her during worship. She was proud that they listened to the sermon and seemed interested in the service. As the invitational hymn was sung, the oldest grandson walked down the aisle and made his profession of faith in Christ as Savior. There was a tug of emotion in Granny’s heart because one of her grandsons had been saved. Just a moment later, another of her grandsons professed Jesus as Savior. This time she began to shed tears of joy. Imagine two grandsons saved in one service. Then, the third grandson accepted Jesus as his Savior. Granny could not be silent any longer. She shouted out, “Praise God”!

God receives praise from creation. The stars and the universe testify of His greatness. If man did not proclaim the gospel, the stones of the earth would cry out God’s greatness (Luke 19:40). All creation testifies of God’s power and greatness.

Man is to praise God. Man praises God in worship when he gives due reverence to God. Man praises God in song. With the stirring sound of the trumpet or the soothing sound of the harp, man can praise the Lord (Psalm 150:3). Even with the sound of cymbals, man is to declare his praise for God (verse 5). The inward spirit of man should declare praises to God.

Just A Thought: *No one should be ashamed to praise the Lord.*

Marc Shultz

Prayer Requests

Notes

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