

# Devotional Quarterly

*Through-the-Bible Series*

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**Vol. 14, No. 1**

**December 1, 2003**

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## Achieving Greatness Through Service A Study in the Gospel of Mark

*These Daily Devotionals will challenge all saved people, especially church members, to dedicate themselves to honor, worship and serve God faithfully.*

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**Personal and Daily Devotionals  
for  
Winter Quarter, 2003-2004**

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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.

## December Scripture Readings

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DAILY READINGS</b>	<b>DAILY DEVOTIONALS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> December 1	Galatians 1:1-12, 20-24; 2:10-21; 3:1-18	Isaiah 40:1-5
<input type="checkbox"/> December 2	Galatians 4:1-14, 19-31; 5:1-6; 6	Malachi 3:1-6; 4:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> December 3	Ephesians 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:13-21; 4:25-32	Matthew 3:1-17
<input type="checkbox"/> December 4	Ephesians 5:18, 21-33; 6:1-9, 19-24	John 1:15-27
<input type="checkbox"/> December 5	Philippians 1; 2:12-16, 26-30; 3; 4:1-9, 20-23	John 1:28-37
<input type="checkbox"/> December 6	Colossians 1:1-19; 2; 3:11-17; 4:1-6	Matthew 14:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> December 7	1 Thessalonians 3; 4:8-18; 5	
<input type="checkbox"/> December 8	2 Thessalonians 2; 3:1-9, 16-18	1 Corinthians 12:1-11
<input type="checkbox"/> December 9	1 Timothy 1:1-10, 17-20; 2:9-15; 3:14-16	1 Corinthians 12:12-31
<input type="checkbox"/> December 10	1 Timothy 4-6	1 Corinthians 13:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> December 11	2 Timothy 1:1-4, 12-18; 2:1-18; 3:1-9	1 Corinthians 14:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> December 12	Titus; Philemon	1 Corinthians 14:13-22
<input type="checkbox"/> December 13	Hebrews 1—3:6, 17-19; 4	1 Corinthians 14:23-40
<input type="checkbox"/> December 14	Hebrews 5:1-10; 6; 7	
<input type="checkbox"/> December 15	Hebrews 8—10; 12; 13	Acts 13:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> December 16	James 1:13—4:1-11; 5	Acts 13:13-43
<input type="checkbox"/> December 17	1 Peter 1:1-16; 2:1-12, 18-20; 3—5:6, 12-14	Acts 13:44-52
<input type="checkbox"/> December 18	2 Peter 1:1-4; 2:1-9, 15-22; 3:1, 2, 10-18	Acts 14:1-20
<input type="checkbox"/> December 19	1 John 1—3:24; 4:7-21; 5; 2 John	Acts 16:1-15
<input type="checkbox"/> December 20	Jude; Revelation 1; 2:10-29	Acts 16:16-40
<input type="checkbox"/> December 21	Revelation 3:1-13; 4	
<input type="checkbox"/> December 22	Revelation 5; 6:1-11	Hebrews 11:1-40
<input type="checkbox"/> December 23	Revelation 7; 8	James 1:1-27
<input type="checkbox"/> December 24	Revelation 9; 10	James 2:1-26
<input type="checkbox"/> December 25	Revelation 11; 12	John 14:1-31
<input type="checkbox"/> December 26	Revelation 13; 14:8-13	John 20:24-31
<input type="checkbox"/> December 27	Revelation 15; 16	Psalms 37:1-40
<input type="checkbox"/> December 28	Revelation 17; 18	
<input type="checkbox"/> December 29	Revelation 19; 20:1-10	Genesis 39:1-23
<input type="checkbox"/> December 30	Revelation 21	Numbers 12:1-16
<input type="checkbox"/> December 31	Revelation 22:1-10	Joshua 22:1-34



## January Scripture Readings

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DAILY READINGS</b>	<b>DAILY DEVOTIONALS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> January 1	Genesis 1:1-27; 2; 3:1-13, 20-24	1 Samuel 1:1-28
<input type="checkbox"/> January 2	Genesis 4—6	Daniel 3:1-30
<input type="checkbox"/> January 3	Genesis 7; 8; 9:18, 19, 28, 29	Daniel 6:1-28
<input type="checkbox"/> January 4	Genesis 10; 11; 12:4-20	
<input type="checkbox"/> January 5	Genesis 13; 14; 15:19-21	Isaiah 7:1-14
<input type="checkbox"/> January 6	Genesis 16—18	Isaiah 9:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> January 7	Genesis 19—21	Isaiah 11:1-16
<input type="checkbox"/> January 8	Genesis 22:20-24; 23; 24	Isaiah 34:1-17
<input type="checkbox"/> January 9	Genesis 25—27:25, 42-46	Isaiah 42:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> January 10	Genesis 28—30	Isaiah 53:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> January 11	Genesis 31; 32	
<input type="checkbox"/> January 12	Genesis 33—35	2 Corinthians 5:14-21
<input type="checkbox"/> January 13	Genesis 36; 37:1-7; 38	Romans 13:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> January 14	Genesis 39—41	Romans 13:8-14
<input type="checkbox"/> January 15	Genesis 42—44	John 15:1-27
<input type="checkbox"/> January 16	Genesis 45—47	Galatians 5:16-21
<input type="checkbox"/> January 17	Genesis 48; 50:1-14	Galatians 5:22-26
<input type="checkbox"/> January 18	Exodus 1—3	
<input type="checkbox"/> January 19	Exodus 4—6	Romans 12:3-8
<input type="checkbox"/> January 20	Exodus 7—9	Romans 16:1-27
<input type="checkbox"/> January 21	Exodus 10—12	1 Corinthians 3:1-15
<input type="checkbox"/> January 22	Exodus 13—15	1 Corinthians 4:1-17
<input type="checkbox"/> January 23	Exodus 16—18	2 Corinthians 4:1-18
<input type="checkbox"/> January 24	Exodus 19:1-15; 21; 22	2 Corinthians 6:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> January 25	Exodus 23; 24	
<input type="checkbox"/> January 26	Exodus 25—27	1 Timothy 2:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> January 27	Exodus 28—30	1 John 5:11-21
<input type="checkbox"/> January 28	Exodus 31—33	Matthew 6:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> January 29	Exodus 34—36	Matthew 6:8-15
<input type="checkbox"/> January 30	Exodus 37—40	Matthew 7:7-11
<input type="checkbox"/> January 31	Leviticus 1—3	James 5:7-20



## February Scripture Readings

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DAILY READINGS</b>	<b>DAILY DEVOTIONALS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> February 1	Leviticus 4; 5	
<input type="checkbox"/> February 2	Leviticus 6—8	Matthew 24:1-14
<input type="checkbox"/> February 3	Leviticus 9—11	Matthew 24:15-31
<input type="checkbox"/> February 4	Leviticus 12—14	Matthew 24:32-51
<input type="checkbox"/> February 5	Leviticus 15—17	Matthew 25:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> February 6	Leviticus 18—20	Matthew 25:14-30
<input type="checkbox"/> February 7	Leviticus 21; 22	Matthew 25:31-46
<input type="checkbox"/> February 8	Leviticus 23; 24	
<input type="checkbox"/> February 9	Leviticus 25—27	Luke 22:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> February 10	Numbers 1:4-44, 47-54; 2; 3:1-13, 17-38	Luke 22:14-23
<input type="checkbox"/> February 11	Numbers 4—6	John 13:1-20
<input type="checkbox"/> February 12	Numbers 7—9	John 13:21-38
<input type="checkbox"/> February 13	Numbers 10—12	1 Corinthians 5:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> February 14	Numbers 13—15	1 Corinthians 11:1-34
<input type="checkbox"/> February 15	Numbers 16—18	
<input type="checkbox"/> February 16	Numbers 19—21	Matthew 26:31-46
<input type="checkbox"/> February 17	Numbers 22—24	Matthew 26:44-56
<input type="checkbox"/> February 18	Numbers 25; 26:5-50	Matthew 26:57-68
<input type="checkbox"/> February 19	Numbers 27—29	Matthew 26:69-75
<input type="checkbox"/> February 20	Numbers 30—32	Matthew 27:1-26
<input type="checkbox"/> February 21	Numbers 33—36	Matthew 27:27-56
<input type="checkbox"/> February 22	Deuteronomy 1; 2	
<input type="checkbox"/> February 23	Deuteronomy 3; 4:1-30, 41-49; 5	Psalms 100:1-5
<input type="checkbox"/> February 24	Deuteronomy 6—8	Luke 12:35-48
<input type="checkbox"/> February 25	Deuteronomy 9—11	Luke 17:7-10
<input type="checkbox"/> February 26	Deuteronomy 12—14	Acts 6:1-7
<input type="checkbox"/> February 27	Deuteronomy 15—17	Colossians 3:12-25
<input type="checkbox"/> February 28	Deuteronomy 18—20	Revelation 22:1-21
<input type="checkbox"/> February 29	Deuteronomy 21; 22	



## Isaiah's Prophecy

**KEY VERSE:** “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God,” Isaiah 40:3.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the approach of winter by saying, “Do thy diligence to come before winter” (2 Tim. 4:21). As it was then, so it is now that the coming of winter calls for some preparation. I trust that each reader of these Devotionals is making plans to join in the study of the book of Mark. It is a great book about serving God. I also hope you will keep this book at hand and make the reading and meditation of these Devotionals a daily routine to help you in your daily walk with God. Isaiah was a prophet of God who lived and prophesied some seven hundred years before Christ came to planet Earth.

Isaiah is classified as a major prophet inasmuch as he is quoted fifty-five times in the New Testament. A prophet of God served a twofold purpose: a forth teller and a foreteller. As a forth teller, he gave out a message for the people of his day. As a foreteller, he wrote about future events.

Isaiah had been rebuking the Israelites for their sins. (See Isaiah 24:1—39:8.) He then changed his message in offering them “comfort” that was to come from the “LORD’s hand” that consisted of a pardon for their sins. (See Isaiah 40:1, 2.) Isaiah then looked beyond that time to a future event—the coming of John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord (verses 3-5). In doing so, he was a “voice” for God.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *John the Baptist was a voice for God. Will you follow his example?*

Gene C. Smith

## Malachi's Prophecy

**KEY VERSE:** "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts," Malachi 3:1.

The name Malachi means "my messenger." Malachi was a messenger from God. He was the last of the prophets to the restored remnant of Israel after their seventy years of captivity. The burden of his message was the love of the Lord. Malachi, like Isaiah, predicted the ministry of John the Baptist. With becoming humility, Isaiah laid no stress on any personal attributes or accomplishments of John the Baptist but simply proclaimed him to be that "voice" for God (Isa. 40:3). John the Baptist was to arrive on the scene before the Lord came and prepare the people for His arrival (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 1:76; John 1:6-8).

The second coming of Christ is the subject of Malachi 4:1-6. The "Sun of righteousness" (verse 2) is Jesus Christ. As such, He will "arise with healing in his wings." Jesus' return to planet Earth is a certainty. He said so Himself (John 14:1-6). He is coming again to gather all the family of God together (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

John the Baptist prepared peoples' hearts for the coming of Christ by urging them to repent of their sins and receive Jesus as their Savior. This would bring not only unity and peace to them but also judgment on those who refused to turn from their sins to Him (Malachi 4:6).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Serving and worshiping God must be the primary focus of our lives.*

Gene C. Smith

## Matthew's Record

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

In Bible times when a king planned to visit a certain place, he always sent an advance agent to prepare everything for his arrival. Before the President of the United States visits a place, secret service men go before him to see that all necessary measures are taken for his safety. Jesus Christ had the greatest advance agent the world has ever known. He was a rugged individual by the name of John the Baptist. He was to herald the coming of the King of the Jews—Jesus Christ. Webster defines a herald as "an officer who proclaims war or peace, bears messages to or from a ruler or commander and makes solemn announcements." John the Baptist was God's herald.

John's message was simple and easily understood. It was a message that demanded the people do something. It called for action, and that action was repentance of sin. The word repentance means "to change the mind." John called upon the people to change their minds about God, sin, salvation and their spiritual needs. True repentance involves a complete about-face, a turning from sin to the Savior. The work God had for John the Baptist to do was to prepare a people for the Lord when He arrived (Matt. 3:1-5).

Those who repented were baptized by complete immersion in water by John (verses 6-12). Jesus was also baptized by John in the same manner (verses 13-17).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *A person is not baptized to make him a child of God but to declare his sonship with God in Christ. (See Romans 6:1-4.)*

Gene C. Smith

## John's Humility

**KEY VERSE:** "He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose," John 1:27.

John began his gospel account differently than the other gospel writers. He presented Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Therefore, he went back into eternity past, before the incarnation of Christ, and wrote about His preexistence (John 1:1-5). He also wrote about the ministry of John the Baptist (verses 6-8) and the incarnation of Christ (verses 9-14).

"John bare witness of him" (verse 15). When asked if he were the Christ, John confessed, "I am not the Christ" (verse 20). He also confessed that he was just a "voice" for God (verse 23). John declared that Christ was "preferred before" him (verse 27), humbly revealing that he was not worthy to untie the shoes of Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the true Light of the world (John 1:9). Mankind was walking in the darkness of sin, but Jesus revealed to them the way to God. True churches of Jesus Christ reveal that Light to a world of lost sinners as they proclaim the gospel of saving grace.

No longer is God far away where man cannot feel His presence; when Christ came, He brought God near to man. He is truly Immanuel which means "God with us." He became a man to bring God near us. He also came to die for man's sins and provide mankind with a Savior (John 5:24.)

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus Christ died on the cross to be our Savior. He was buried, but He arose from the dead and lives in Heaven to give eternal life to all who believe in Him. (See John 3:16.)*

Gene C. Smith

## John's Witness

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

I ask you to travel with me (mentally) to the banks of the Jordan River. We see a large crowd of people gathered there around a man who is preaching to them. He points out their sins and calls them to repentance. Who is this strange and mighty preacher? He emptied the cities around that area as the people came in great numbers to hear and see him. He is identified as John the Baptist—the forerunner of Jesus Christ. In this first chapter of John we read about him and his ministry.

John's message was one of repentance of sin. This truth is not mentioned in many pulpits today. This is tragic indeed. Preachers must be firm in the faith as they preach and give the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This involves repentance—the first step toward God. True repentance results in faith in Christ Jesus, the Savior, who takes away the sin of the world (verse 29).

Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the Temple area for the sins of the people of Israel. (See Exodus 29:38-42.) This deed prophesied that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God's anointed, would be led to the slaughter like a lamb. To pay the penalty for sin, a life had to be given. Jesus gave His life on the cross that our sins could be taken away. Have you trusted Him as your Savior?

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).  
Repent before payday.*

Gene C. Smith

## John's Faithfulness

**KEY VERSE:** "And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus,"  
**Matthew 14:12.**

When someone has done an unusual thing, the world soon knows about it. In 1927, Charles Lindbergh climbed into a small airplane in New York and thirty-three hours later he arrived in France where great crowds of people met him and took note of this significant event. The entire world soon heard about his great feat. Thirty-five years later in 1962, John Glenn crawled into a space capsule and flew around the world three times. News of this event spread around the world rapidly.

One day in the life of Jesus, everyone was talking about what He was doing. The news of this soon reached the palace of King Herod (verse 1). He thought John the Baptist had come back from the dead (verse 2), and his conscience began to trouble him greatly. When God created man, He gave him a conscience. It serves as an alarm clock, ringing out when one sins. It will not let one rest day or night until the guilty one deals with that sin. That is the way it was with Herod. He had flashbacks because of what he had done to John the Baptist. Herod had him beheaded for faithfully telling the truth about his adultery with Herodias, his brother's wife.

When Jesus heard of John's death, His heart was filled with sorrow. Jesus would not see John again until He would see him in Heaven.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *There may be a number of things a believer may not be able to do, but there is one thing every believer can do, that is, be faithful to Jesus Christ.*

Gene C. Smith

## The Source of Gifts

**KEY VERSE:** “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will,” 1 Corinthians 12:11.

I recently sat in a church service when twenty-five people employed their talents in the praise, worship and service of the Lord. Although a multiplicity of talents were used to glorify the Lord, they are not to be confused with the spiritual gifts referred to in this devotional reading. These gifts were imparted to the members of the Corinthian church by the Holy Spirit and are not to be confused with the endowment of natural talents. An unbeliever, an atheist, an infidel or the vilest sinner may have many talents, but they are not the spiritual gifts referred to in this chapter.

Paul stated that believers should not be “ignorant” (verse 1) about spiritual gifts. However, there are some who are ignorant about them now. The word gifts (verse 1) is italicized. This means it was not employed in the original text. In the original text this was one word and it referred to spiritual endowments by the Holy Spirit upon certain believers for a specific endeavor. They were not acquired by mere human instrumentality (verses 4, 8, 11).

These miraculous gifts were never intended to be for the purpose of entertainment or as a personal endorsement by Almighty God of the faith and piety of any of His children. The spiritual gifts were bestowed on believers in apostolic times for service in the Lord’s work through His churches.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Believers are to use the talents and abilities God has given them in the service of the Lord and not be drawn away to charismatic gifts designed for a bygone era.*

Gene C. Smith

## Purpose of Gifts

**KEY VERSE:** “That there should be no schism [division] in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another,” 1 Corinthians 12:25.

In this Devotional reading, the apostle Paul described the relationship of gifted believers to each other, using the analogy of a human body and a church body. Although a human body has many members with diverse functions and duties, it is nevertheless one organism. A single life flows through it. A church is the same—many members, but just one body (verse 12). The human body has many members (verse 14). So it is with a church. Each member has his particular work to do just as each member of the human body has its own function (verses 15-24).

In verse 18, Paul shows that God set each member of the human body in a body as it pleased Him. The same is true with a church. The various members do not choose their positions and places of service in a church. God sets them in a church as it pleases Him (verse 24); therefore, each member is to fill his place and function as God intended. If one does not fill his place in a church, no one else can fill it for him. Others have their own places, and they must fill those places. If they fail to do this, there is a collective loss. Every member is important (verses 22-24).

God has “tempered the body [human] together,” giving each one a necessary function (verse 24). The same is true with a church. All members are to work together in unity and harmony in a church so that there will “be no schism” (division) in a church body (verse 25).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Unity and harmony must prevail in a church for it to be effective, while envy and jealousy contribute to division and turmoil.*

Gene C. Smith

## The Greatest Gift

**KEY VERSE:** “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity,” 1 Corinthians 13:13.

This chapter is properly called the love chapter of the Bible. It is Paul’s eulogy to love. The King James text uses the word charity, which does not give the proper meaning of the term to the modern English reader. Charity has come to denote benevolence or alms given to the poor and needy. However, this is not the full sense of the word in the original text of chapter 13.

Two words are used in the original text for the word love. One is the verb *phileo* which means “affection”—the love one has for mankind in general. It means human love at its highest form, a noble love. It is used twenty-five times in the New Testament. The second word is *agape*—the highest word for love in the New Testament. It refers to a divine love. It is more than an emotion; it is love that God places in the heart of man. This occurs in verb form 142 times and 116 times in the noun form in the New Testament. It denotes a high, holy love. It is the highest form of love, denoting the divine love that God has for mankind. Another Greek word for love is *eros* which denotes a passion, or lust. This word never occurs in the New Testament.

There are three remaining spiritual endowments. They are faith, hope and love (verse 13). These three alone remain in the Lord’s churches. Some glad day faith will end in sight and hope will be fulfilled in realization, but *agape* love will never end. Thus, it is the greatest gift.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *In eternity we will still experience God’s great love as we enjoy His presence.*

Gene C. Smith

## Edify the Church

**KEY VERSE:** “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church,” 1 Corinthians 14:12.

Chapter 14 of the book of First Corinthians sets forth the exercise of the spiritual gifts (endowments). These spiritual endowments of the Holy Spirit were given to maintain the unity of the church in Corinth in the midst of division. Each member had a separate gift; yet, all were to function together as the human body functions with its many members. All gifted members were to use their gifts to the “edifying [building up] of the church.”

You, no doubt, have seen some little, underdeveloped boy exercising, lifting weights and working out. He was trying to develop some muscles to gain strength. As growing boys, my older brother and I would stand against the door facing and make a pencil mark charting our attained height. We wanted to grow taller and taller and do it quickly. Likewise, the Lord pays attention to the body of the local church so that it might grow and develop. To achieve growth there must be unity.

Perhaps you feel that you are not doing much of anything for the Lord. One of the most thrilling things is to find out what God wants a person to do and to be where He wants him to be. What a thrill, what an experience, what an adventure to find out what God wants you to do and then do it to edify the church in which you hold membership.

As believers function in this manner, they will be able to build up their church, glorify God and honor the Lord Jesus Christ—the head of the church.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *There is no place for envy and jealousy in the work of the churches. All members are a part of the same body, working to edify the churches.*

Gene C. Smith

## Not for Believers

**KEY VERSE:** “Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown tongue*,” 1 Corinthians 14:19.

The present-day movement of speaking in tongues has no biblical basis. The speaking in tongues in today’s Devotional reading was not an ecstatic outburst of gibberish no one could understand. It was an endowment of God by the Holy Spirit for some of the Corinthian church members to speak in other languages unknown to the speaker for the communication of the gospel to those who spoke and understood those languages. Today, there is no need for this endowment as the Word of God has been translated in other languages and from it they may learn the true gospel.

Note that the word unknown in chapter 14 is italicized. This means it was not in the original text. There is no such thing as an unknown tongue because God knows all languages. God is, therefore, quite capable of hearing anyone pray in his native tongue and understanding what he is saying. Thus, there is no need for an unknown tongue.

The tongues in chapter 14 were for a “sign” (verse 22). The way the Corinthians were speaking in tongues was helping no one because other members did not understand what was being said, and unbelievers thought the people speaking in tongues were crazy. After a person spoke in a tongue, an interpreter was to explain what was said and give thanks to God (verses 13-18). The unsaved people would then be convicted of spiritual realities and motivated to research the Christian faith further.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Church members are to honor God and work together with the other members to strengthen and build up the local church.*

Gene C. Smith

## Decency in the Church

**KEY VERSE:** “Let all things be done decently and in order,” 1 Corinthians 14:40.

The services of the church assembly are to be orderly. Whether it is singing, praying, teaching or preaching, there is to be order in the church services. This does not mean that the members must follow in a blind submission to a prescribed ritual. It does mean that there is to be an orderliness that is opposite of disorder and confusion.

In some churches today, however, this is not the rule. Often there is no appointed time to begin or to end the services. If a time has been set, it is sometimes not followed. In some church services there is no orderliness in the music when the music director has not planned for the hymns to be sung or has not correlated the hymns with the theme of the preacher’s message. No one seems to know when the offering will be received or what is to transpire next. Some adults are guilty of talking during the church service, children are restless and fretful, and people are moving about for no reason at all. This disorderly condition creates confusion—the exact opposite of what the apostle Paul enjoins upon believers in verse 40.

All church services are to be conducted “decently and in order” (verse 40), with regard to propriety and in an orderly manner. This could well include respect for the pastor, the music director, the deacons, the teaching staff and the entire church assembly. Disrespectful attitudes sometimes surface and confusion is wrought in a church assembly. When chaos and confusion prevail, it is difficult to conduct orderly services.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The Lord Jesus Christ has a place of service for all believers in His churches and gives them talents to be used to glorify God. Find your place and honor Him by using your talents.*

Gene C. Smith

## Witnesses Withstood

**KEY VERSE:** “But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith,” Acts 13:8.

While preaching in revival services some years ago, I encountered much opposition. In my endeavor to preach the gospel and win the lost to Christ, some church members joined in with some nonmembers to downplay the preaching and the prevailing spirit of revival. Some went to the point of organizing a few people to combat the revival effort.

Burdened over this situation, other members remained after the Sunday morning services for prayer. Their prayer meeting continued until it was time for the evening service. In the Sunday night service one man sought to upset me while I was preaching by laughing out loud and shouting derogatory remarks at me. I refused to yield to him. I simply kept on preaching. He left the services but returned before the end of the sermon. As I gave the invitation, this man came forward and accepted the Lord as his Savior. Twenty-one other people followed him to the altar and trusted Christ as Savior. A genuine revival broke out that night. As I drove home, I thought of Paul’s encounter with an unbeliever in his mission endeavors.

The church in Antioch of Syria enjoyed the fellowship of Paul, Barnabas and other ministering brethren (verses 1, 2). While ministering to the Lord, Barnabas and Paul were called to the mission field (verse 2). Departing from the seaport city of Seleucia, they sailed to the city of Paphos on the isle of Cyprus. As they preached the gospel there, Elymas, a sorcerer, withstood them, seeking to turn the deputy (Sergius Paulus) from the faith (verse 8).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God is bigger than any problem.*

Gene C. Smith

## Opportunity Given

**KEY VERSE:** “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses,” Acts 13:39.

My passion is the preaching of the Word of God. I had rather be in a pulpit preaching than doing anything else. I retired from the active pastorate after forty-eight years in the ministry. In the past three years, I have filled in preaching for pastors and churches and serving as an interim pastor in several churches. I have missed few Sundays in preaching God's Word. I love to have the opportunity to preach the Word, regardless of the circumstance.

Paul's missionary entourage left the isle of Cyprus and pressed on to Perga and then on to Antioch in Pisidia (verses 13, 14). On the Sabbath day, Paul and his companions went into the Jewish synagogue. When given the opportunity to speak, Paul addressed the Jewish audience. He first presented the historical background of the Israelites as an introduction to the convincing part that followed. Paul concluded with this eloquent message on the subject of justification through faith (verses 17-39) and warned the Jews to heed his message (verse 40).

We must ever remember that the gospel is for all people. Jesus loved all mankind and died on the cross for everyone's sin that He might be the Savior of the world. (See John 4:42.) The gospel must be presented to them so that they may hear it and may be given the opportunity to believe and be saved from their sins. (See Acts 13:41-43.) Let's tell the story loud and clear at every opportunity presented to us.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Believers are most useful to God when they are most useful to others.*

Gene C. Smith

## Word Published

**KEY VERSE:** “And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region,” Acts 13:49.

A few years ago I made a trip to Korea to visit our missionaries. While there, I taught in their seminary daily and preached in the churches on Sundays. As I taught and preached, a translator was present to interpret what I said into the Korean language. This took twice the time of the regular services, but God richly blessed our efforts with people being saved in each and every service. Afterwards, we were blessed again as we baptized those who professed faith in Christ.

The following Sabbath day, after Paul preached in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, almost everyone in the city came “to hear the word of God” (verse 44). The unbelieving Jews were filled with envy and spoke out against the missionaries (verse 45). Paul and Barnabas then turned to the Gentiles (verses 46-48). The “word of the Lord” was then “published throughout all the region” (verse 49).

The unbelieving Jews stirred up the devout women and the chief men of the city. They gave the missionaries so much trouble that they shook off the dust of their feet against them and departed for Iconium (verses 50, 51). A positive result occurred, however, as the “disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost” (verse 52).

I have a sermon about five kinds of churches. The first one is a soul-winning church. This kind of church is constantly involved in witnessing and winning the lost to Christ. This honors the Lord and glorifies God.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *A victorious Christian never dodges a difficulty, never gives up no matter what the circumstances are, but he keeps pressing on.*

Gene C. Smith

## Witness Stoned

**KEY VERSE:** “And there came thither *certain* Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew *him* out of the city, supposing he had been dead,” Acts 14:19.

The events of this Devotional reading follow immediately the events of chapter 13. Paul and Barnabas continued on their first missionary journey, being sent out by the church in Antioch of Syria.

After leaving the city of Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas made their way to the city of Iconium (verses 1-5). A great number of the Greeks and Jews became believers (verse 1). However, the “unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles” (verse 2), and both groups assaulted these missionaries with the intention of stoning them to death (verses 3-5).

Paul and Barnabas were made aware of their intentions. They “fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia” (verse 6). This area was identified by the Romans as a part of Galatia. Paul wrote a letter to the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:1, 2). Probably the other churches established in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe also read this letter.

This area is present-day Turkey. There are no New Testament churches in that area, but in Paul’s day there were several strong churches in these three cities. In Lystra, an impotent man was healed by Paul (Acts 14:8-18). The unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium stirred up a mob. They stoned Paul, drew him out of the city and left him for dead (verse 19). He revived and he, along with Barnabas, departed to Derbe (verse 20).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Opposition to biblical preaching today comes not from unbelievers from without but from unbelievers within the membership of the churches.*

Gene C. Smith

## Witness Received

**KEY VERSE:** “And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought *us*, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide *there*. And she constrained us,” Acts 16:15.

Many years ago missionary Robert Moffat learned the importance of not overlooking children. Only a few people came to one of his meetings because of bad weather. Although disheartened, he preached his message, not noticing a small boy who was operating the bellows of the organ. Before Moffat was finished, that boy decided to become a missionary. His name was David Livingstone, who became God’s pioneering missionary in Africa.

Today we view Paul and his missionary companions doing a work similar to David Livingstone’s but in a different part of the world and at a different time. The events of Acts 16 occurred in Asia Minor and Europe in AD 52.

As Paul prepared for his second missionary journey, a difference of opinion arose between him and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, but Paul did not want to do so because he “returned to Jerusalem” on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). The contention became so strong that Barnabas took Mark with him and they went to the isle of Cyprus to do missionary work (Acts 15:39, 40). Paul chose Silas as his fellow worker and they traveled “through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches” (verse 41).

Their travels took them into Europe where they had their first convert—a woman named Lydia (Acts 16:14). After her baptism, she invited them into her house to rest (verse 15).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God is powerful enough to take care of our every need.*

Gene C. Smith

## Witness Believed

**KEY VERSE:** “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house,” Acts 16:31.

When I was in Korea on a mission trip, I preached in the church at Eui Jung Boo, located five miles south of the thirty-eighth parallel. The thirty-eighth parallel divided South Korea from North Korea. It was commonly referred to as no-man’s-land because it was a neutral place for officials from both countries to meet and discuss plans for peace.

As I preached, the Holy Spirit convicted the hearts of the hearers. I preached concerning the Philippian jailer’s conversion. When the invitation was given for people to accept Jesus Christ as Savior, several people responded. Following the service, I joined this group of new converts who were fellowshiping with one another. I enquired about their conversation because I did not understand their language. One young man answered in broken English stating that I had preached about the jailer who was saved. Pointing to himself and a nearby prison, he said, “I am jailer.” We all rejoiced together because another jailer was saved. I baptized him later that day.

Paul and Silas were jailed in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24). An earthquake came, loosening the prisoners’ bonds. The jailer rushed into Paul and Silas’ cell and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (verses 30, 31). Following their baptism they became the nucleus of the church in the city of Philippi (verses 35-40).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *A missionary is not known for what he gives up but for what he takes up.*

Gene C. Smith

## Heroes of Faith

**KEY VERSE:** “But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city,” Hebrews 11:16.

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews all Christians are called on to live by faith. In it, the writer sets forth two important topics relating to faith.

1. The description of faith (Heb. 11:1-3). This is not a definition of faith but a description of what true faith does and how it works. True faith is not blind optimism or a manufactured hope-so feeling. True faith is a confident obedience to God’s Word in spite of circumstances and consequences as viewed in the lives of those who are used as examples of faith. Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house; it gives confidence and assurance to the believer. He has “evidence” (verse 1) or a conviction from God that what He has promised, He will perform and provide. The writer makes it quite clear that faith is a practical thing (verse 3).

2. The demonstrations of faith (Heb. 11:4-40). Twenty individuals and groups are set forth as people who demonstrated their faith in various ways. The writer begins with “Abel” (verse 4) and ends with “the prophets” (verse 32). Other heroes of faith, not named, are referred to by stating what they achieved for God (verses 33-38). An anonymous person has written the following: “Read this book—it will give you faith.” This faith enables us to turn from the approval of others and to seek the approval of God. It looks to the future, for that is where our greatest blessings are to be found (verses 39, 40).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** “Lord, Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5).

Gene C. Smith

## Do Not Doubt

**KEY VERSE:** “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed,” James 1:6.

To identify the writer of this general epistle is challenging because there were several men in the first church who were so named. It would seem that this James was a half brother to Jesus Christ. (See Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:19.) He was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem and the leader of the first church council. (See Acts 15:13-22.) However, as he wrote this letter, he simply referred to himself as “a servant [bond slave] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). He must have been a deeply spiritual man because tradition tells us that he was a man of prayer. It was stated about him that he prayed so much that his knees resembled those of a camel. No doubt, his prayer life enabled him to aid other believers with their prayer lives.

The people to whom James wrote had problems with their praying. (See James 4:1-3 and James 5:13-18.) They were encountering difficulties; therefore, James instructed them (and us) to “ask in faith, nothing wavering” or not doubting. When one prays, he is to believe and not doubt God’s promise to provide for that need. When one doubts God and His ability to provide, he becomes like a wave of the sea, tossed to and fro by the driving wind. He is a “double minded man” (James 1:8), unstable in his ways, or staggering like a drunk man. That kind of person will not “receive any thing of the Lord” (verse 7).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus said, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24).*

Gene C. Smith

## Faith and Works

**KEY VERSE:** “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone,” James 2:17.

As I sat down at my desk to write this devotional, I received a note from a cousin who resides in Tennessee. She and her husband were grieving over the deaths of the missionaries in Yemen on December 30, 2002. They were personally acquainted with Dr. Martha Myers, having met her in Malaysia in 1991. They spent two weeks together at a continuing medical education conference for medical missionaries in that part of the world. Martha had committed herself to the Yemeni people and loved them dearly, but the terrorists killed her. It is a dangerous world in which we live, but God is in control. These dear people had a faith that was at work for the Lord.

James deals with a mistaken conception of faith in verses 14-26. Some brethren made a claim to having faith, but they did not have any works to prove their faith. So James wrote to show the proper relationship between faith and works. Faith without works is a dead, impotent faith, and works without faith certainly cannot save anyone. Therefore, James resolved to prove that faith and good works are inseparable.

There are three kinds of faith set forth in this Devotional reading. First, a dead faith is made known in verses 14-18. A dead faith is one devoid of works. One's works reveal his faith. Second, a demoniac faith is mentioned in verse 19. The devils (demons) believe in God, but they are not saved. Third, a dynamic faith is highlighted in verses 21-26, using Abraham and Rahab as illustrations of a faith that works.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Faith makes the uplook right, the outlook bright, the inlook good and the future glorious.*

Gene C. Smith

John 14:1-31

Thursday, December 25

## Believe Me

**KEY VERSE:** “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me,” John 14:1.

Heart trouble is the number one health problem in America. We hear almost daily of someone who has suffered a heart attack. Bypass surgery and heart valve replacements are common occurrences. Heart trouble seems to be no respecter of persons. It occurs in the young as well as the elderly and in the rich as well as the poor. Regardless of who it is, when the heart quits beating permanently, life is over for that individual.

Jesus, in the Key Verse, spoke about another kind of heart trouble. This heart trouble is a spiritual ailment. Jesus was speaking of a troubled, or a burdened, heart— a heart that aches with great sorrow. This was a common problem in His day, and it is a common problem in our day. Money cannot keep it away. Popularity cannot cure it. No one can securely lock the door against it. Even the best Christians suffer from it. We all are affected by it. Jesus looked into the hearts of His followers, saw this trouble and spoke words of comfort to them. Those who follow Him today are also included in this promise by Jesus Christ.

Jesus spoke concerning six entities in this great chapter. They are: the peace promised (verse 1); the place prepared (verses 2, 3); the pathway provided (verses 4-6); the privilege of prayer (verses 7-14); the promise of the Holy Spirit (verses 16-26); and the bequest of peace (verses 27-31).

Jesus is coming again to gather all the family of God together. We can claim comfort and consolation in this great truth.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus is coming again! Are you ready for His return?*

Gene C. Smith

## Slow To Believe

**KEY VERSE:** “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,” John 20:29.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God—all of it from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. It was written by forty different writers over a period of fifteen hundred years as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. All sixty-six books of the Bible comprise the complete revelation of God to man. Every book in the Bible is important in its own way and for its purpose; however, John’s gospel is the pinnacle of revelation because it portrays Jesus as the Son of God. It proves that Jesus is the Son of God (verse 31). How does it prove this truth? The recorded miracles of Jesus prove this truth.

There were seven recorded miracles. They were the turning of the water to wine (John 2:1-11), the healing of the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54), the healing of the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9), the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-14), Jesus walking on the water (John 6:15-21), the healing of the blind man (John 9:1-41) and the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44).

Every Christian would do well to study this great book to get to know Jesus better. Thomas questioned Jesus’ authority by refusing to believe He arose from the dead. Thomas emphatically declared that he would not believe it until he had seen Jesus. He wanted to touch Jesus’ nail-scarred hands and feel His pierced side. Jesus so revealed Himself to Thomas. Thomas spoke to Jesus and said, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Fellowship with Christ is the secret of a victorious faith that overcomes obstacles.*

Gene C. Smith

## Trust Him

**KEY VERSE:** “Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed,”  
**Psalm 37:3.**

The book of Psalms is one of the most beneficial books in the entire Bible. Because it is so wonderfully suited to the heart of man, it is especially dear to every child of God. There is no experience of the human heart or life that does not find its counterpart in the Psalms. It might be said that the book of Psalms has a threefold practical value. First, it furnishes us with models of devotion. In the other books of the Bible we have, mostly, God speaking to man, but in the Psalms we have, mostly, man speaking to God. Second, it teaches truth, not abstractly but in terms of human experience. Third, the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed in the book as nowhere else.

Psalm 37 is entitled simply A Psalm of David, meaning that David composed it or that he was the author of it. The Key Verse directs us to “trust in the LORD.” This means for us to rely upon Him, to confide in Him and to rest on Him.

Instead of being disturbed and saddened because of wicked men’s prospering (verses 9-22), God’s people are to calmly confide in God and rely wholly upon Him. We are to leave everything in His hands, feeling confident that He rules over whatever occurs for His honor and glory and for the good of His people. (See verses 1-7 and 23-26.) Therefore, we are not to fret (verses 1, 7, 8) over present conditions in which we find ourselves, even though they may not be promising now.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God often uses bitter experiences to make us better servants for Him.*

Gene C. Smith

## Joseph Accused

**KEY VERSE:** “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” **Genesis 39:9.**

We hear so many excuses for bad behavior these days. My father beat me. My mother was a drunk. My teachers weren't fair. It's my race, or the color of my skin. No one wants to accept responsibility or rise above his circumstances.

If anyone ever had an excuse for bad behavior, it would have been Joseph. He was hated by his jealous brothers, sold into slavery, lied about and unjustly put in prison. But all this bad treatment did not change Joseph's character or lessen his integrity. He did not look for anyone to blame for his poor circumstances. Instead, he was able to rise above all the bad treatment and live according to a set of standards which lifted him up above those around him. He maintained a standard of ethical behavior that allowed God to bless him in wonderful ways. In the end Joseph was able to say, “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

Integrity is the key word. Joseph's reply to Potiphar's wife's enticement revealed his true character: “How then can I do this great wickedness?” He labeled the action as not only a sin against Potiphar but also a sin against God. Everything that went into the development of his character—his parentage, his upbringing, his own desire to be an outstanding servant of God—all played a part in his reaction to the adversity he endured.

**LIVING IT:** *“But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (1 Peter 2:20).*

Mary McCalister

## Moses Accused

**KEY VERSE:** “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth,” Numbers 12:3.

Moses had characteristics that were essential to his being a good servant. Some of those characteristics are pointed out in this chapter.

1. He was meek (verse 3).
2. He was faithful (verse 7).
3. He was compassionate and forgiving (verse 13).

It is interesting to see how many of these characteristics are mentioned in what is commonly called the Beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Jesus pronounced blessings upon the meek, the merciful and those who remain faithful in persecution (Matt. 5:5, 7, 10). Moses fit all these categories, and God truly blessed his life and ministry. Moses’ relationship with God was so close that “the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Ex. 33:11).

When we remember Moses’ background, it is all the more surprising to find that he was a meek and humble man. He was raised in the court of the Egyptian Pharaoh as a son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He was in line to be a ruler in Egypt; yet, as the writer of Hebrews stated, he chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25).

What is the influence of a person with the heart of a servant, such as Moses? It is impossible to measure the good that one man, devoted completely to God, can accomplish in this world.

**LIVING IT:** *God can use a servant who develops a character of integrity, meekness and faithfulness.*

Mary McCalister

## Tribes Accused

**KEY VERSE:** “The LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if *it be* in rebellion, . . . against the LORD, (save us not this day),” Joshua 22:22.

Sibling rivalry and jealousy have been present in the human race ever since the time of Cain and Abel. It seems to emerge in almost every generation in the history of man.

The instance described in this passage reveals that the scourge of sibling rivalry was alive and well in Israel. Three of the tribes—Reuben, Gad and Manasseh—had been granted the right to settle on the east side of the Jordan River. After they had fulfilled their obligation to send their fighting men to help conquer Canaan, they returned to the land they had chosen to settle.

Their leaders chose to erect a large altar on the east side of Jordan, near where the Israelites had crossed over. The purpose of the altar was to remind all the Israelites that those who had chosen to settle east of Jordan were as much a part of Israel as those who had settled in Canaan. This was questioned by the western tribes, and they expressed the fear that the eastern tribes intended to establish a separate religious system.

It took leadership by Phinehas, the son of the high priest, to help erase the division among the tribes and bring about a peaceful solution. He was able to heal the breach and bring peace to all the tribes, leading them to accept each other as brethren with a common goal.

Sometimes our motives can be the best, but if friends and loved ones misunderstand them, strife and trouble can result.

**LIVING IT:** *Give those close to you the benefit of the doubt and do not be suspicious of their motives.*

Mary McCalister

## Hannah Accused

**KEY VERSE:** “For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him,” 1 Samuel 1:27.

Have you ever found yourself being tested to the roots of your being, prostrating yourself in prayer and weeping, only to find that your actions were misunderstood and attributed amiss by those who should have known better? Hannah “prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore” (1 Sam. 1:10) when she found herself being accused of drunkenness. That must have cut to the quick, coming from a priest who did not rebuke his own sons for their wickedness.

Yet, none of this affected Hannah. She did not try to defend or justify herself. Instead, she simply explained to Eli what she was doing, saying, “No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD” (verse 15). Her actions and attitude were a demonstration of how truly close to God she was.

When we are on the right footing with God, we react in a different way from those who are thinking more of themselves than of what God wants in their lives. The closer we are to God through prayer, Bible study and right living, the easier it is for us to say, as Christ did, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Matt. 5:11). You hear a lot of “praise the Lord” when things are going well, but not much rejoicing when you are being reviled, persecuted and lied against.

**LIVING IT:** *Accept false accusations as a blessing from God, even if it is a blessing in disguise.*

Mary McCalister

## Hebrews Accused

**KEY VERSE:** “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. But if not, . . . we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image,” Daniel 3:17, 18.

There is probably not a child alive who has had any Sunday School teaching at all who does not know the story of the three Hebrew children who were cast into the fiery furnace. Most of us can even recite their names, though they are not familiar names—Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These are not names we would readily give our children; however, their example of faithfulness is one we can pass on to our children, encouraging them to have the same kind of faith and steadfastness.

Of what were these three young men accused? They were accused of not bowing down to worship an image of the king. What was their response? “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not . . . we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image” (Dan. 3:17, 18).

We face similar challenges today. The world would have us bow at its shrines and worship its gods. Even Islam in the guise of religion can threaten the lives, security and future of those who do not submit to it.

We should not conform to the demands of this world or be intimidated by it or its threats. Our God rules over kingdoms and their kings. He sets kings up and removes them, and He tells us we are to worship Him and Him alone.

**LIVING IT:** *The Hebrew children said, “He will deliver us.” They set a good example for us.*

Mary McCalister

## Daniel Accused

**KEY VERSE:** “That Daniel, . . . regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day,” Daniel 6:13.

Daniel spent all of his life from the age of fifteen or so as a captive in Babylon. He became an interpreter of dreams and served some of the greatest kings the world has known, such as Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus and Darius. Daniel 6:3 says, “Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.”

Of course, this was criticized by the presidents and princes. They knew that Daniel prayed openly every day; therefore, they convinced the king to sign a proclamation that no one could pray publicly to anyone but him.

Daniel did not disappoint his enemies, and he was soon cast into a lions’ den because of his daily prayers. God shut the lions’ mouths so they could not harm Daniel, and the next morning Daniel was set free. His accusers suffered the fate they had planned for Daniel.

What can we learn from this episode in Daniel’s life? We learn that God is in charge of the affairs of mankind. We learn that God blesses those who are faithful to Him. We learn also that God can protect those who put their lives on the line for their faith. Daniel 6:23 states that “no manner of hurt was found upon him [Daniel], because he believed in his God.” Just as God could shut the lions’ mouths, He can take care of us. Jesus said, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body . . . Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luke 12:4, 5).

**LIVING IT:** *Serve God with all your heart and soul and trust Him to care for you in life and in death.*

Mary McCalister

## His Conception

**KEY VERSE:** “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” Isaiah 7:14.

Conditions in Judah could not have been worse for God’s people. Their king, Ahaz, was a cowardly, superstitious and hypocritical ruler, probably one of the worst kings Judah ever had. In the midst of their wickedness, God sent the prophet Isaiah to give His people a message.

Isaiah prophesied the deliverance of Israel and the defeat of their enemies, but Ahaz was reluctant to believe the prophet’s message. God said, “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (Isa. 7:9).

Almost as if giving Ahaz a second chance, God said, “Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God” (verse 11). But Ahaz refused, demonstrating his unbelief.

In spite of that, God did offer a sign, and it is contained in what Bible scholars call the messianic prophecy.

If all we had were Isaiah’s words, we might be skeptical, but God through Matthew illuminated the promise for us: “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:21-23).

Christ’s birth came at a time when conditions were not much better for the nation of Israel. He brought hope to a hopeless people.

**LIVING IT:** *The prophecy of Christ’s birth was fulfilled. Believe it and be saved.*

Mary McCalister

## His Name

**KEY VERSE:** “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace,” Isaiah 9:6.

Some of the greatest promises ever given about the coming Messiah and Savior were given in times of the greatest oppression and darkness for the people of Israel. Most of their oppression was brought on by their own disobedience, but God offered them a promise of better days to come.

God’s first promise was that those who walked in darkness would see a great light. Matthew cited the fulfillment of this promise in Matthew 4:14-16.

God’s second promise was that a child would be born, a son would be given. This promise embodied both the humanity and divinity of Christ, but this promise did not cover just Christ’s birth. It extended forward to a time then far in the future when “the government shall be upon his shoulder” (Isa. 9:6). We all know the fulfillment of this promise is much nearer than when it was given.

The names this prophecy gives to the Savior are marvelous indeed:

1. Wonderful. He is glorious in His being and works.
2. Counsellor. He is our advocate.
3. The mighty God. He is one in power with God.
4. The everlasting Father. He was in the beginning with God and is eternal, as God is.
5. The Prince of Peace. He will bring peace to a troubled world.

Along with the nation of Israel, we have the promise that peace and justice will reign when Christ reigns over the earth during the Millennium.

**LIVING IT:** *Praise Christ for His glory, His care for us, His great power, His eternal existence and His peace.*

Mary McCalister

## His Spirit

**KEY VERSE:** “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, . . . of counsel and might, . . . of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD,” Isaiah 11:2.

This passage is clearer if we understand that the Lord through the prophet was making a beautiful contrast between the proud mountain forest of Assyria and the humble offshoot of the cut-off trunk of Jesse. That impressive forest had been leveled, but the rod of Jesse will be exalted above all nations.

This rod shall have a sevenfold Spirit resting upon Him: the Spirit of God, of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Jesus Himself said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4:18) and proceeded to explain a prophetic passage in Isaiah. Jesus also said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). John emphasized this great truth when he wrote, “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word [Christ], and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7).

How marvelous it is to find such clear teachings about the Trinity in Old Testament prophecy. Certainly, students of Scripture in Israel had plenty of evidence of God as the Triune God.

The work of the Prince of Peace, anointed by the Spirit of God, will be to detect what is righteous and what is evil. He will have omniscient knowledge which will make all His judgments fair and right. The glorious virtues of righteousness and truth will cling to Him as a girdle or belt clings to the waist of a man.

**LIVING IT:** *Know that the Spirit lighted upon Jesus and God identified Him as His beloved Son, in whom He was pleased.*

Mary McCalister

## His Day

**KEY VERSE:** “For *it is* the day of the LORD’s vengeance, *and* the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion,” Isaiah 34:8.

The term the day of the Lord is a familiar one to students of prophecy. If this writer counted correctly, the phrase the day of the Lord appears twenty-three times in Scripture, four times in Isaiah and five times in the prophecy of Joel. It appears only five times in the New Testament.

There is a slang expression, Every dog must have his day, so we are familiar with that connotation. Christ did not have His day when He was here on earth. He lived in poverty and relative obscurity and was rejected by His kinsmen, the Jews, but rest assured, His day will come.

What kind of day will that be? It will be a day when the proud and lofty shall be brought low (Isa. 2:12), a day of destruction (Isa. 13:6), a day of wrath (verse 9), a day of vengeance (Isa. 34:8). Joel states it will be a day of darkness (Joel 2:1, 2), a terrible day (verses 11, 31), a day which is near (Joel 3:14). First Corinthians 5:5 and 2 Corinthians 1:14 indicate it will be a day of rewards and judgment.

Certainly that day is not one for the ungodly and sinner to look forward to, but what should our attitude be? Peter said, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, . . . we, . . . look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:11-13).

**LIVING IT:** Say with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Mary McCalister

## His Work

**KEY VERSE:** “To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house,” Isaiah 42:7.

When called on to accept a new task, many will say, I’m just too busy. No one has ever been as busy as Jesus was. Read the four gospels, paying particular attention to the activities of Jesus. When Jesus said, “I work” (John 5:17), the emphasis was on work. According to the prophet Isaiah, the works of Jesus included:

1. A covenant to the people (Israel). Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s covenant with His chosen people (Rom. 9:3, 4).

2. A light to the Gentiles. This is a prophetic promise in which we can truly rejoice because Jesus “was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9).

3. To open the blind eyes. Matthew 11:5 states, “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

4. To free the prisoners from the prison. Ephesians 4:8 states, “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” Jesus frees us from the bondage of sin. He said the truth would make us free indeed (John 8:32).

5. To bring in a new song. The psalmist said, “He hath put a new song in my mouth” (Psalm 40:3). Revelation 5:9 states, “They sung a new song.” We can rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory because Christ accomplished the work He came to do.

**LIVING IT:** *Rejoice knowing that Christ carried out the work He came to do and know that you are eternally blessed.*

Mary McCalister

## His Sacrifice

**KEY VERSE:** “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,” **Isaiah 53:6.**

There are few other biblical passages which describe the suffering and sacrifice of Christ more graphically than this one. The one which comes closest is Psalm 22. Isaiah states that Jesus was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and familiar with grief. He bore our griefs and our sorrows. He was wounded and bruised for our sins. He was oppressed and afflicted. He was imprisoned and put to death.

The psalmist adds to the description of the suffering and sacrifice of Christ by saying that He was forsaken of God, treated scornfully, poured out like water and all his bones were out of joint. His hands and feet were pierced, and the soldiers gambled for His clothes.

Why? Because, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

The suffering of Christ was not only physical but also spiritual. When He took upon Himself the sin of the world, God had to turn His back on Him because God could not look upon sin. Because He felt the crushing weight of all mankind’s sins, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). This is what it took to atone for our sins.

How can we respond to this immeasurable sacrifice? First, we must respond by realizing that all this was done for us and was caused by our sins. Then, we must respond to the work of Christ by believing in Him (John 6:29).

**LIVING IT:** *Let your life show that you are grateful for what Christ endured for you.*

Mary McCalister

## New Creatures

**KEY VERSE:** “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old thing are passed away; behold, all things are become new,” 2 Corinthians 5:17.

True, the believer is a servant of God, but he is changed into much more than that. He is a new creature in Christ. He is reconciled to God. That is, God has put away his sins because Christ bore them on the cross. He can now stand justified before God.

The believer is given a new title, an ambassador for Christ. As Christ’s representatives here on earth, what is demanded of us? Think about what you would ask of anyone who was to represent you. You would want him to present you in the best possible light. You would want him to not do anything which would reflect unfavorably on you. This would be a good guideline for us.

Most importantly, we have been given something valuable and precious—the Word of reconciliation. The story is told of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s being estranged from her parents because they did not approve of her husband. She wrote many letters to them begging for reconciliation, only to have them all returned to her unopened.

The Bible is God’s letter of reconciliation to us. How sad it is if we do not open His letters and read them every day.

When you think of what Christ has done for you, it should be easy for you to be all that God wants you to be. Think about it. He who is pure became sin for you, enduring the wrath of God for you. The sinless One was covered with all the sins of the world.

**LIVING IT:** *Live in such a way that all men will know that you are a new person with a new life and a new home.*

Mary McCalister

## Be Subject

**KEY VERSE:** “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God,” Romans 13:1.

Remembering what you learned in yesterday’s reading, that you are an ambassador for Christ, you can learn today what that means and how your actions should be governed.

“Be subject unto the higher powers.” How does that agree with what we hear every day? As this is being written, our government is contemplating going to war with Iraq. At the same time, the abortion issue has come to the front again with the thirtieth anniversary of the Supreme Court decision, Roe versus Wade. Much of the news is taken up with marches, demonstrations and protests. You have to answer the question, Am I being subject to the higher powers if I actively protest against their decisions?

Practical Paul even covered the paying of taxes. He stated that we are to pay tribute and custom, words for taxes in Bible times. Not only that, but also we are to show fear to some and give honor to some. Showing fear would be respecting the laws of our land, being fearful lest we become lawbreakers. We are to honor those in charge because, as Paul stated, “the powers that be are ordained of God.”

Many of us resent the responsibility of being in submission to our government. We exceed the speed limit, run red lights, all the while keeping our eyes on the rearview mirror, thinking that it is all right as long as we do not get caught. This is not submission. Submission is abiding by the laws of the land and living as a testimony of our submission to God.

**LIVING IT:** *We must be subject to those in charge of our government as a testimony that we know God is in charge.*

Mary McCalister

## Put on Christ

**KEY VERSE:** “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*,” Romans 13:14.

You may ask, How can I put on Christ? What does that mean? Think about a soldier. Every day he gets up and puts on his uniform. Anyone who sees him knows immediately he is a soldier. A modern-day movement is identified with the letters WWJD. The person who identifies with this is to ask himself, What would Jesus do?

Before Paul wrote this admonition, he told us how we are to put on Christ.

1. Owe no man anything. The only debt we should have is the debt of love.

2. Love one another. This is a debt we have toward all men. As Paul said, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise” (Rom. 1:14).

3. We should not commit adultery, kill, steal, lie or covet. These may sound like gross sins, but we must realize that committing them gives the lie to our claim to have put on Christ. Sure, we may not commit adultery, kill or steal, but how many of us can say we have never lied or coveted?

4. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves because love is the fulfilling of the Law (Gal. 5:14). In the first centuries of Christian history, an early writer commented on the Christians’ care for the helpless, their practice of loving-kindness, that caught the attention of their opponents. The comment was made that they loved one another and were prepared to die one for another.

**LIVING IT:** *Putting on Christ means reflecting Him to the world.*

Mary McCalister

John 15:1-27

Thursday, January 15

## Bear Fruit

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

Not everyone is an avid gardener, but most people do have some knowledge of horticulture. When the dormant season comes in the fall and winter, the gardener gets out his pruning shears and begins to cut back his roses, shrubs and trees. He knows what should be left to produce next year’s growth and what needs to be pruned away because it is nonproductive.

Jesus used the analogy of the vine and the husbandman or gardener to make His point in this passage. God cuts out the nonproductive vines and purges or prunes the productive vines so they will bear even more fruit. For us the pruning can sometimes be painful because it is used to remove from our lives the things that keep us from bearing spiritual fruit.

I am acquainted with a young woman who is expecting her first child. Her problem is that she is a smoker. She knows that she needs to stop smoking for the health of her child, but she is finding it difficult to do so. If she succeeds, she will protect the health of her child and her own health as well. She will improve her Christian testimony. She will be able to bear more fruit because God will have pruned away the part of her life that has hindered her from bearing fruit.

Jesus is the Vine. He is not just a helper; He is our life. An old familiar hymn says, in part, “Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.” This is the secret. This is abiding in the vine. This is what produces fruit in our lives.

**LIVING IT:** *Let Christ have complete control of your life, your thoughts and your desires.*

Mary McCalister

## Wrong Fruit

**KEY VERSE:** “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, . . . they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” Galatians 5:19, 21.

Each one of us needs to be a fruit inspector, at least of our own lives. We can be sure God is judging the fruit we bear.

Sometimes people who claim to be believers choose to do the works of the flesh. The results of these choices are: they lose their sons and daughters who go into the drug culture when they do not have their needs fulfilled at home; they become enslaved to the culture of worldliness, wanting to be like those around them; they mortgage all they own so they can have more possessions; they are no longer in control of their affairs and others make the decisions for them. Life becomes a rat race for them and brings them little or no happiness.

Yes, the choice is ours. We can choose to walk after the Spirit and produce the fruit of the Spirit, or we can walk after the flesh and produce the works of the flesh—sexual impurity, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness and revelings. What ugly pictures this list brings to our minds. We may think, I’d never do that, but few of us are free from enmity toward some people and many of us are guilty of envying what someone else has. We can all benefit from an honest fruit inspection.

I have a daughter who cannot stand bananas. Their odor makes her ill. We should think of how our fleshly works affect God. These terrible works of the flesh make God ill.

**LIVING IT:** *If we walk in the Spirit and are led by the Spirit, we will produce the right fruit.*

Mary McCalister

## Right Fruit

**KEY VERSE:** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law,” Galatians 5:22, 23.

When you compare the lists of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, the list of the fruit of the Spirit is much shorter. This is one indication that walking after the Spirit can greatly simplify our lives. Walking after the flesh only complicates our lives.

As early as the third century, a writer made a comparison which still stands today. He said the road was controlled by robbers and thieves, the seas by pirates, and the sport of the base crowds was to watch men being murdered. This same writer then looked at a community of Christians. He said they were a quiet and holy people, though they were despised and persecuted. He said that their actions and attitudes had helped them overcome the world.

The fruit of the Spirit produces love—a deep desire to please God and to help others; joy—we can rejoice over sins forgiven and look forward to the glories of Heaven; peace—no worries, no cares, because God cares for us; long-suffering—patience to bear the weaknesses of others; gentleness—treating others with kindness; goodness—a godly life; faith—being true to the principles of God; meekness—humility; temperance—self-control, moderation.

The kind of Christian character which produces the fruit of the Spirit is a demonstration of God’s grace in your life and shows others what He can do for them if they will let Him.

**LIVING IT:** *Let the Holy Spirit lead you so that you will produce the right kind of fruit.*

Mary McCalister

## Servants Equipped

**KEY VERSE:** “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us,” Romans 12:6.

You cannot study Romans 12 without beginning with verses 1 and 2. You are to present yourself to God as a living sacrifice. This means to accept Christ completely as the Lord of your life, to turn over to Him every facet of your life and to welcome Him as the One who completely controls all your life.

The key word here is living. You serve a living God. You conform your life to the Bible, which is the living Word. You submit to Christ who is the living Bread. He has given you in salvation the living water. You are called on to live by a new and living way. You have a living hope.

To be transformed is what God wants and expects of the believer. We need to be responsive to His will. Divine direction keeps us moving on the right path. To be transformed is also a reasonable expectation. It is no more than God should expect of us. When we take a new job, we get a list of job requirements. It is only reasonable for our employer to expect that we will fulfill those requirements to the best of our ability. It is reasonable for God to expect us to fulfill His requirements.

We cannot be a success for God unless we accept His love and direction and walk in harmony with others by doing what is right. It is a matter of the choices we make— choices that determine the extent of our faith, our love, our devotion—and the recognition of His sacrifice for us so that we may be living sacrifices for Him.

**LIVING IT:** *God does not ask you to do anything He does not equip you to do.*

Mary McCalister

## Servants Named

**KEY VERSE:** “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you,” Romans 16:16.

This Devotional could well be titled God’s Honor Roll. Most of us can remember how exciting it was to achieve the kind of excellence which put our names on the honor roll in school. How much more thrilled we would be if we could make God’s honor roll of the faithful. Perhaps we need to pattern our lives after some of those saints mentioned by Paul.

Phebe, a servant of the church, a helper of many, including Paul.

Priscilla and Aquila, who risked their lives for the churches and housed an assembly in their home.

Epaenetus, one of the first converts in Asia.

Mary, who worked hard for the church.

Andronicus and Junia, fellow prisoners with Paul and highly respected among the apostles.

Amplias and Stachys, well-beloved by Paul.

Urbane, Paul’s helper.

Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, hard workers for the Lord.

Rufus, an eminent servant of the Lord and his mother who was like a mother to Paul also.

Timothy, who was Paul’s workfellow.

Paul names many others who may not be familiar to us, but we know they are well-known to God.

Paul’s benediction can be a comfort and encouragement to us. He commended them to God because He was able to establish them and keep them as they carried the gospel to all nations.

**LIVING IT:** *Strive for excellence in your Christian life so that you may make God’s honor roll of the faithful.*

Mary McCalister

## Servants Tried

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

A better title for this study might be Servants Judged. The important thing to remember is that God knows our hearts and judges our motives more than the results of our works.

Paul was appalled to find how much the church members at Corinth were dominated by the flesh, which is the human nature apart from God. This was evidenced in their being followers of men: “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos” (1 Cor. 1:12). This was a fleshly, carnal attitude which greatly hindered the work. Paul pointed them to the one true foundation, Jesus Christ.

In Christ they could find forgiveness of sins. They found themselves in a new relationship with God. Where once they saw hatred, now they could see love. Where once they were alienated from God, now they could be in an intimate relationship with Him.

In Christ they could find strength for the present. Knowing this, they could build properly on the only foundation. Their works could be gold, silver and precious stones.

In Christ they could find hope for the future. They could know that God was in control and was working all things together for their good (Rom. 8:28). They could look forward to a greater glory to which death would be only a means of deliverance.

Knowing these things, they could turn away from perishable works of wood, hay and stubble and insure their reward for good works of gold, silver and precious stones.

**LIVING IT:** *Make sure you serve Christ, not some man.*

Mary McCalister

## Servants Faithful

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

It is important to understand what steward means. Anyone who has flown on a plane or traveled on a cruise ship has become familiar with the term. The steward does not own the plane or anything on the plane. The company owns everything, but he is entrusted with its care. That steward has been given the responsibility of taking the goods belonging to a higher authority and dispensing the goods to the people for their benefit. This definition can apply in the spiritual realm.

A steward must be faithful to God. Only God knows all the circumstances. Only God can know one's true motives. God “is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). God will judge fairly each child of His because of what He knows.

A steward must remember that he is accountable to his fellowman. We are responsible for the testimony we give to those around us. As we learned in an earlier Devotional, we owe a debt to all the world (Rom. 1:14). Paul did not set himself above those with whom he came in contact. He realized his life and words had an effect on those around him.

Finally, a steward must face the judgment of himself. Before we can become acceptable stewards of what God has entrusted to our care, we must take a good look at ourselves and shape up. We cannot be blind to our own shortcomings.

It is good to remember, “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:20).

**LIVING IT:** *Resolve to be faithful to God in carrying out the task He has given you to do.*

Mary McCalister

## Servants Persecuted

**KEY VERSE:** “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory,” 2 Corinthians 4:17.

This lesson might be called Paul’s Paradoxes. Notice what he says:

1. We preach not ourselves, but Christ. Paul was not self-seeking. He sought only to present Christ to a lost and dying world. This is a far cry from those who make a name for themselves in the religious world.

2. Clay pots but heavenly treasure. Always remember, God is glorified through weak vessels because these are the vessels who are depending on God’s power, not their own.

3. Troubled but not distressed. Serenity in the face of difficult situations comes from an abiding faith in God.

4. Perplexed but not in despair. When unfathomable challenges come, we do not say, Why, me, Lord? Instead we say, Thy will be done.

5. Persecuted but not forsaken. In 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 Paul listed some of his persecutions; yet, in all his suffering he knew God was with him.

6. Cast down but not destroyed. It is not a sin to be discouraged, but we should not let discouragement destroy us.

Paul had a confident faith. He knew that ultimately he would experience victory. He knew that God would be glorified in his suffering. He counted his trials as a light affliction, knowing they were strengthening his Christian life and character.

**LIVING IT:** *Can you agree with Peter, who wrote, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16)?*

Mary McCalister

## Servants Together

**KEY VERSE:** “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things,” 2 Corinthians 6:10.

We are in this together might be a good motto for Christian workers who serve the Lord together. That is what Paul said when he spoke of his relationship to the church at Corinth, “We then, as workers together” (verse 1). Then he listed the experiences these workers would have: internal conflicts of the Christian life (such as anxieties), stripes and beatings, imprisonment, tumults and turmoils, toils, sleepless nights, fastings and hunger. This really is not what we want to hear. We enjoy fellowship dinners, revivals and retreats much more than the perils Paul listed for us.

We know that Paul endured all these afflictions, and he wanted his fellow servants to share in them with him. This is a part of being servants together.

That was a far cry from the life of comfort the modern-day theologian promises to those who say they want to live the Christian life.

Reality TV is the going thing as I am writing this. It may have gone by the time you read it. Right now people seem to enjoy watching other people suffer. There is one point in favor of this kind of programming—it tells us we should be real. We should not expect peace and prosperity. We can expect to have suffering, trials and tribulations in this life if we serve God. The secret is that we learn to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). Truly, we are in this together, and we need to work together because Solomon wrote, “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:12).

**LIVING IT:** *Our trials should unite us, not drive us apart.*

Mary McCalister

## Priority of Prayer

**KEY VERSE:** “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men,” 1 Timothy 2:1.

When the President of the United States is briefed about a crisis in the world, he asks where the naval ships are located. Naval forces are often the first branch of the armed forces sent to a crisis area.

When a child of God faces a crisis in life, the first thing he should do is pray about the crisis. Prayer should also be a priority when he is not facing a crisis. A believer should not only pray when he is in trouble but should also make prayer a daily part of his life. He should pray in the morning and give thanks to God for another day of life. He should pray a prayer of thanksgiving for his blessings as they occur. He should pray for opportunities to witness to the lost. He should pray for those in need as well as his own needs. He should pray for strength to serve God daily.

Believers should never be selfish in prayer. Believers are urged to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:2). It is common for citizens to complain about those who rule over them. Children of God are urged to pray for all men (verse 1). It is always appropriate for believers to lift up one another in prayer.

A consistent prayer life promotes spiritual growth. The believer who has a consistent prayer life will seek the will of God. A consistent prayer life enables saved people to live a God-honoring life.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Prayer should be a forethought, not an afterthought.*

Marc Shultz

## Confidence in Prayer

**KEY VERSE:** “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us,” 1 John 5:14.

Grandpa had four grandsons before he had a granddaughter. He loved all his grandchildren, but his granddaughter held a special place in his heart. When she came to visit, they would go to the local department store. She was allowed to pick out whatever she wanted from the toy aisle. She knew she could get whatever she wanted from grandpa.

God’s people tend to look at God as a generous grandpa. They expect to get whatever they make an object of prayer. They express disappointment to God because they do not get their heart’s desire. God does not express His love by giving His children their every desire.

Saved people can have confidence God hears their prayers. They can also have confidence God will answer their prayers according to His will. A faithful church member got to the point that, when he was called on to pray during the church service, he simply prayed, “Lord, Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.” God’s children should make their requests known to God with the expectation He will do His will.

Believers should not be so presumptuous to ask God to violate His will in Christ to give them their heart’s desire. God knows the best way to answer your prayers. God says no when that is the best answer. He will say yes when it fits within His will.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God does not answer prayers with a blank check.*

Marc Shultz

## Simplicity in Prayer

**KEY VERSE:** “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking,” Matthew 6:7.

A son met his father at the door when he came home from work. He took his briefcase, got him a cup of coffee and told his father he was looking good. He asked him about his day at work and the ride home on the freeway. After several minutes of pampering, the father asked his son, Okay, what do you want? He saw through his son's flattery.

Prayer is communication with God. It should not be viewed as a work of literature or fancy oration. Using vain words will not guarantee a positive answer to prayer. A person should not pray to impress people but to communicate with God.

Communication is listening as well as talking. It is important for a person to listen to the leadership of the Holy Spirit as he prays. The Holy Spirit will lead to the will of God. Listening to the leadership of the Holy Spirit will help a person pray for God's will over his own selfish desires.

God knows the intent of the heart, so using vain words does not make prayers more likely to be heard by God. God hears all prayers. He will not turn deaf ears to the fervent prayers of His people (James 5:16).

Listen to a child pray. He is only concerned with communicating with God in the simplest terms. We should be more childlike in our prayers.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Concentrate on the content of your prayers, not how you speak them.*

Marc Shultz

## Example of Prayer

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

A family was entertaining the preacher for supper. Before they ate, mother asked her son to say grace. They normally did not pray before meals, so the young man was confused by his mother’s request. To cover her embarrassment, she told him to say what daddy said before they ate. The son’s eyes lighted up and he yelled out, “Go easy on the butter, kids. Your dad is not made out of money.”

Jesus gave His disciples an example of how to pray. He did not mean for them to recite His example word-for-word but to use it as a pattern to follow. Following the pattern taught them how to pray effectively.

The first part of the Lord’s pattern for prayer taught them how to address the Father. The person praying should humbly address the Father. He is not to be arrogant but submissive in his prayers.

Jesus taught His disciples to begin by praying for God’s will (Matt. 6:10). There is no doubt the Father’s will is accomplished in Heaven. Our desire should be that it also be accomplished here on earth.

Jesus then taught His disciples the proper requests to make to God. They were to ask for the daily needs of life (verse 11). They were to seek divine forgiveness as they were willing to forgive others (verse 12). They were to ask for deliverance from the temptation to do evil (verse 13). Our prayers should follow the Lord’s pattern.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *What can others learn about your spiritual life by listening to you pray?*

Marc Shultz

## Persistence in Prayer

**KEY VERSE:** “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened,” Matthew 7:8.

A young woman wanted to get married but had no prospective groom. She had prayed for God to send someone into her life whom she could love, but no answer seemed to be forthcoming. She tried one last prayer, “Lord, I am not asking for anything for myself, but I would appreciate it if you could send my mother a good-looking son-in-law.” At least she was persistent in her prayers.

There are three possible answers to your prayers. God can give you what you request; He can deny your request; or He can make you wait. Why would God make His people wait for answered prayer? He knows the time is not right for our prayers to be answered. He could be teaching us to be patient by making us wait for our prayers to be answered. He could be reminding us that He is in control. It is best to wait for God to answer our prayers.

How long should we continue making a particular concern an object of prayer? Until God gives an answer. It is futile to attempt to get God to change His mind. It is best to accept God’s answer to prayer.

God’s children should not be timid to make their requests known to God. The Key Verse says, “For every one that asketh receiveth” (Matt. 7:8). This is not a promise that you will get your prayer request. It does mean God will answer your prayer in a manner within His will and for your good.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Whatever is worth praying for is worth waiting for God’s answer.*

Marc Shultz

## Earnest in Prayer

**KEY VERSE:** “Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” James 5:16.

Father came home from work tired. As he sat in his easy chair, he read a letter from his son. He was asking his dad for more money. Dad was agitated as he read, “Dear Mom and Dad, expenses have increased. I must have more money or I will have to drop out of school.” Because dad was angry, he thought his son’s tone in the letter was presumptuous. He exclaimed, “That ungrateful brat will never get another penny out of me.” Mother then took the letter and read it. She was in a good mood. She read the letter out loud in kind, motherly tones. The father then replied, “Since he changed his attitude, I will send him more money.” The difference was in the attitude of the person reading the letter.

The book of James suggests that believers should be energized as they pray. They should not pray only as a matter of routine but because of a sincere desire for their prayer requests. Paul prayed on three occasions for God to remove his thorn in the flesh. He earnestly felt he could serve God better if the thorn were removed. God declined Paul’s request. Paul then learned that God’s grace was sufficient for him (2 Cor. 12:9).

Christians should not be timid in their prayer requests. They should accept whatever answer God grants to their prayers. They should pray with confidence that God will hear and answer their prayers according to His will.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Children of God are energized in prayer when they seek God’s will.*

Marc Shultz

## Disciples' Question

**KEY VERSE:** “And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Matthew 24:3.

During the height of the Cold War, Americans were told to prepare for an enemy attack with a nuclear bomb. This was a frightening prospect. Students at school were taught the duck-and-cover routine. They were told to duck under their desks and cover their heads with their hands. In retrospect, this was foolishness. Ducking and covering would have done nothing to protect the students from an atomic attack.

The Bible is clear about prophetic events. During the end-time events, many terrible calamities will take place upon the earth. The disciples asked the Lord for signs of His coming and the end of the world. These signs were recorded in the Bible so mankind can prepare for the end times.

Many believers do like to think about end-time events. They read the biblical account of the terrible events that will transpire in the world before the final judgment. Some preachers do not preach about prophecy because their congregations do not want to hear about the end times.

Bible scholars have differing interpretations about end-time events, such as when the Great Tribulation will begin in the prophetic timetable. There is one fact upon which all Bible students can agree. The Lord will return in a time set by the Father. It is necessary for each individual to prepare for the Lord's return. It could be at any moment.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Live as though this would be the day the Lord returns.*

Marc Shultz

## Abomination

**KEY VERSE:** “All these *are* the beginning of sorrows,”  
**Matthew 24:8.**

An investigative reporter spent a day in prison in an effort to report on life behind bars. The reporter was booked into the prison just as though he had been sentenced to prison by a judge. Only the warden knew he was a reporter and not a real prisoner. During his twenty-four hours behind bars, the reporter saw many things that were simply too bad to report. He exclaimed that words could not adequately describe the horrors he saw while in prison.

Conditions in the world leading up to and following the return of the Lord will be awful. The same conditions will exist that caused God to destroy the world by flood in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37). The spirit of antichrist will be present in the world and will deceive many (verse 4). It will be a time of trouble the world has never seen before.

God’s people should take heart because these events foretell the return of the Lord. The Lord will not allow His creation to be destroyed by man before He pronounces judgment (verse 22). Despite the abomination present in the world, God is still in control.

During these times of abomination, believers will be persecuted for their faithfulness to Christ (verse 9). The traumatic nature of these abominations should cause all of God’s children to prepare for these difficult days.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The more difficult the times, the more determined believers should be to be faithful to God.*

Marc Shultz

## Be Ready

**KEY VERSE:** “But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only,” Matthew 24:36.

I always enjoyed going to town with dad. I never knew when he might be making the trip, so I always watched for him heading for the car. Most of the time he did not mind my tagging along. He had only one rule—I had to be ready when he was leaving. He would not wait for me to get ready.

There is much speculation about when Jesus shall return. The Bible gives certain signs that suggest His coming is near, but it does not give the exact day or hour. Each individual should be prepared for the Lord's return which could be at any time.

A person prepares for the Lord's return by accepting Him as Savior. The child of God should prepare for the Lord's return by faithfully serving Him until His coming. There is much work to be done until the Lord's return. Jesus should not return to find His children idle but faithfully serving Him.

The time to prepare for the Lord's return is before His coming. The Bible defines the signs of the Lord's return so that individuals can be prepared for His coming. When individuals ignore the signs, they risk not being ready when He comes again.

Preparing for the Lord's return is an individual responsibility. Preachers can preach many sermons on the Lord's return, but it is up to each person to be ready when the Lord comes again. Are you ready?

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The Lord will return if you are ready or not. Why not be ready?*

Marc Shultz

## Watch

**KEY VERSE:** “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom,” Matthew 25:1.

The tradition of the Jewish weddings during biblical times was much different than today’s customs. The groom spent the engagement period building a honeymoon cottage for his bride. The bride awaited the time when the groom would return for her. She was to have her bags packed and her lamp filled with oil. When the groom finished the honeymoon cottage, he would come to marry his bride. When she heard the announcement that the groom was coming, she was to be ready to meet him. Since she did not know exactly when the groom would come, she would watch for his return at any moment. If she did not watch for the groom to come, she would risk not being prepared to meet him.

The Bible compares the return of the Lord to the bridegroom coming for his bride. Jesus is busy preparing a place for His people. One day He will return to take His people to the place He has prepared for them (John 14:2, 3). Like the bride watching for her groom’s return, saved people are to watch for the Lord’s return. We do not know the exact time of the Lord’s return, so we must be prepared for His coming at any moment.

Believers should eagerly anticipate the Lord’s return as much as a bride anxiously waits for her groom to come for her. Believers should look forward to the day the Lord returns and takes them to the home He has prepared for them.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *How closely are you watching for the Lord’s return?*

Marc Shultz

## Well Done

**KEY VERSE:** “His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord,*” Matthew 25:21.

Two men were employed to work for a new company. They were to begin work on the first day the company was in business. When they reported for work, the plant had not been completed. The boss did not want to pay the men for not working, so he told them to move a pile of dirt from one location to another, which they did. The next day the plant was still not ready for operation. The boss told the men to move the pile of dirt back to the original location. One of the men quit because he did not sign on to move dirt. The other did what he was instructed to do and had a good-paying job because of his faithfulness to do his work.

Believers are to serve according to the will of God. He demands faithfulness from His servants (1 Cor. 4:2). He only demands their reasonable service (Rom 12:1). Believers are to be submissive to God in whatever He requires of them. God will not require you to do the impossible but will give you the strength to do whatever task He calls you to perform.

The people of God should not be afraid to do whatever God asks of them. Fear prevents a person from being faithful to God. Our efforts for the Lord will have been worthwhile to hear Him say, “Well done.”

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Submissiveness to God means not questioning His will.*

Marc Shultz

## Nations Judged

**KEY VERSE:** “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats,”  
**Matthew 25:32.**

A classmate in my second grade class was missing her lunch money. It had been taken from her purse while she was out of the room. My teacher had an idea who took the money but wanted the culprit to confess. She called the students to her desk one at a time and asked them to look at her face-to-face. She then asked each student if he took the money. Eventually, the guilty student confessed and returned the money he had stolen.

The deeds of those who will stand before God in judgment are known. It is impossible to hide anything from Him. He knows the deeds of those who have been faithful to Him. He knows of their faithfulness in their duty to Him and how they supported His faithful servants. He knows the evil deeds of those who have not been faithful to Him.

The greatest judgment will be for those who do not know Christ as Savior. The sentence at their judgment will be “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). There will be no appeal to escape this judgment.

God knows your every thought, word spoken and action taken. He knows everywhere you go and what you do when you think no one is looking. Your life is an open book before God, and one day you will answer to Him.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *If you do not want to face God with it, do not do it!*

Marc Shultz

## Passover Prepared

**KEY VERSE:** “Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover,” Luke 22:1.

The Statue of Liberty was a gift to the United States from France. It was given to celebrate the freedom offered in America. The torch held in the right hand of Lady Liberty was completed before the rest of the statue and sent to the United States as a promise, looking forward to the finished statue.

The Passover Feast celebrated God's sparing the firstborn of the Israelites in Egypt. The Israelites were instructed to sacrifice a lamb without blemish. The blood of the lamb was to be sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses. When God passed through the land of Egypt to execute judgment, He took the lives of the firstborn of each house that did not have blood sprinkled on the doorposts. God spared the lives of the firstborn of each house stained with blood on the doorpost.

The Passover Feast pictured the impending sacrifice of the Messiah. Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Jesus is without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:19). The blood of Jesus Christ was shed for the remission of sins (Heb. 9:22).

The Passover Feast reminded the Israelites of the promised sacrifice of the Messiah. The blood of lambs could not save them from their sins. The blood of the Lamb of God would cleanse them from their sins. The picture was complete with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.*

Marc Shultz

Luke 22:14-23

Tuesday, February 10

## Supper Instituted

**KEY VERSE:** “And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him,” Luke 22:14.

Life is filled with transitions. There is the transition from childhood to adulthood. There is the transition of power from one elected official to another. The most significant transition is from life to eternity.

The Passover Feast had accomplished its purpose. Jesus was set to fulfill the picture by dying on the cross. With this transition there was no longer a need to observe the Passover Feast. Jesus assembled with His disciples to institute a new memorial. In the upper room the Lord instituted the observance of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper signified the broken body and shed blood of the Lord's sacrifice on the cross.

The hour was at hand for Jesus to fulfill the gospel. After His death, burial and resurrection, the Lord's work on earth would be finished. He would then ascend to Heaven to intercede on behalf of those who know Him as Savior. Jesus did not seek to avoid the cross. He was led to the cross as a lamb was led to the slaughter (Acts 8:32).

The Lord's Supper is a memorial to the reality of the gospel. Jesus died for our sins, was buried and rose again according to the Scripture. The gospel “is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). Children of God should never forget the magnitude of the Lord's sacrifice on the cross. The Lord's Supper is a call to remember that sacrifice. The Lord's Supper is to be observed in remembrance of the Lord's sacrifice (1 Cor. 11:26).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *No greater price was paid than by Jesus on the cross.*

Marc Shultz

## Example Set

**KEY VERSE:** “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you,” John 13:15.

One of the attractions at Sea World in San Antonio, Texas, is Shamu, the killer whale. She has been trained to perform many actions to the delight of visitors to the park. These actions required many hours of training. When Shamu gave birth to a baby whale, it was allowed to watch its mother perform. Trainers soon realized the baby whale was performing the same actions as its mother. The baby whale had learned by watching its mother perform.

Jesus set the example of Christian service. He was unwilling to ask others to do what He would not do. Jesus set the example of baptism. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist to show the importance of baptism. By washing the disciples' feet, Jesus was setting the example of humility in service. Discipleship requires self-denial (Matt. 16:24). Jesus was willing to do the most menial tasks to set the proper example of service.

Young Christians learn how to serve the Lord by the example of mature Christians. Children learn to be faithful to God by seeing their parents serve Him. The pastor, deacons and teachers set the example of service for church members. Thank God for those who set the proper example.

You are setting an example for others. The question is whether it is a good or bad example. Set the proper example by faithfully attending church, serving the Lord and living a righteous life. Be a positive influence in the lives of others.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Be a doer of the word and not a hearer only (James 1:22).*

Marc Shultz

## Betrayer Identified

**KEY VERSE:** “When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me,” John 13:21.

A Central Intelligence Agency agent placed a film canister in a trash can in a Washington, D.C. park. Seconds later he was surrounded by federal law enforcement officers and placed under arrest. The film canister contained top secret government documents. The CIA agent was spying for the Russian government. He betrayed the government that had placed trust in him.

Judas was numbered among the Lord’s disciples. He heard Jesus preach the gospel and witnessed miracles performed and lives changed by the preaching of the gospel. Despite what he had seen, Judas betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

None of the other disciples had any suspicion of Judas. Not one of them identified him as the betrayer of the Lord. By every appearance, he seemed to be a faithful disciple. Appearances can be deceiving. Judas turned out to be a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Man may deceive man, but he cannot deceive God. God knows the thoughts, motives and attitudes of the mind. God is not fooled by pretense. The actions of those who pretend godliness will become known for their evil deeds. Faithful disciples of the Lord never succumb to the world.

Do not place too much faith in man who can disappoint. Place your faith in God who never disappoints. Spiritual matters and not personal greed will motivate true disciples of the Lord.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Many people have betrayed the Lord for less than thirty pieces of silver.*

Marc Shultz

## Discipline Required

**KEY VERSE:** “Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” 1 Corinthians 5:6.

One drop of iodine in a glass of clear water will discolor the water and change its taste. Once the iodine is dropped into the glass of water, it cannot be taken out. The appearance and taste of the water are altered.

Salvation by grace is not a license to sin. The child of God is responsible for living a disciplined life. To fail to live a disciplined life changes what should appear to be glorious into dishonor. Failure to live a disciplined life tarnishes the testimony of the child of God. The world concentrates on the moral failures of the child of God and finds disfavor with Christianity. Sin hinders the Christian testimony.

Churches that do not exercise church discipline also bring dishonor to God. To turn a blinded eye toward sin hinders the work and fellowship of a local church. A church that does not exercise church discipline misses an opportunity to help bring an errant child of God to repentance. A church that does not exercise church discipline is not following the will of God.

A saved individual who lives a disciplined life has his life in order. He is not a slave to sin but a servant to God. He gives glory to God through his life. He sets an example of righteousness to the world and brings godly honor to his name. His life will be lived in harmony with God and he will have true joy. A disciplined life is the only one that will please God.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Exercise self-discipline before God brings you under His discipline.*

Marc Shultz

## Supper Restricted

**KEY VERSE:** “And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come,” 1 Corinthians 11:34.

Politicians often raise funds at banquets where they charge anywhere from one hundred dollars a plate and up. The meal is only a small portion of the cost of the banquet. The rest goes into the campaign fund of the politician. The purpose of the banquet is not to feed the visitors but to raise campaign funds.

The purpose of the Lord's Supper is not to feed hungry church members. If they need a full meal, they can eat at home. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is a memorial to call to remembrance the sacrifice of the Lord on Calvary. To make it a feast to satisfy hunger would be to place the emphasis on the individual rather than the Lord.

The tone was serious in the upper room when Jesus observed the Lord's Supper with the disciples. The Lord would soon die on the cross. There was also an expression of hope when Jesus spoke of drinking the fruit of the vine with them in the Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:29).

The Lord's Supper is to be observed according to the will of God. It is not a time to satisfy the hunger of the body but to pause and remember the Lord's sacrifice on Calvary. It is to be observed as a memorial to the Lord until His glorious return (1 Cor. 11:26). For a church to observe the Lord's Supper in a way other than according to His instructions is to observe it unworthily.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The Lord's Supper should be observed His way.*

Marc Shultz

## Gethsemane

**KEY VERSE:** “And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words,”  
**Matthew 26:44.**

A high school classmate fell asleep in class. The bell rang to change classes, and the student did not awaken. The teacher allowed him to continue to sleep. When he awakened, he did not know what class he was in. Most of the students were different than those he was accustomed to seeing. He had missed his next class while asleep.

Jesus entered Gethsemane to find strength. He asked Peter, James and John to make sure He was not disturbed while He prayed. As Jesus prayed, the three disciples fell asleep. Jesus awakened them and rebuked them for not being able to stay awake one hour while He prayed in the garden (Matt. 26:40). Each time Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, they fell asleep.

Are you in a state of spiritual slumber? While the Lord is working in your life, are you giving in to the weaknesses of the flesh? Are you failing to obey the Lord's commands? If so, it is time to awaken out of your slumber. The Lord has important tasks for you to perform. His instructions are clear and His will is supreme. You will miss doing His will if you continue to slumber.

The Lord will find many of His children spiritually asleep when He returns. They will not be faithfully serving the Lord at His coming. Serve the Lord each day as if it were to be the day He comes again.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *It is better to awaken out of your spiritual slumber before the Lord awakens you.*

Marc Shultz

## Arrested

**KEY VERSE:** “But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled,” Matthew 26:56.

A police officer’s son admitted to his father that he had helped murder a man. The officer had a sworn duty to enforce the law without partiality. He turned his son over to the authorities. He was required to testify against his son in court. The father’s testimony helped convict his son of murder. After his son was convicted of murder, the father did not forsake him. He stood by his son during his most difficult hour.

The arrest of Jesus should not have come as a surprise to His disciples. Jesus had told them of His destiny with the cross. To offer salvation to everyone who believed, it was necessary for the Lord to die on the cross and rise from the grave the third day.

During the difficult hour of His arrest, the disciples forsook the Lord. Rather than standing by His side, they fled to spare their own lives. Peter followed Jesus from afar off (Matt. 26:58). Twelve legions of angels awaited the Lord’s call to take Him from His hour of death, but His own disciples had failed to follow Jesus during His difficult hour.

You can take comfort in knowing that, no matter how much you disappoint God, He will never forsake you. The disciples continued to preach the gospel and win people to salvation. God was still at work in their lives. The Lord was willing to go to the cross for you. What are you willing to do for Him?

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *When the going gets tough, keep going with the Lord.*

Marc Shultz

## Tried

**KEY VERSE:** “And they that had laid hold on Jesus led *him* away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled,” Matthew 26:57.

Fictitious lawyer Perry Mason had an undefeated record as a defense attorney. The case against his client would seem to be airtight. The trial would be winding down, and it would appear the district attorney had proven his case. At the last minute, Perry Mason would uncover a new piece of evidence that would establish his client's innocence.

Most defendants at trial claim innocence but are actually guilty. Jesus was innocent of any wrongdoing. His only crime was proclaiming the truth. His words brought conviction to the hearers. Rather than accepting His message, they sought to kill the messenger. They thought if Jesus were crucified, His message would be silenced. In actuality, by putting the Lord to death, they were fulfilling the prophecy of Scripture.

Jesus did not mount a defense against the charges because He knew all things were working out according to the will of the Father. He was presumed guilty of the charges brought against Him. There would not be a last-minute acquittal, but Jesus would die innocent of any crime. It was necessary for Him to die on the cross so that repentant sinners could have eternal life in Heaven.

Jesus was willing to pay a debt He did not owe because He loves you and wants you to have eternal life. He suffered the indignity of an unjust trial so that you would not have to suffer the agony of spending eternity in hell. He died so that you might live.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus was judged guilty by man so that you could be judged innocent by the Father.*

Marc Shultz

## Denied

**KEY VERSE:** “Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee,” Matthew 26:69.

The man who robbed the convenience store was not too bright. He wore a mask to disguise his face. He robbed the clerk at gunpoint and ran off into the darkness. Police officers were able to identify the man and went to his house to arrest him. He proclaimed his innocence, but police officers were able to place him at the scene of the crime. Before he robbed the store, he filled out an entry for a sweepstakes drawing.

Simon Peter spent the early part of his ministry in the company of Jesus. He had learned about the Scripture from the Lord. He had performed miracles and preached in the name of Jesus. Simon Peter mingled with the crowd to witness the trial of the Lord. His obscurity was soon uncovered. He was recognized and accused of being one of the Lord's followers. Fear took over, and Peter denied knowing the Lord. The man who desired to give his all to serve the Lord denied Him three times to spare his own life.

It is normal to expect lost people to deny the Lord. It is unexpected for the child of God to deny Him. A disciple of the Lord must take up his cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24). A disciple must follow the Lord even in difficult situations. A disciple must give his all to follow the Lord. A disciple must never deny the Lord by action or word.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *God never denies knowing His children. They should never deny knowing Him.*

Marc Shultz

## Rejected

**KEY VERSE:** “Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? *They all say unto him, Let him be crucified,*” Matthew 27:22.

A pastor was speaking to a man about his lost condition. The man patiently listened as the pastor explained to him the plan of salvation. The man declined to accept Christ as Savior. He told the pastor that he had listened to what he had to say, had made a conscious decision not to accept the Lord as Savior and did not want to hear about the matter again. The man was not rejecting the pastor but the Lord. He thought he was making an intelligent decision. In reality, it was the most foolish decision that he could ever make.

Jesus came unto His own and they did not receive Him as the Messiah (John 1:11). They considered it blasphemy for Jesus to claim to be the Son of God. Their hatred toward the Lord was so great that they were willing for the convicted criminal Barabbas to be released and for innocent Jesus to be crucified. Pilate allowed the angry mob to judge Jesus according to their own desires though he found no fault in Him (Matt. 27:24).

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Whosoever calls upon Him as Savior shall be saved (Acts 2:21). The Lord desires no one to die lost but for everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). The person who does not accept the Lord as Savior is condemned because of his unbelief (John 3:18). The only reason a person is lost is because he has not received Jesus as Savior.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Jesus rejects no one who comes to Him in repentance and faith. No one should reject Jesus as Savior.*

Marc Shultz

## Crucified

**KEY VERSE:** “And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify *him*,” Matthew 27:31.

A newspaper reporter toured the death house at the state prison in Huntsville, Texas. He toured death row where all prisoners sentenced to die are incarcerated. He wrote of the feeling of hopelessness that engulfed the facility. He toured the death room where the condemned prisoner awaits impending execution. He was shown the table where the prisoner is strapped down to receive the lethal injection. The reporter stated he never wanted to see the facility again.

Descriptions of the Lord's death on the cross are often sterile. Artists' renditions of the Lord hanging on the cross are kind enough to partially cover His body. In reality, the Lord hung naked on the cross. Imagine, if you can, the great amount of blood that was spilled beneath the cross. It would be impossible to describe the pain the Lord suffered while on the cross. It was not a pleasant sight.

A centurion guard who witnessed the events around the Lord's death said, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54). His statement explains why Jesus was willing to die on Calvary. Most of the mob mocked the Lord as He died on the cross. Soldiers gambled for His clothing beneath the cross. One man was willing to believe on Him as the Son of God. Many people in the world deny Jesus as the Messiah. A majority of people never accept Him as Savior. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave the third day so that those who do believe on Him will have eternal life.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The agony of the cross gave man his greatest hope.*

Marc Shultz

## With Gladness

**KEY VERSE:** “Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing,” Psalm 100:2.

The pastor was preparing Sunday’s sermon when he heard someone singing “Amazing Grace.” He figured someone was practicing to sing a special for Sunday’s services. He went to the sanctuary to see who was singing and found the church janitor going about her task of cleaning the church building. She was singing hymns as she cleaned the church house.

When the alarm clock awakens you on Sunday morning, which of these reactions expresses your attitude? I have to get up and get ready to go to church, or I get to get up and go to church. Attitude makes a great difference in how a person performs a task. A person usually gives his best effort to what he enjoys doing. Many people have the wrong attitude about serving the Lord. They view it as a drudgery rather than a blessing. Children of God should be happy to serve the Lord. The faithful servant of God is blessed for his work. Serving the Lord has results that will be seen in eternity. There is nothing more beneficial a person can do than serve the Lord.

The next time you are called on to do something you do not enjoy, try this experiment. Sing a hymn while you work. If you do not feel comfortable singing out loud, sing to yourself. If you cannot remember the words to the hymn, hum the tune. This should help change your attitude and make the work go easier.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Serving the Lord is a blessing. How blessed are you?*

Marc Shultz

## Blessed Servants

**KEY VERSE:** “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not,” Luke 12:40.

I once worked in a store where the boss was rarely on the job. At most, he came into work one week a month. When he did show up, he expected everything to be to his liking. The employees never knew when he would come, so we always had to perform our tasks as though he were there. If we performed our jobs properly, we did not have to worry about the boss showing up unexpectedly.

How different would your life be if you knew this would be the day the Lord returned? You would be busy making sure you were prepared for His return. You would be witnessing to lost friends, relatives and strangers telling them to accept the Lord as Savior. You would be on your knees in prayer repenting of your sins. There would be an air of urgency about your work for the Lord.

Believers should approach each day as if that were to be the day of the Lord's return. The Lord could return at any moment. Now is the time to share the gospel with your lost friends and relatives. Now is the time to repent of your sins and find peace with God. Now is the time to accomplish the will of God because tomorrow could be too late.

Live February 24, 2004, as though it were to be the day the Lord returned. You will be blessed as you serve the Lord in anticipation of His return.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Serve the Lord and excitedly await His return.*

Marc Shultz

## Our Duty

**KEY VERSE:** “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do,” Luke 17:10.

September 11, 2001, was one of those defining moments in life. Everyone remembers where they were when they heard about the terrorists’ attacks on the United States. There were many heroes who put their lives on the line to save others. Policemen and firemen raced into the burning buildings while others were attempting to escape. Hundreds of those heroes sacrificed their lives to do their duty. Those who survived feel uncomfortable being called heroes. They were just doing their duty.

Jesus Christ knew His duty to the Father. His destiny would lead Him to the cross where He was sacrificed for the sins of the world. Jesus was a willing sacrifice. He did not attempt to shirk His duty. He performed His duty because of His love for all humanity (John 15:13).

The duty of the child of God is to do His will. Believers should seek the kingdom of God first (Matt. 6:33). Man’s duty is to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). Mankind must give his full attention to his duty to God. It must be his first priority.

The child of God who does his duty to God is profitable in His service. The person who shares his witness wins people for Jesus. The Bible teacher helps increase knowledge of the Word of God. The faithful pastor helps his church members grow spiritually. It is important that each person do his duty to God.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Your duty to God is your reasonable service (Rom 12:1).*

Marc Shultz

## Servants Chosen

**KEY VERSE:** “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations,” Acts 6:1.

A pastor ran into his office to get the address of a member. He intended to be in the office for only a moment. Before he left the office, the phone rang. The conversation lasted for a couple of minutes. The caller needed spiritual counsel. Before he could leave the office, the phone rang again. Two hours passed before he could get out of the office. It was then too late to make the contact he wanted to make.

When the needs of widows in the Jerusalem church were being neglected, God had a plan. The disciples had their hands full in prayer, Bible study and preaching the Word of God. The Jerusalem church selected faithful men of God to serve as deacons. They served the church in ministry and in filling the physical needs of the widows. The ministry of the Jerusalem church was aided by their faithful service.

Church members must get out of the mind-set that the pastor is the only one qualified to do the necessary work of ministry. Pastors should not think they must do everything but be willing to give other members the blessing of serving. Each church is filled with talented people capable of doing the work of ministry. The more people serving the Lord, the more work will be done for His cause. Whether as a pastor, deacon, teacher or common church member, there is much that church members can do for the Lord.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *The faithful few should not be forced to do the work. Everyone should find a way to serve the Lord.*

Marc Shultz

## Serve Others

**KEY VERSE:** “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering,” Colossians 3:12.

We live in a selfish society. Everyone is out for himself. Society’s motto seems to be, look out for number one. Unfortunately, that same selfish attitude prevails in the lives of many children of God. They expect God to grant them blessings but do not seek to serve Him. Selfishness is inconsistent with Christianity.

An important element of serving God is serving others. Would it be possible for you to serve God without showing the same mercy He has extended toward you? The Bible instructs us to love our neighbor (Mark 12:31). Children of God are to bless their enemies and do good to them that curse them (Matt. 5:44).

The foundation of service to others should be their spiritual welfare. A lame man was begging for charity at the gate of the Temple. Peter and John had no money to give him. They did not ignore the beggar but gave him something he did not expect—healing. They called upon the name of the Lord to add strength to his legs so he could walk (Acts 3:6). His health was restored, his spirits lifted and his faith increased. They gave him something money could not buy.

The lives of people will not be changed by charity alone. All saved people should be sensitive of the physical needs of others. Their greater need is spiritual in nature. To serve the spiritual needs of others is to serve the needs of Christ.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *What we have done for the least of the brethren, we have done for God (Matt. 25:40)*

Marc Shultz

## Servants Rewarded

**KEY VERSE:** “Behold, I come quickly: blessed *is* he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book,”  
Revelation 22:7.

The children know their father will soon return home from work. They have certain chores they are responsible to complete before he returns home. They have all day to complete the chores. Some of the children complete their chores. The others put off doing their chores to do their own thing. They never get around to completing their chores. Which of the children will look forward to their father coming home?

Believers should anxiously anticipate the Lord's return. It will be a time of victory for those who know Him as Savior. Only the Father in Heaven knows the exact time of the Lord's return. Believers are to faithfully serve the Lord until He returns. Some children of God are too busy doing their own thing to serve the Lord. They do not faithfully serve Him. Other saved people serve the Lord knowing He could return at any moment. They recognize the urgency of the times and are busy about the Master's business. Which group will be eagerly looking forward to the Lord's return?

Why should a child of God eagerly anticipate the Lord's return? A child of God will see the face of Jesus (Rev. 22:4). What a joy to be in the presence of the Lord! There will be no more need of the sun because the Son of God will be the light. The child of God will reign with Him forever (verse 5). The child of God should pray, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (verse 20).

**JUST A THOUGHT:** *Are you living as though the Lord could return today?*

Marc Shultz

## Prayer Requests

## Notes