



ECHOES

Adult Student Book
Comprehensive Bible Study
June, July, August 2024



Hope in the Lord

Studies in Psalms, Lamentations, Acts,
Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews,
1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John

ECHOES

Adult Student Book Comprehensive Bible Study A Bible Study Quarterly for Adults

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Hope in the Lord

June, July, August 2024

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What's Ahead

Quarterly Preview

The summer cycle looks at expressions of Christian hope both in this present age and in the glorious future God is preparing for us.

Unit 1, “Experiencing Hope,” considers Christian hope through the lens of those whose faith in Christ gave shape to the early church. Lessons draw from Colossians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Hebrews, and Acts.

Unit 2, “Expressing Hope,” turns attention to the prayers of ancient Israel as a model for offering to God our praise and petitions. These Hebrew prayers are also expressions of Christian hope. The first lesson of the unit is from a song of lament in Lamentations 3, while the remaining lessons of the unit are drawn from the Psalms.

Unit 3, “Eternal Hope” (1 Thessalonians, 1 John, and Titus) considers facets of the promised future God is preparing for those who call on the name of Jesus.

In this quarter, here are some biblical principles you will study that can apply to your own life situations:

- Encourage one another with the hope of Christ.
- Live in the Spirit’s freedom, not the shadow of the condemning law.
- Glorify God by accepting and building up one another.
- Be diligent to the end, assured of God’s promises.
- How do you testify about your hope in Christ?
- Present your despair to your faithful God—He can handle it.
- Proclaim God’s love and hope to the next generations.
- In the light of God’s unfailing love, delight in His commands.
- Expectantly wait with hope and trust in God’s unfailing love.
- Face the trials of life in fellowship with God’s people.
- As God’s beloved and forgiven children, walk in what is right.
- Say “No” to ungodliness; be eager to do what is good.
- Be reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Glorious Riches

Shantray grimaced at the menu. “I need to keep my Sluncheon bill under \$20.” She and her new friend, Eva, had finally found time to meet for lunch.

“I really couldn’t afford to eat out today, but I didn’t want to pass up getting together,” said Shantray.

“Girl, we could have had lunch at my house,” chided Eva. “Are you having money problems?”

“My credit card debt is crushing me,” confessed Shantray.

“Ouch,” said Eva. “I got out of credit card debt three years ago.”

“How?” Shantray quickly asked.

“First, I recognized I had a problem. Then I asked God to help me,” said Eva. “I saw a lot of my spending was being consumed by lust.

“It took a while for me to get out of debt. I stopped charging. I consolidated some cards onto one with a lower interest rate. I prayed for and received more self-control, which you know is a fruit of the Spirit. When you ask God to help you live and walk by the Spirit, He will!”

“I need the Lord to help me,” Shantray said.

“He will,” interjected Eva, “but you have to be willing to crucify your flesh. My church teaches a financial literacy class. If you want me to, I will check on the date of the next session.”

“Please do!” said Shantray, perking up.

1. *How does our faith encourage us in difficult circumstances?*

2. *Why do we have hope in everlasting life?*

3. *What does it mean to encourage others with the hope of Christ?*

The Mystery Revealed

Colossians 1:24-29, KJV

24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Colossians 1:24-29, NIV

²⁴Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Paul's letter to the Colossians may be short, but it is jam-packed with truths about Jesus—and powerful instructions about how Christians are to live. The first chapter begins with a prayer of thanksgiving, followed by an explosive hymn about Jesus' role as the Lord of all

creation. Paul called the Colossian church to stand firm in this belief.

In verse 24, Paul turned to talk about how following Christ had formed his own life's purpose. The apostle's words may seem strange. What does it mean to "fill up . . . what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions" (vs. 24)? Some have mistaken this to mean that people must accomplish their own works in order to be saved, rather than trusting in Christ alone. But Paul already said that Jesus completed all the work necessary for salvation (1:18-20). The phrase seems to refer to carrying out a mission on someone else's behalf. Jesus set a pattern: He suffered out of love for His people. Paul was following in His footsteps to carry out that love.

Paul knew that God had given him a special role in presenting the Gospel, but it was for the benefit of others—not for his own glory. He spoke of a "mystery" (vs. 26), a way of describing God's plan of salvation. He declared that the glorification of God through the Gospel—that is, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of God's people—is the purpose of all time and history. This purpose was "hidden" for ages, hinted at by prophets and promises of the Scriptures (vs. 26). The mystery is now fully revealed: Jesus has come! Jesus, as Paul claimed, is the one to whom the whole universe has been pointing, from the start of creation until now! The mysteries of the Gospel are open to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to various individuals and groups of people, but verse 27 explains that the riches of the Gospel are now declared "to the Gentiles" (that is, those not even physically descended from Abraham). The church at Colossae probably had a mixture of Jews and Gentiles; Paul proclaimed that the Gospel belongs to both groups.

Christ is not only the ruler of everyone who believes, but He is "in" everyone who believes (vs. 27). Through His Holy Spirit, Jesus lives and reigns in the heart of

every Christian. That fact provides “hope” for future “glory” (rather than condemnation) at His return, no matter a person’s ethnic background (vs. 27). Paul’s goal was not for a specific group to gain special knowledge, but he wished that everyone who believed in Christ might be perfected by His Spirit, and presented as “fully mature” to God at the judgment (vs. 28).

Paul could not accomplish this goal by his own strength. Rather, anything he accomplished was because of Christ working through him. Christ was not only the subject of Paul’s message but also the one who empowered him to give it!

4. *What does Paul mean when he says he is “filling up” what is lacking in Christ’s sufferings (vs. 24)?*

5. *Who gave Paul the responsibility to preach the Gospel?*

6. *What is the “mystery” that God has revealed to the saints?*

7. *How does Paul say he finds the strength to do the hard work of preaching the Gospel?*

Sharing Truth’s Treasures

Colossians 2:1-3, KJV

1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

Colossians 2:1-3, NIV

¹I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ²My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³in

3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Paul had invested in the Colossian church by praying for them constantly and sending dear friends to assist and encourage them (1:9; 4:8). He also built a relationship with a church in the nearby city of Laodicea (mentioned also in Rev. 3:14-22). Paul described his work on behalf of these churches as a struggle. He defended the truth of the Gospel from false teachers in that area of Asia Minor, even though he had never personally been there.

Paul's zeal to defend God's truth was not an end in itself. In verse 2, he explained that his goal was that the church might be encouraged by their knowledge of the truth and brought together "in love" as they unite in proper worship of Christ. The fight to understand God's Word and the struggle to defend sound doctrine wasn't meant to cause conflict between believers. Rather, it was to be a source of joy as the church shared together in the hope of Jesus, helping one another see Him clearly.

Indeed, seeing Jesus for who He is, is the best sort of "riches" that anyone might receive, for only those who know Him and believe in His name are able to understand the "mystery" of God's purpose for the world (vs. 3).

Although it would be common in the Greek religious world to pray to many gods, Paul declared that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are found in one person: Jesus Christ (vs. 3). Knowing Jesus as the Son of God, the only true ruler and Savior, is the only way to make sense of everything else!

8. *What was Paul's relationship with the church in Colossae like?*

9. *What was Paul's goal for the Colossians?*

10. *In whom are hidden "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (vs. 3)?*

Truth and Treasure Give Hope

Jesus died in our place on a cross to make atonement for our sins against God. His resurrection from the dead proved His victory over death and opened the way for us to have access to God. When we believe this to be true, and trust and receive the righteousness Jesus offers us, we enter into a personal, saving relationship with Christ.

At times we may feel impoverished in one way or another—financially, physically, or spiritually. Yet Jesus blessed those who are “poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). God offers His people great riches—truth, wisdom, and guidance in this life as we follow Jesus and choose to walk with Him. God’s truth and wisdom will stand against the noise of our world which sees no need for God. God doesn’t promise a perfect life, but He does promise that we can have purpose in life and future glory through a personal relationship with Jesus.

Once we believe and invite Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, Christ lives and reigns in our heart. His Spirit teaches us to dwell in love and unity with fellow believers and to offer God’s love to the world.

There is nothing more important than to strive to know Him. Paul’s words to the Colossians remind us that Jesus Christ is the only source of truth, the answer to every ultimate question. He is our only hope.

Living in the hope of Christ isn’t always easy in this world, but we have access to Christ’s power working through us. God’s strength can help us defend and uphold the truth of the Gospel, if we stand firm in our faith.

11. *What does it mean to have a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ?*

12. *How might believers feel they are “poor in spirit?”*

13. *How does the treasure of the truth of the Gospel give us hope?*

14. *How does following Jesus give purpose to our lives?*

Encourage One Another

Paul wrote to believers to encourage them in their hope in Christ. We have the same hope of future glory with Christ based on His finished work of salvation—His sacrificial death and resurrection. We also have hope in the treasure of receiving wisdom and guidance in life through our belief and knowledge of Jesus, if He lives and reigns in our hearts.

► *How can we encourage others in their faith when they go through hard times? On a note card, write an encouraging note to someone—believer or nonbeliever—to share the hope we have in Christ. Consider new insights you gleaned from the lesson about the hope of Christ and how it applies to your everyday life.*

KEY VERSES

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
—Colossians 2:2-3, KJV

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
—Colossians 2:2-3, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 3 through June 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Acts 28:23-31—Boldly Proclaiming the Kingdom.
- Tues.** Exodus 19:9-11, 16-25—The Awesome Presence of God.
- Wed.** Hebrews 12:18-29—The Consuming Fire.
- Thurs.** Acts 4:23-31—The Church Prays for Boldness.
- Fri.** Exodus 34:28-35—Transfigured by the Power of God.
- Sat.** Deuteronomy 31:1-8—Be Strong and Courageous.
- Sun.** 2 Corinthians 3:5-18—Ministers of a New Covenant.

Bold Ministers

“Have you lost weight?” Ronelle asked Sebastian.

“No.” Sebastian smiled.

“Well, it’s something. What is it?” queried Ronelle.

“You’re looking better and better every time I see you.”

Sebastian zipped his guitar case and looked up at the praise and worship team member.

“It’s the glory of the Lord,” said Music Minister Kenton, seated at the keyboard.

Sebastian smiled and dipped his head as he rose to his feet. The 31-year-old was grateful for this church where he had been a member for the past two years. He was happy to have found a church that loved God, loved people, and didn’t major on a bunch of rules and regulations. They were passionate about following the Lord and the Spirit’s lead.

Sebastian had become passionate about following as well. His spiritual walk had taken on a new depth since coming to this church. It was evident in his worship, his music, and his life. Sebastian had become captivated by doing the will of the Lord, and yet he had never felt such freedom in the Lord. It was a wonderful paradox.

“Thank you, Minister Kenton,” said Sebastian. “I continually seek God’s face. And I’m grateful for the love, grace, forgiveness, and glory of God.”

“Well, brother,” said Ronelle. “The glory of the Lord is all over you. At our next rehearsal, I’ll have on some sunglasses.”

1. *What is the difference between legalism and God’s grace and freedom?*

2. *How do people limit God’s love, grace, and joy today?*

3. *Why is it important to focus on the Spirit’s freedom, rather than rules that condemn?*

Ministers of a New Covenant

2 Corinthians 3:5-11, KJV

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

2 Corinthians 3:5-11, NIV

⁵Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ⁹If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. ¹¹And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Paul asserted that he and his colleagues proclaimed the Gospel in a sincere and authoritative manner (2 Cor. 2:17).

It may be that Paul's detractors were accusing him of self-promotion and the pursuit of money. If so, he countered that neither he nor his associates were bragging about themselves. Likewise, they did not require "letters of recommendation" endorsing them to others (2 Cor. 3:1).

The Father enabled Paul's "competence" (vs. 5) in witnessing to the lost. God made Paul worthy as a servant of the "new covenant" (vs. 6) of Jeremiah 31. This agreement is not based on a written code, one which condemns sinners and consigns them to death (or eternal separation from the Creator). Rather, the compact comes from the Spirit who brings "life" to all God's regenerate children (2 Cor. 3:6).

Paul contrasted the new covenant of grace with the old covenant of the law (Exod. 34:29-35). The Ten Commandments etched in stone communicated God's "glory" (2 Cor. 3:7). At the time, Moses' face shone so brightly that his peers could not fix their gaze on him.

But Paul reasoned that the Gospel ministry empowered by the Spirit was even more "glorious" (vs. 8). The law produced "condemnation" (vs. 9), resulting in a death sentence for everyone. But the good news about Christ resulted in "righteousness" for all who trusted in Him. The believers' right standing before God is an outcome so wonderful and everlasting that it makes the glory which shone from the face of Moses seem dim by comparison.

God knew that the law by itself could not accomplish His purpose of redemption, that someday the fullness of His plan would be revealed. The law demonstrates our need for a Savior. Christ has come, and the glory of the new covenant shines brightly throughout eternity (vs. 11).

4. *Who made Paul qualified to be in ministry?*

5. *What was the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant?*

6. *What critique did Paul make of the law?*

7. *What argument did Paul make for the "ministry of the Spirit" (vs. 8)?*

The Ministry of the Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:12-18, KJV

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13 And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:12-18, NIV

¹²Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Paul contrasted the old covenant of the law with the new covenant of grace. Once more, Paul drew attention to the fading glory coming from Moses' face. To prevent God's people from seeing this radiance, the lawgiver placed a "veil" (vs. 13) over himself. Likewise, Paul surmised that the law was being surpassed by the Father's

saving plan to redeem the lost through His Son. The glory of the new covenant would not fade.

Perhaps with deep misgivings, Paul asserted that the “minds” (vs. 14) of his unbelieving Jewish peers were closed. Even as they attentively listened to the Scriptures being read in synagogue services, a “veil” prevented them from understanding the truth. The covering can only be removed by the Spirit of God.

Paul declared that those who trusted in Christ for salvation have the “veil” lifted from their eyes (vs. 16). In turn, the Spirit renews their minds and transforms their hearts after the “image” (vs. 18) of the Son. The Spirit enables them to understand that the Son came to fulfill the Scriptures.

Paul identified the “Lord” with the “Spirit.” As the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit removes the spiritual “veil” (vs. 16) and brings “life” (vs. 6) and “freedom” (vs. 17) to believers. The Spirit can offer freedom from slavery to the written rules that humans were unable to keep. Those in Christ receive the Father’s grace. This is the new covenant inaugurated by the Son.

Furthermore, the Spirit enables God’s children to behold and reflect His “glory” (vs. 18). In this new redeemed order, there is no place for covering the “ever-increasing” radiance the Spirit produces in the lives of Christians. The Spirit changes them to outwardly reflect the likeness of Christ, as ambassadors of God’s grace and love for the world. This path to true holiness, which specialists called sanctification, originates with the “Lord,” whom Paul declared was the “Spirit.”

8. *What “veil” did Paul say the Jews had when they heard the Scriptures (vs. 13)?*

9. *How is the veil lifted?*

10. *What was the basis for the believers’ “freedom” (vs. 17)?*

His Word on Our Hearts

God gave commandments in tablets of stone to His people at Mount Sinai, but His plan all along was to write His law on their hearts, so His people would know Him (Jer. 31:31-34). All people are offered a personal relationship with the living God.

God's new covenant agreement—an offer of grace through Jesus' death and resurrection—provided a way for imperfect people to keep the covenant. Paul placed his trust in God's strength alone. Any confidence in our ability to hold up our end of the covenant relationship is found through faith and trust in Jesus alone for righteousness before God.

Paul contrasted the old covenant of the law with the new covenant of grace in order to show the role of the Spirit. When we trust Jesus and have faith that He is God's Messiah, the Spirit transforms our hearts and minds. The veil is lifted, and we are able to behold and to reflect God's glory in our lives—with the Spirit's help.

Because Jesus came, God is not hidden from us. We must not hide the work of Christ either. Jesus emphasized we are not to cover or hide (as with a veil) God's work in our lives (Matt. 5:14-16). Rather, as we accept God's gift of grace and a life of freedom in the Spirit, we are to reflect Christ and His love to those around us. People who claim to be followers of the Lord without submitting to His will are only fooling themselves. Those who truly belong to the Lord are transformed so others will see Christ at work in their lives.

11. *What does our covenant relationship with God look like?*

12. *Why might some people still live under a shadow of condemnation?*

13. *What does it mean to reflect God's glory in our lives?*

Living in Freedom

Believers' lives become a letter from Christ. The Spirit of the living God writes His Word on our hearts. We enter into a new covenant with God through a personal relationship with Jesus. God gives us glimpses of His everlasting glory through His Word, resulting in a bold hope that we will share in that glory in the future. As we become more and more transformed into His image, the Spirit of the Lord gives us freedom in our daily lives.

► *How can you live in the Spirit's freedom this week? On this page or on an index card, complete this statement:*

*"This week I will live in the Spirit's freedom by _____
_____."*

KEY VERSE

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. —2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

—2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 10 through June 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Luke 22:25-30—Servant Leadership.

Tues. Acts 1:1-11—You Shall Receive Power.

Wed. Isaiah 61—Anointed by God.

Thurs. Psalms 133-134—How Pleasant to Live in Unity.

Fri. Ephesians 4:1-7—Bear with One Another in Love.

Sat. Philippians 2:1-13—Embrace the Mind of Christ.

Sun. Romans 15:1-13—Prayer for Hope, Joy, and Peace.

Empowered Servants

Robyn let out her breath on the fourth ring and smiled when Sandra answered the phone. She hadn't seen her friend at church for more than four months. She knew Sandra was having some car problems but felt like there was something more.

"I've been missing you at church," said Robyn.

"I just have so much going on," said Sandra.

The two women talked for a while about their families and jobs, then Robyn circled the conversation back to church.

"I don't think I've healed from all of my 'church hurt,'" said Sandra. "I had some painful experiences at previous churches. Then when I experienced 'the incident' at our church, it didn't take much for me to be felled again."

"I'm so sorry that happened to you," Robyn said. "I understand, really. God is working on all of us. He is helping me with forgiveness, and He is helping me with my flesh. I know that I have been hurt, and I have also hurt others because of my selfishness, my pride, my sin."

"Yeah, you're right, Sister Robyn," Sandra said slowly. "I've got hang-ups, and there are areas I can grow in. I admire you for saying that."

"We all can grow in the area of love."

"Amen," said Sandra.

"I can pick you up for church this Sunday," continued Robyn. "Please come—the group needs you there."

"Okay," surrendered Sandra. "Thanks, I will."

1. *Who is someone in the church body whom you admire and why?*

2. *What sometimes holds you back from fully accepting others?*

3. *How is God glorified when we live in community and harmony?*

Be Considerate of One Another

Romans 15:1-6, KJV

1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:1-6, NIV

¹We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ²Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. ³For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." ⁴For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

⁵May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Romans 14 and 15, Paul stressed the importance of Christians treating one another with sensitivity and love. There is some uncertainty about who were the "weak" (14:1) and the "strong" (15:1) in the church at Rome. The "strong" were perhaps Gentile Christians who had little exposure to the law of Moses and exercised their freedom in the Son more than did their saved Jewish peers. In contrast, when the "weak" observed holy days, they abstained

from consuming animal flesh. These could have been Jewish believers who were observing various religious festivals.

Paul considered himself to be a strong Christian. He urged those in the church at Rome who were likeminded to accept the misgivings of the Lord's followers who were "weak" in the faith (Rom. 15:1). In all their actions, believers were to first consider what was best for others in the church, to help others grow stronger in their faith (vs. 2).

Jesus perfectly demonstrated this humble attitude. Rather than try to vindicate Himself, He allowed others to slander and revile Him so that the lost might be saved. This truth is based on Psalm 69:9, which Paul quoted in Romans 15:3. His citation served as an example of how God's Word, though "written in the past" (vs. 4), had contemporary relevance, including the provision of needed and timely instruction for believers.

As Jesus' followers studied and applied Scripture to their lives, the Spirit gave them "hope." In turn, this enabled them to endure trials and encouraged them to remain loyal to the Son. The apostle prayed that the Father, the ultimate source of the believers' patience and consolation, would help His children at Rome to be united in their thinking and at peace with one another as they obeyed and served the Messiah (vs. 5).

Paul knew there would continue to be differences of opinion among his readers over matters not clarified in Scripture, but he wanted the strong and weak to accept their differences in Christian love and join together in glorifying the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 6).

4. *What is the goal of putting our "neighbors" (vs. 2) first?*

5. *Who is the prime example of being focused on the needs of others? Why?*

6. *How can believers be considerate of one another?*

Accept One Another

Romans 15:7-13, KJV

7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:

9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.

11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.

12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Romans 15:7-13, NIV

⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed ⁹and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name."

¹⁰Again, it says,

"Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people."

¹¹And again,

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him."

¹²And again, Isaiah says,

"The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope."

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul contended that the example of Jesus is incentive to “accept one another” just as Jesus welcomed Jews and Gentiles (vs. 7). Christians, in turn, are to glorify God by accepting one another.

The Roman Christians are to welcome one another, just as Jesus welcomed them “to the glory of God” (vs. 7, KJV). The Son, though reigning in heaven with the Father and the Spirit, became a servant of the Jews (vs. 8). This demonstrates the truth of God’s “promises,” those made long ago. The Father showed unwavering commitment to keep ancient pledges to the children of Abraham.

And from eternity past, it was God’s redemptive plan to include Gentiles in the Body of Christ (vs. 9). Jews and Gentiles would “glorify God for His mercy” (vs. 9).

Paul supported this claim with a string of scriptural quotations from the Law, the Prophets, and Psalms (vss. 9-12). Psalm 18:49 (vs. 9b) speaks of confessing and praising the Lord among the Gentiles. Paul’s second quote is from Deuteronomy 32:43 (vs. 10), where Gentiles, alongside the descendants of Israel, were directed to express thanksgiving to God. The third quote, from Psalm 117:1 (vs. 11), says that all people—including Gentiles—are invited to praise God. Finally, the fourth quote is from Isaiah 11:10 (vs. 12). One from King David’s royal line, called “the Root of Jesse” would come to bring hope to Gentiles.

The Creator God was the ultimate source of believers’ “hope.” Paul prayed that the Father would bless those in Rome with unmeasured “joy and peace” as they continued to put their trust in Him (vs. 13). He desired that the power of the Spirit would fill them with this hope.

7. *What two reasons did Paul give for believers accepting one another?*

8. *How is the advancement of the Gospel affected by believers accepting one another?*

9. *What sorts of feelings would emerge when believers accept one another?*

Uplift Defined

Paul told the new believers in the church in Rome to set aside their legitimate desires and remain sensitive to the apprehensions of others. This instruction included believers endeavoring to do things that would uplift or edify all their fellow Christians. As he told the Corinthians, “No one should seek their own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor. 10:24).

Merriam-Webster defines “uplift” as “to lift up” or “to improve the spiritual, social, or intellectual condition of.” The first part is a more literal meaning of the word, but the second half is in line with what Paul was saying in today’s text.

The definition gives three objectives that the mature Christian can seek to accomplish by offering encouragement. Newer believers are weaker, but not in a physical sense. They don’t have as much knowledge and experience in the faith as a more mature believer. Therefore, it falls on the shoulders of mature believers to uplift others when they are struggling, slipping back into old habits, or doubting their faith.

New believers may feel completely overwhelmed by everything they do not know. They may think they are not good enough to participate in a Bible study or small group with those who have followed Christ for much longer. They may be tempted to go back to what was familiar and comfortable. This is where the strong believers need to step in to say, “You can do this! Jesus loves you, and I’m here to help.”

10. *How can you improve the spiritual life of a fellow believer today, tomorrow, this week?*

11. *How can you improve the social life of a fellow believer today, tomorrow, this week?*

12. *How can you improve the intellectual condition of a fellow believer today, tomorrow, this week?*

God of This City

Believers are designed to rely on one another, but too often we take this action for granted or don't realize just how important it is. The will of God in this world can't be accomplished by one individual; it takes the entire Body of Christ to spread His message and love.

► *Where do you see a need for God in your town or city? How can you plug in to that situation and be a light? For example, is there another organization or charity involved already that you could partner with?*

KEY VERSES

Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. —Romans 15:5-6, KJV

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. —Romans 15:5-6, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 17 through June 23

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 42—Hope in God Our Help.
- Tues.** 1 John 5:1-13—Whoever Has the Son Has Life.
- Wed.** 1 John 5:14-21—Boldness in Christ.
- Thurs.** Psalm 23—The Lord Is My Shepherd.
- Fri.** Isaiah 12—Trust in God Our Salvation.
- Sat.** Hebrews 6:1-8—Maturing in Christ.
- Sun.** Hebrews 6:9-20—Trust God's Promises.

Full Assurance

Are you in much pain?" Grady asked. Pastor Ericson Davis smiled with his lips slightly tight. Severe arthritis in his back caused the 6-foot-tall minister to walk with a pronounced bent. The pain could be intense at times, but this Sunday morning it was light to moderate. When he woke up, however, the pain had been excruciating. He had needed his wife to help get him out of bed.

The 76-year-old had diligently done the prescribed stretches and exercises, and they helped to lessen the pain.

"It's fair to moderate, thanks for asking," said Pastor Ericson.

"I hate to see you in pain," the younger man said.

"That was an anointed word you preached this morning," said Sister Rhiana, walking up to the two. "I really needed it."

"Praise God!" said Pastor Ericson.

When she left, Grady said, "Do you have plans to retire soon? Not that I want to see you stop. I'm just concerned about how you're going to make it."

"I appreciate that," said Pastor Ericson. "I plan to preach until I can't anymore, and I know God will continue to provide for and bless me until the very end."

On the drive home, Sister Davis turned to her husband, smiled, and said, "I think Brother Grady is going to buy you a leather chair or something more comfortable to sit in."

1. *What is an example of a time in your life when you had to be diligent?*

2. *Is it easy or difficult for you to believe God will keep His promises? Why?*

3. *What Scriptures support the supposition that God keeps His word?*

Be Diligent to the Very End

Hebrews 6:9-12, KJV

9 But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 6:9-12, NIV

⁹Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. ¹⁰God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹²We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Hebrews 5:11—6:8 warned readers not to be “lazy” (vs. 12), implying if they remained in their dullness, they would eventually walk away from the faith all together. However, 6:9-20 contrasts this warning with an encouragement to fight dullness by clinging to the promises of God.

Though walking away from faith must be a real concern for these believers, the writer said that he was “persuaded” of “better things” for them (vs. 9). The “better” things refer to the final day, when God will save them from the wrath to come.

The author’s confidence of “better things” is rooted in the unchanging character of God. He “will not forget” their work and labors of love done for Him (vs. 10). The church was known as a people who cared for the needs of others. It is evident that their love was selfless; it was done

“toward his name” (vs. 10, KJV). “Toward his name” indicates that their love was the kind that was from God and for God.

Verse 10 highlights the “labour of love” among the audience and further encourages them to keep going. The author said that his greatest “desire” for them was that they might show ongoing “diligence” so that they might obtain the final reality of their present “hope” (vs. 11). “Diligence” is defined in verse 12 as following the example of the saints who came before.

4. *What are the warnings and encouragements in the context and in this section?*

5. *Why is the author persuaded of better things for his audience?*

6. *According to this text, what is one way to know what diligence looks like in the Christian life?*

God Keeps His Promises

Hebrews 6:13-20, KJV

13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,

14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the

Hebrews 6:13-20, NIV

¹³When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”

¹⁵And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

¹⁶People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷Because God wanted to make the

heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.

¹⁸God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Abraham trusted in the promises of God. God both promised and swore by Himself that He would do what He said he would do. To doubly confirm the promise to Abraham, God swore an oath “by himself” (vs. 13, NIV).

An oath was made by making a promise in the name of someone or something greater (Num. 30:2). So, when God wanted to make an oath to Abraham, there is no one greater than God. Thus God made an oath by His own name. God didn’t need to make an oath in order to establish the promise; God’s promise was already trustworthy, for God always makes good on His promises. But in order that Abraham would be doubly confident, God took an oath on His own name.

According to verse 14, God’s promise, confirmed by an oath to Abraham, was that Abraham would receive blessing and would have a large family. Therefore, after patiently waiting, Abraham “received what was promised” in the birth of his heir Isaac (vs. 15).

Verses 16-18 contain an argument from the lesser to

the greater. According to this author, when people want to settle an argument, they make an oath on something greater than themselves. When an oath is made, it “puts an end to all argument,” and the matter is settled (vs. 16) As if God’s promise wasn’t solidified enough already, “two unchangeable things” make it doubly impossible for God to lie: His nature and His oath (vs. 18).

Hope in God and His promises is like “an anchor for the soul” (vs. 19). An anchor holds a ship down amid turbulent waters, but hope in God is “firm and secure” in the midst of the trials and temptations of life. This anchor of hope is firmly established behind the “veil” which separates God’s holy presence.

Jesus’ death made a way for sinful people to have a right relationship with a Holy God. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice and priest who can cleanse sin (Heb. 10:14). When Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross, the separating veil was torn in two (Matt. 27:51). Hope is anchored in Christ who stands behind the veil in heaven (Heb. 9:24).

In the same way that God made a promise and an oath to Abraham, God made a promise and an oath concerning Jesus. Psalm 110:4 says, “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4, KJV). If Jesus is a priest forever, then his priestly role in heaven will never cease.

Hope must be anchored in Jesus as the “forerunner” (vs. 20) of faith. For if believers put faith in Jesus, their hope will be anchored in heaven and they will be diligent to press on toward that hope, until they see Him face-to-face on the final day of salvation.

7. *What are the two unchangeable things that guarantee God will not lie?*

8. *What was God’s promise and oath to Abraham?*

9. *What is God’s promise and oath to Jesus?*

10. *How does God’s promise and oath to Jesus give us hope?*

Back Against the Wall

My husband and I were expecting our first child. I was very pregnant when without warning, my husband—Bruce—couldn't walk. His back was causing debilitating pain, and he was immobile! When I say immobile, I mean he couldn't shower, dress, sit, or do anything. The pain became slightly tolerable if he laid in a very specific position. You can imagine the effect this had on us.

Bruce couldn't work anymore, and his job was our only income. We had bills, and we didn't know how long our savings would last. Would this injury resolve itself? I was in my third trimester; I was in no condition to look for a job—not to mention, I couldn't leave Bruce alone if he couldn't do anything. I was his nurse around the clock.

We tried anything to get him relief—physical therapy, a chiropractor, endless doctor appointments, specialists. It felt like a never-ending cycle. Days turned to weeks and months. He was still bedridden and in unbelievable pain.

And yet, I've never felt more seen by God. He showed up when people provided meals, when pastors came to pray, and when we stretched our dollars to make ends meet. Total strangers gave us money. There were people getting us in to see different doctors to try new treatments. We felt care and love like never before. We never missed a payment. Finally, after nearly four months of pain, Bruce had spinal surgery and felt relief.

Our house, our marriage, our new baby girl—all of these would have been impacted without the grace of God during such an ordeal. God gets the glory for the faithfulness He showed us, never leaving or forsaking us.

11. *What promise in Scripture do you cling to on difficult days?*

12. *Which of God's promises are you most excited to see fulfilled?*

13. *What are some ways you "keep the faith" when you feel like giving up?*

Faithful to You

It's easy to flip through Scripture and see examples of God fulfilling His promises and think, *Gee, that's really cool. I wish He would do something like that for me.* Good news! He can, and He will!

► *Rewrite the Key Verses shown below by inserting your name wherever you see the words "our" or "we." How does seeing your name in the verses change or impact their meaning for you? Does it bolster your faith? Why or why not?*

KEY VERSES

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. —Hebrews 6:19-20, KJV

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. —Hebrews 6:19-20, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 24 through June 30

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 27—My Heart Shall Not Fear.
- Tues.** Philippians 3:1-14—The Treasure of Knowing Christ.
- Wed.** Galatians 1:13-24—Jesus Makes a Difference.
- Thurs.** Isaiah 41:1-15—God Will Help the Fearful.
- Fri.** Daniel 12—The Wise Shall Shine Brightly.
- Sat.** Acts 9:1-9—Encounter with Christ.
- Sun.** Acts 26:1-11—An Apostle's Defense.

Fearless Witness

It's like he doesn't think for himself anymore ever since he's been going to that church," said Jevonte, as he moved the clippers up the back hairline of his customer.

Jevonte was complaining about his cousin, Travone, who had once been his "ride-or-die" partner.

"The dudes I know who do go to church, go sporadically and haven't changed their street life," said Dashaud, the barber two chairs down.

Jamar was listening and praying while waiting on Jevonte to trim his hair. Being new to the city, the 31-year-old had been in this barbershop only two other times.

"The Lord certainly changed me," said Jamar. Silence came over the shop, and all eyes turned to him. "People get confused about going to church and having a relationship with God."

"You're a church dude?" Jevonte asked, unfastening the smock from his customer's neck and shaking it.

"I'm a Christ dude," smiled Jamar. "I go to church for fellowship and to hear the Word."

"Some of the biggest hypocrites and sinners are in churches," spouted Dashaud.

"I was a big sinner, but it was the blood of Jesus that saved me, the Holy Spirit who cleaned me up and is still cleaning me up," said Jamar, climbing into Jevonte's chair.

The buzz of conversations in the shop started back up again. Throughout his hair trim, Jamar spoke of the love of Christ, with Dashaud listening in.

1. *Why is it important to verbally share our hope in Christ with others?*

2. *What role does the Holy Spirit have in our sharing our hope in Christ?*

3. *Why is it important to be obedient to the Holy Spirit leading in testifying of our hope in Christ?*

Paul's Opening Statement

Acts 26:1-3, KJV

1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

Acts 26:1-3, NIV

¹Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: ²"King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, ³and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently."

When Festus became governor of Judea, he asked Paul whether the apostle would go back to Jerusalem to stand trial, but Paul appealed his case to Caesar, fearing that his Jewish peers would try to kill him in Jerusalem (Acts 25:1-12). When King Agrippa II and his sister, Bernice, came to Caesarea to visit Festus, he told them about Paul's case. Agrippa, being intrigued by the matter, agreed to hear the apostle (vss. 13-23). The following day, a formal inquiry was held in which Agrippa gave Paul "permission to speak" (26:1) in his own defense. Paul began his defense by gesturing with his hand, like an orator would do while making a speech.

The Greek verb "to defend" (vs. 2) emphasizes someone in court providing argumentation to counter accusations made against him or her. In Paul's case, the baseless charges included violations of the "Jewish law" (25:8), along with unspecified offenses against the Jerusalem "temple" and "Caesar" (see 21:28).

Though the charges were false, Paul did not speak in

a disdainful way toward Agrippa. Instead, he addressed the ruler as “king” (vs. 2). From there, Paul acknowledged how “fortunate” he was to be given the opportunity to appear in Agrippa’s presence and rebut all the charges.

Paul acknowledged that Agrippa was especially knowledgeable about “Jewish customs” (vs. 3), so Paul implored Agrippa to “listen . . . patiently” as he offered his defense.

4. *What did Agrippa give permission for Paul to do?*

5. *What was the occasion for Paul’s appearance before Agrippa?*

Paul’s Belief in the Resurrection

Acts 26:4-8, KJV

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers:

7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

Acts 26:4-8, NIV

⁴“The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. ⁶And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today.

⁷This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. ⁸“Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”

Paul noted that the Jewish leaders were well aware of his life story beginning with his childhood. This included his formative years of education, which he received while residing among his own people and even in Jerusalem. Paul told Agrippa that even the apostle's opponents knew him for many years and could confirm as witnesses in a legal proceeding, should they choose to do so, that Paul compulsively observed the "strictest" (vs. 5) regulations mandated by the Pharisees.

Next, Paul focused on one of Judaism's most contested issues—whether God raised the dead. He referred to his confident expectation in the resurrection as the promise that God made long ago to the patriarchs. More than any other issue, he was being tried for proclaiming the good news about his "hope" (vs. 6) in the Messiah. Furthermore, the apostle declared that the Lord's "promise" (vs. 7) of life after death was the same pledge Israel's 12 tribes longed for God to fulfill. Indeed, this hope led all Jews to worship and serving God "day and night."

Still respectfully addressing Agrippa, Paul strategically claimed his belief in the afterlife was the actual reason his religious peers brought charges against him. He questioned why any person, including Agrippa, doubted whether God could to raise people from the "dead" (vs. 8).

6. *What characterized Paul's life before his conversion?*

7. *About what "hope" did Paul speak to Agrippa (vs. 6)?*

Paul's Persecution of Christians

Acts 26:9-11, KJV

9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison,

Acts 26:9-11, NIV

⁹"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

¹⁰And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put

having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities."

Paul acknowledged that, before his conversion, he believed it was his ethical duty to do everything necessary to stop the proclamation of "the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (vs. 9). He did that in Jerusalem with the authorization of the chief priests. He was hunting down, harassing, and incarcerating "the Lord's people" (vs. 10) according to his scrupulous observance of the Jewish law.

Before trusting in the Messiah, he voted for believers to be killed as heretics. He might have recalled the painful memory of his involvement in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54; 8:1; 22:20). Paul felt it was his duty to travel from one town and synagogue to the next, forcing Christians to "blaspheme" (or curse, vs. 11) Jesus' name. This most likely means forcing them to renounce their their faith in Him.

His zeal was so intense that he even traveled to "foreign cities" (like Damascus) to chase after and persecute Christians. It did not matter to this misguided Pharisee that he risked becoming ceremonially defiled (or ritually unclean) by entering pagan and Gentile lands. But the resurrected Savior intervened while Paul was traveling on the road heading to Damascus.

8. *Prior to Paul's conversion, what was his attitude toward Christians?*

9. *In what ways did Paul once persecute Christians?*

Hopelessness

Hopelessness consumes many hearts. When I read the news, I feel it. Families mourn after a mass shooting, communities are torn apart by gang warfare, and people in extreme poverty struggle to afford the necessities of life.

“You look dejected,” my husband said as I returned home from a frustrating day. I felt dejected too. With a smile, he reminded me that Christ can give me hope, no matter what I face. I thanked him for his encouragement. I didn’t know how to make sense of what I was feeling.

As I laid in bed that night, I prayed that God would remind me of hope. It occurred to me that Jesus came to a world that wasn’t perfect, a world that had its share of problems—like mine. I realized that Jesus had experienced the same frustrations as I. He was surrounded by illness and poverty, by greed and brutality. He faced real evil, and He overcame it. Somehow I slept more peacefully at that thought.

The next day, nothing had really changed in the world—except me. No longer did I dwell on the evil I don’t control. I lived in the hope that Christ gives. I trust that, even when I don’t see, God is at work in this world. He is in control.

It’s difficult to have hope when we look at our realities. Yet as we learn to refocus our gaze onto the face of Christ, we find a God who is with us. Our hope in God can look naive or foolish to outsiders, but we know that God is not sleeping or disinterested. God wants to fill our hearts with peace. Christ will reign as king until the memories of pain and evil have utterly fled.

10. *Why is it difficult to have hope when we focus on what we see in the world?*

11. *How should our daily response to the world’s problems reflect the hope we have in Christ?*

12. *Have you personally experienced hope in Christ?*

Chosen to Share

Remember that special feeling when your friend chose you to be on his sport team? We need to experience that same special feeling about being chosen to testify of our hope in Christ. John 15:16 says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.” Jesus reminds us in this verse that He chose us to go into the world and testify of our hope in Him. It is not of our choosing or optional. Jesus chose us to take every opportunity given to testify of our hope in Him.

► *Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to testify of your hope in Christ daily. Throughout the next week, look for opportunities to share your hope in Christ with others. Write here the names of some people you might share the hope of Christ with.*

KEY VERSE

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers. —Acts 26:6, KJV

“And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today.” —Acts 26:6, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of July 1 through July 7

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 6:9-15—Our Father in Heaven.
- Tues.** Jeremiah 52:1-15—Judah’s Fate Sealed.
- Wed.** Jeremiah 52:16-30—God’s People Face Exile.
- Thurs.** Hebrews 4:12-16— Boldly Approach the Throne of Grace.
- Fri.** Hebrews 8:6-13—God Will Remember Sins No More.
- Sat.** Psalm 30—Joy Comes with the Morning.
- Sun.** Lamentations 3:16-24—Hope in God’s Steadfast Love.

Ceaseless Love

Javina dripped the last bit of water from her kitchen sink. She needed a plumber, not only for her kitchen sink, but also one of her bathroom sinks and the plumbing stack in the basement.

Her house, which was not very old, still needed sizable repairs, like a new roof and some electrical work. Javina intended to rent out her house and do repairs with the extra income. But that had been when she was engaged to Ty, and the two had planned to move into his condo.

Emotionally, she was still reeling from Ty breaking the engagement, and today was the first anniversary of her mother's death. As an only child, Javina had no other sibling to grieve with. She and her mom had been inseparable.

And to top it all off, one of her good friends, Kerri, had ghosted her. Kerri had blocked her calls. Javina didn't know why. She could feel herself sinking into depression and despair, and she couldn't seem to get a foothold.

As she fell into bed for the night, Javina let a whimper come out of her soul. "Lord, help me," she prayed quietly. "This is all too much. I don't know what to do. I'm so hurt."

As she closed her eyes, she was not looking forward to the coming day; but she knew the Lord and His mercy would be there.

- 1.** *As a Christian, what despair has challenged your faith in God the most?*
- 2.** *How did that despair impact your life?*
- 3.** *How did the Lord deliver you from that despair?*

A Downcast Soul

Lamentations 3:16-20, KJV

16 He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes.

17 And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity.

18 And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD:

19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

20 My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

Lamentations 3:16-20, NIV

¹⁶He has broken my teeth with gravel;
he has trampled me in the dust.

¹⁷I have been deprived of peace;
I have forgotten what prosperity is.

¹⁸So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD."

¹⁹I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.

²⁰I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.

Although Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem, Jeremiah acknowledged that God Himself was using Babylon to punish the southern kingdom of Judah for its sins and rebellion against Him—just as He had used Assyria more than a century earlier against the northern kingdom of Israel. Judah had watched its sister nation be destroyed, yet had not learned its lessons.

As he had for the previous first two and a half chapters, Jeremiah not only cried over the destruction of Judah but detailed his own personal pain—and again, laid the responsibility upon God: "I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with bitter herbs and given me gall to drink" (Lam. 3:14-15). In verse 16, he expanded further: "He has broken my teeth with gravel." Israel's conquerors had literally driven them into the dirt.

Also, whatever food was left to eat was likewise riddled

with dust and gravel. God had indeed left Jeremiah to cower in ashes—with the ashes not only reflecting a state of repentance (Job 42:6; Jonah 3:3-8), but also the literal state of Jerusalem as a devastated city.

Jeremiah then moved from details about his personal condition to details about his general state of mind. The “weeping prophet,” even more than he already had during the many times the leaders of Israel had persecuted him, had “been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, ‘My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD’” (vss. 17-18). At least while Jeremiah had prophesied against Judah, there was still hope that the nation would repent and that God would restore them, despite what he had suffered at their hands. Now even that hope had been completely removed.

The prophet concluded this part of his lament by again remembering all he had suffered: “I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me” (vss. 19-20). Put simply, Jeremiah was despondent. Everything he had endured, for decades, to warn Judah now appeared to be all for nothing. The hope that the people of Judah had once had in the Lord had disappeared.

4. *How did Jeremiah describe what God had done to him and to Jerusalem (vs. 16)?*

5. *How did Jeremiah describe his own personal state (vss. 17-18)?*

6. *What did Jeremiah remember (vss. 19-20)? How did this affect him?*

A Hopeful, Waiting Soul

Lamentations 3:21-24, KJV

21 This I recall to my mind,
therefore have I hope.

22 It is of the LORD'S

Lamentations 3:21-24, NIV

²¹Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:

²²Because of the LORD'S great

mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.

24 The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

²³They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

²⁴I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

All seemed truly lost. And yet, despite his obvious despair at the destruction around him, Jeremiah's frame of mind took a sharp turn in verse 21. Something else had finally entered this grim picture: hope—specifically, hope in the only One who could provide hope in this seemingly hopeless situation. Therefore, instead of focusing on "my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall" as he had in verse 19, Jeremiah now declared, "This I call to mind and therefore I have hope"—hope in a truth that was even greater than the devastation of Jerusalem, and in a power greater than any leader or army.

The truth Jeremiah now "call[ed] to mind" was this: "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (vss. 22-23). Judah had been thoroughly beaten down, but had not been "consumed." Outward circumstances would not have the final say. There was still a remnant of those who honored God, and therefore there was still hope. Jeremiah, and ultimately Judah itself, would survive even this intense suffering. God still loved them; while each day brought hardship and discipline, it also brought a fresh appearance of His mercy, unfailing compassion, and great faithfulness. As long as God was present, Jeremiah asserted, all could never be entirely lost.

With these truths firmly reestablished in his mind, Jeremiah realigned his focus and resolve: "I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him'"

(vs. 24). All Judah had left was the Lord—and the Lord, as always, was enough. The leaders of Judah had failed to deliver the nation because they and the people had chosen to disobey their true deliverer. Nonetheless, God would be faithful to them, even though they had been faithless toward Him (2 Tim. 2:13). While God had removed His protection from Judah and allowed it to suffer fully for its sins and rebellion, He had not abandoned them fully. His presence, and His compassion, were still with them. Therefore Jeremiah, and the faithful ones left in Judah, would “wait for him.”

Bible commentator Warren Wiersbe was once given a short rhyme that he said became a source of personal encouragement:



encouragement:

“Look at yourself and you’ll be depressed.

Look at circumstances and you’ll be distressed.

Look at the Lord and you’ll be blessed!”

Our circumstances change, and so do our feelings about them, but God is always good, loving, merciful, and kind, and He never changes.”

7. What changed in Jeremiah’s words and state of mind, starting in verse 21?

8. What did Jeremiah “call to mind” about the Lord (vss. 22–23)?

9. What did Jeremiah declare in response to God’s faithfulness?

Rembrandt’s painting of Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem (1630) shows the despair of the prophet, while in the left background people are fleeing the burning city.

Photo: Dennis Jarvis

Clinging to God

When the prophet Jeremiah saw the ruins of the holy city of Jerusalem, he clung to the Lord. When he saw God's people slain and cast into bondage, he clung to the Lord. When he himself was scorned and mistreated, he still clung to the Lord his God. Truly, Jeremiah is an exceptional model for each believer in Christ.

Adversity comes to all of us. As surely as there is evil in the world, our faith in Christ will be challenged. It may be subtle and unexpected, such as someone sideswiping us while we are driving; or it may be catastrophic, such as the prolonged death of a loved one. No matter the situation or the circumstances, we must cling to God's love and faithfulness if God's promises to us will ever have any enduring meaning for us.

When Joshua gave his farewell speech to the leaders of Israel, he told them to "hold fast to the LORD your God" (Josh. 23:8). When the psalmist needed the Lord, he said, "I cling to you; your right hand upholds me" (Ps. 63:8).

Why did Joshua exhort God's people to cling to God, and why did the psalmist declare his clinging to God? Both knew the character of the Lord—that He is a merciful and loving God, that He is faithful to His promises, that He is steady and unchanging and always able to uphold us.

Therefore, take your despair and all your other burdens to the Lord and cling to Him, for He can handle it: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," Jesus says to each one of us. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

10. *How do you present your despair to the Lord?*

11. *How does the Lord handle your despair?*

12. *Why is clinging to the Lord vital in your walk with Jesus?*

Confession and Gratitude

Jeremiah lamented the destruction of Jerusalem and the devastation of God's people. Although he understood that the rebellion of the people was responsible for God's judgment, he was also confident in God's loving compassion. So, he presented his despair to the Lord, just as we should do, being confident that He is always faithful and able to handle our own personal despair.

► *Write a prayer letter to Jesus. Thank Him for always being not only present to listen to your problems but also ready to bear them for you. Next, give to Him whatever despair you're experiencing or might be at your doorstep. Finally, praise Him for His love for and His mercy toward you.*

KEY VERSES

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.
—Lamentations 3:21-22, KJV

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
— Lamentations 3:21-22, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 8 through July 14

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Corinthians 2:12-17—The Fragrance of Knowing God.
- Tues.** Psalm 107:1-9—The Testimony of the Redeemed.
- Wed.** Psalm 107:10-22—Sing of God's Deeds with Joy.
- Thurs.** Colossians 1:3-12—Hope Laid Up in Heaven.
- Fri.** Ephesians 3:1-13—Proclaim Christ's Boundless Riches.
- Sat.** Psalm 71:1-11—Refuge in the Lord.
- Sun.** Psalm 71:12-21—Hope and Praise Continually.

Continual Proclamation

Listen to me, talking your head off,” said Angelique, pushing her dessert plate aside.

The 53-year-old had come to see her former coworker, Mrs. Mitchell. Mrs. Mitchell had lost her husband about two years ago. She had recently been released from the hospital following a fall. She had early signs of Parkinson’s. Her two sons lived out of town, but she had one granddaughter who lived in a neighboring state and regularly checked on her. Still, when Angelique heard about Mrs. Mitchell being hospitalized, she decided it was time for another visit.

Mrs. Mitchell had given Angelique wise counsel many times when they worked together. Among other things, the older woman helped Angelique navigate the politics of their school system. Angelique wanted to be of help to her friend now, and here she was going on and on about the trials and tribulations of her adult children.

“How are you doing, really?” asked Angelique.

“My God continues to bless me and keep me,” said the 81-year-old. “He woke me up this morning, in my right mind. I can’t thank Him enough.”

Angelique smiled. Mrs. Mitchell was still loving God. She thought her love may have waned and said so.

“Oh goodness no, child!” declared Mrs. Mitchell. “I know him as a Savior and a keeper. He is the only one you can put your hope in. You need to call on God for yourself and your children.”

1. *Why does God want us to teach generations other than our own about the good news that is in Christ Jesus?*

2. *In what ways does your church fulfill this calling from God?*

3. *Do you participate in teaching or outreach ministries? If not, why not?*

Continual Hope

Psalm 71:12-14, KJV

12 O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help.

13 Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt.

14 But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.

Psalm 71:12-14, NIV

¹²Do not be far from me, my God;

come quickly, God, to help me.

¹³May my accusers perish in shame;

may those who want to harm me

be covered with scorn and disgrace.

¹⁴As for me, I will always have hope;

I will praise you more and more.

Whether our afflictions come with aging or some other trial, if we are not careful, we can feel as if God is far from us. However, nothing could be further from the truth. As the psalmist made clear, help from our loving and gracious God is only a prayer away. Always, our heart's desire will be for Him to come to us "quickly" (vs. 12). But this is a matter of perspective, for though our circumstance may lead us to believe that the Lord is far away, the reality is that He is always with us.

There is no greater reason to rejoice than knowing that our God is with us. And we are assured of His presence through consistent prayer and time with Him, which in turn produces thankfulness in our hearts, no matter the circumstances. This can be hard at times, especially when facing false "accusers" (vs. 13).

False accusations can be painful in at least two ways. First, if believed, lies can tarnish the opinions others may have of us. Second, these false accusations can negatively impact the view others may have of our God. So the psalmist prayed that his accusers would be brought to "scorn and disgrace" (vs. 13). When that happens, others will see them for who they are and will not believe their lies.

Because we know that the Lord is always with us and will take up our cause against those who falsely accuse us, we also know that He is our only hope in this life and in the life to come. Unlike our false accusers, it is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18). Therefore, we who put our trust in the Lord “have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (vs. 19a). And because our hope is sure in the Lord, out of gratitude and love, our praise can pour out of abundant hearts.

Additionally, we can lead the younger generation in doing the same. Considering the hope we have in the Lord, it is so important to help the next generation understand the hope and love that is also theirs if they come to Him in faith.

4. *Why did the psalmist want the Lord to come to him quickly?*

5. *What did the psalmist desire for his adversaries and false accusers?*

6. *Knowing that the Lord will help, what can we always have?*

Courageous Hope

Psalm 71:15-18, KJV

15 My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof.

16 I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.

17 O God, thou hast taught me from my

Psalm 71:15-18, NIV

¹⁵My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,
of your saving acts all day long—
though I know not how to relate them all.

¹⁶I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.

¹⁷Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your

youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.

18 Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.

marvelous deeds.

¹⁸Even when I am old and gray,
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come.

The key to having the full assurance of our great hope in the Lord is to recall regularly the wondrous works He has already accomplished in our lives. That can encourage and see us through the dark times of life. And when we get on the other side of a trial or ordeal, we can look back at it and see how He led us through it, as well. Such was the case of the psalmist, who was ready to proclaim “all day long” (vs. 15) what the Lord had done for Him.

The psalmist’s challenge was that he did not know how he could name all the righteous and saving acts of God because he could not count them all. However, whether young or well-seasoned, healthy or ailing, we have every reason to rejoice and praise the Lord. And may our rejoicing be in such a manner that it also instructs and encourages “the next generation” (vs. 18) to come. When future generations see the “power” of the Lord, they are more apt to pass on God’s truth to the generations after them.

Sometimes we may think that when we become “old and gray,” God forgets us or we have nothing to pass along to those coming behind. We should pray as the psalmist did, “Do not forsake me, my God.” He will hear us and remind us that He is still with us at all times.

7. What should our mouths proclaim?

8. How long should we proclaim it?

9. To whom should we proclaim it?

Comforting Hope

Psalm 71:19-21, KJV

19 Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee!

20 Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

21 Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.

Psalm 71:19-21, NIV

¹⁹Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, you who have done great things.

Who is like you, God?

²⁰Though you have made me see troubles,

many and bitter,

you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth

you will again bring me up.

²¹You will increase my honor and comfort me once more.

There is no limit to the righteousness of God. And no matter how bad the troubles of life may be, we can know that our He is with us. Though our troubles may be “many and bitter” (vs. 20), we can know that God will strengthen us in this life. And when the time comes that our bodies are placed in the “depths of the earth,” our hope is still in the Lord, who is like no other and has always “done great things” (vs. 19).

There is also no greater comfort, especially for the aged, than knowing that God’s love and hope have been proclaimed and received by those who will carry on for Christ after we are gone. God will “honor” those who honor Him. What the psalmist meant when he said God will “restore my life again” is not clear, but a good life lived for Him lasts as it affects generations after us.

10. *How far does the righteousness of God reach?*

11. *What did the psalmist see and experience at the hand of God?*

12. *What promise of restoration and increase did the psalmist hope for?*

Share Your Faith

“Even youths grow tired and weary,” said Isaiah, “but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isa. 40:30-31). We who love the Lord can and should nurture that “hope in the Lord” in our young people. To see them “soar on wings like eagles” and “run and not grow weary” and “walk and not be faint” should inspire each of us to tell them about Jesus’ love and compassion for them and how He atoned for their sins and redeemed them for God’s heavenly kingdom.

When Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey together, others accompanied them, including Barnabas’s young cousin, John Mark. For whatever reason, Paul did not want Mark to join them on their next mission, which caused a split between Paul and Barnabas (see Acts 15:36-41). Many years later, Paul and Mark must have reconciled, for while he was in prison, he told Timothy to “get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

Thankfully, the senior Paul did not give up on his younger colleague in their ministry. Paul’s patience, forgiveness, and self-reflection regarding Mark probably helped him in being a mentor to Timothy.

Jesus Himself viewed younger people with deep affection when He said to His followers, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14).

13. *What could you do to tell other generations about Jesus?*

14. *What difficulties arise when you share the Gospel with young people? How does the Lord help you overcome these difficulties?*

15. *Do youth who love the Lord inspire you with your own faith in Jesus? Explain your answer.*

Enlightening Future Generations

In Psalm 71, the psalmist seeks the aid of God both for himself against his enemies and for future generations to whom he vows to proclaim the marvelous awesomeness of the Lord. It is a declaration of hope that can be realized only in the Lord God, and it's a message He calls us to teach to future generations about the hope we have in Christ.

► *Write here the names younger people with whom you could share the Gospel this coming week. Be ready to tell next week what happened when you presented your faith in the Lord with a youth if such an incident occurred.*

KEY VERSE

But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more. —Psalm 71:14, KJV

As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. —Psalm 71:14, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 15 through July 21

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

Mon. 2 Timothy 3:10-17—Equipped for Every Good Work.

Tues. Matthew 4:1-11—Resist Temptation.

Wed. Proverbs 30:1-9—Every Word of God Proves True.

Thurs. Colossians 3:12-17—Let Christ's Word Abound in You.

Fri. James 1:19-27—Doers of the Word.

Sat. Psalm 119:57-72—Lord, Teach Me Your Statutes.

Sun. Psalm 119:73-80—Hope in God's Word.

Delightful Precepts

Darius looked around at the other five men in Nolan's living room. If you had told him a year ago that he would be sitting with five other men on a Friday night enjoying a Bible study, he wouldn't have believed it.

Darius was loving living a life for the Lord, and he enjoyed learning the Word of God. He was thankful that he finally heeded God's voice and came to Christ. He just hated that his mother wasn't alive to see it.

The 30-year-old's old life had been one full of material trappings, fun times, a good posse, and attractive women. Now, his world had changed, and he loved the things of God! But there was so much he didn't know and understand. He remembered his mother talking about God, but it all seemed like a foreign language to him.

It didn't anymore, thanks to the Holy Spirit. Learning about God's ways and following the Lord was not a hardship, he had told his old friend, Ahmand. Darius wanted to please God, which meant keeping His commandments. They were not like the laws and regulations of the world.

Tonight, they were studying 1 John. Darius had a question about 1 John 3:6, because he had certainly sinned and made mistakes since knowing the Lord.

"Good question, Brother Darius," said Nolan. "I'm happy you've been so faithful to our men's study. I also appreciate your love for the Word."

1. *What is your general attitude toward the world's rules and regulations?*

2. *What do you perceive are the differences between the world's rules and regulations and the commandments of God?*

3. *How do the commandments of God indicate who God is and how He feels about us?*

Commands of Our Creator God

Psalm 119:73-74, KJV

73 Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.

74 They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.

Psalm 119:73-74, NIV

⁷³Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.

⁷⁴May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word.

Our text begins with the psalmist acknowledging a foundational truth: Our God is our Creator. He created the heavens, the earth, and everything therein, including people. As David proclaimed of the Lord, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Ps. 139:13-14). When we behold the beauty of the night sky, we can see how clearly it declares the glory of the Lord (Ps. 19:1). And the same is true when we look upon a newborn baby.

Along with marveling at the glories of our Creator, we can trust that He wants to communicate with us, as well. Over millennia, God has given His Word, the Old and New Testaments, to teach us how to have a relationship with Him and help us to understand how to please Him by keeping His commands. And, He has given us His Spirit to guide us in that understanding.

Furthermore, we can know that there is great reason to rejoice for those who fear the Lord and put their hope in His Word. It is strange to think of fear as a companion of rejoicing and hope, but such is the case when our fear is in the Lord. When we truly consider from His Word how mighty and majestic God is, we rightly understand how feeble we are in comparison. And that knowledge gives us hope that, no matter the circumstance or trial, God is more

than able to see us through it.

4. *What did the psalmist first acknowledge about the Lord?*

5. *Why did the psalmist want understanding?*

6. *According to this passage, in what should we put our hope?*

Commands of Our Compassionate God

Psalm 119:75-77, KJV

75 I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

76 Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.

77 Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.

Psalm 119:75-77, NIV

⁷⁵I know, LORD, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

⁷⁶May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.

⁷⁷Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.

It takes spiritual maturity to appreciate afflictions that God allows into our lives. Most people do not normally ask to be “afflicted” (vs. 75), but the wise person will recognize the value of it for good. The Hebrew for “afflicted,” also conveys the idea of chastisement or humbling. And though it may seem harsh for a time, there is also a gentle aspect about it. In other words, affliction or chastisement from God is not out of anger or wrath, but rather from the heart of a loving Father. As Proverbs 3:11–12 admonishes, “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”

We too can accept afflictions from the Lord, not only because of His love, but also because we know His laws

and commands are truly “righteous” (vs. 75). Our God deals with us rightly; and when we follow His commands, we will stay on His righteous path. Furthermore, we can take comfort in His unfailing mercy and kindness toward us. And most comforting of all is the knowledge that God keeps His promises, for it is not possible for God to lie.

Additionally, we can find “compassion” (vs. 77) and life in God’s tender mercy and His Word. Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life” (John 5:24). Likewise, Paul referred to the need to hold fast to the word of life (Phil. 2:16). No wonder the psalmist spoke of delighting in God’s law, His Word, for by His mercy it is our very life.

7. *What can we know about the affliction God brings into our lives?*

8. *In what can we find comfort?*

9. *In what are we to delight and why?*

Commands of Our Caring God

Psalm 119:78-80, KJV

78 Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.

79 Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.

80 Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.

Psalm 119:78-80, NIV

⁷⁸May the arrogant be put to shame
for wronging me without cause;
but I will meditate on your precepts.

⁷⁹May those who fear you turn to me,
those who understand your statutes.

⁸⁰May I wholeheartedly follow your decrees,
that I may not be put to shame.

God cares when others in pride and arrogance mistreat His people, and we can be sure that He will deal with them effectively and justly. In fact, how others treat the

Lord's people will be a primary consideration when He returns in judgment. Feeding, clothing, and otherwise ministering to the Lord's people are indicators of righteousness, and failure to do so indicates just the opposite (see Matt. 25:31-46). In God's sovereign time, evil people who treat others with contempt will not escape shame and judgment. There is nothing hidden from God's attention.

In stark contrast to the perverse, arrogant person, when God's people "meditate" (vs. 78) on His precepts, holy fear and reverence will come upon them; and they will seek to do His will. And key to doing God's will is to "understand" (vs. 79) it. Godly fear and true understanding of the Lord's statutes go hand in hand. To have a right view of God's Word, we need to have a right view of God Himself. When we have a right view of God, we will present ourselves to Him as living, holy, and acceptable sacrifices, not conformed to this evil age, but transformed with minds renewed by the Word and Spirit (see Rom. 12:1-2).

Another key to standing unashamed before the Lord is "wholeheartedly" (vs. 80) following His decrees. The idea here is having a heart that is strong and sound for the Lord. It speaks of a pure, stout heart for the things and ways of God. When we approach decrees and statutes with a whole heart that is pure in His eyes, we will have no reason to be ashamed. When we consider God's faithfulness and unfailing love for us, how could we do anything but delight in His commands? There is joy in keeping and heeding the Word of God, for it gives life to those who respond to it in faith.

10. *According to this passage, how does a prideful person treat others?*

11. *What does it take to know and understand God's testimonies and statutes?*

12. *What assurance do we have when we wholeheartedly follow God's commands?*

Knowing God

Henry T. Blackaby, pastor and author of the best-selling *Experiencing God* books, famously said, “God’s commands are designed to guide you to life’s very best.” With such a divine intention for us, what else can we do but delight in God’s commands, knowing that His unfailing love for us readily lights our life path.

But how can we be assured that the Lord truly loves us without knowing who God is? We can’t! “There’s a difference between knowing God and knowing about God,” wrote J.I. Packer in his Christian classic *Knowing God*. “When you truly know God, you have energy to serve Him, boldness to share Him, and contentment in Him.” Moreover, “Knowing God is a relationship calculated to thrill a man’s heart.” In other words, there is an evident intimacy in knowing God; and in knowing God, our heart receives His deep love for us. Whatever He asks of us is for our own spiritual welfare. Therefore, in times of distress and anxiety, His commands comfort us with His assurance of His love for us; then we can rejoice, confident that we are securely in the Lord’s hands.

Another element in knowing God is fearing God. It is not the fear of a mad tyrant, but, like the psalmist, knowing that there are consequences to breaking or ignoring His commands. Nothing good comes from such behavior or attitude. Again, His commands are for our own good, and violating them can only be bad for us. Therefore, “delight in the fear of the LORD” (Isa. 11:3).

Finally, let us always remember and rejoice that God’s “word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Ps. 119:105).

13. *Why should you fear the Lord God?*

14. *How does God’s commands indicate to you that He loves you?*

15. *Why do you delight in the Lord’s commands?*

Rejoice!

In one section of Psalm 119, the psalmist relates the hardship he is enduring, particularly at the hands of his enemies. Nevertheless, the psalmist expresses his gratitude for God's command, which brings joy to his heart because it shows God's love and care for him. We can identify with his statements, for we know that what the Lord demands from us is truly what is best for us.

► *Select a command or teaching in the Bible that delights you, and write it here. Commit this command or teaching to memory. For each day of this coming week, recite it as part of your prayer, as well as relating to the Lord why this Scripture causes you to rejoice.*

KEY VERSE

Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding that I may learn thy commandments. —Psalm 119:73, KJV

Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands. —Psalm 119:73, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 22 through July 28

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Peter 1:16-21—Await the Dawning Day.
- Tues.** 2 Peter 3:1-15a—Hasten God's New Creation.
- Wed.** Psalm 59:1-9, 17—God Is My Fortress.
- Thurs.** Matthew 25:1-13—Watch and Be Ready.
- Fri.** Matthew 25:14-21, 24-30—Watch and Work Faithfully.
- Sat.** Lamentations 3:25-36—Wait for God's Salvation.
- Sun.** Psalm 130—Wait and Hope in the Lord.

Expectant Watchfulness

Imani sat staring out of the campus coffee shop window. The overcast, rainy day was indicative of her mood as of late.

Imani was anxious about her upcoming finals. She was concerned about how one class could tarnish her 3.8 grade-point average. Then there was her breakup with Autry, which was six months old, but she still felt the tire treads on her heart after his sudden, badly explained departure.

Also, Imani had been in an accident (the fault of the other driver). But while her car was being repaired, she was without transportation and stressed about the \$500 deductible. Most of all, she had berated her roommate last week about a recurring incident. She later repented to the Lord and the roommate. But things had been somewhat “cool” between them, although Imani had gone out of her way to show goodwill with a few material gestures.

So, Imani was waiting on God for . . . what? She didn’t know what exactly. She had been praying for help and guidance. Imani felt like she was in a somewhat dry place spiritually. But if there was one thing she could count on in life, it was the Lord!

Imani sipped her chai tea latte and prayed, “My hope is in You, Lord.”

- 1.** *What is a life situation when your options were limited and all you could do was wait?*
- 2.** *In that time, what were some negative experiences that later turned out to bear fruit in your life? How did that time develop your character?*
- 3.** *How can you cultivate a positive, faith-filled attitude?*

Out of the Depths

Psalm 130:1-2, KJV

1 Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

2 Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

Psalm 130:1-2, NIV

A song of ascents.

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;

²Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

The psalmist cries out to God from “the depths” (vs. 1). He does not mean deep, still water. His cry is that of one in distress. “The depths” is a term typically used in connection with the sea or with water (Isa. 51:10; Ezek. 27:34). It is associated with the dangers of the wild, untamable ocean. When the author perceives himself to be in the depths, he recognizes that he has fallen into the clutches of a mighty foe against whom he has no hope of prevailing.

At the outset, he gives no immediate cause for being in the depths or even what the depths are. He only recognizes he is there and so does all that he knows to do: He cries to the Lord for mercy.

This cry for mercy begins with the simple request that the Lord hear his voice. He may feel distant from the Lord, but the cry that bursts forth is an expression of trust that the Lord does, in fact, hear him. The distance does not muffle the sound. His pleas will fall on attentive ears. He repeats the request, not because he thinks God needs many words in order to respond (see Matt. 6:7-8), but because the repetition reflects the earnestness of his appeal for help and the gravity of his situation.

4. *How does the author display both a true expression of his feelings and a strong sense of trust in God?*

5. *Why does the author repeat his request that God hear him?*

6. *What important addition to the cry comes in verse 2?*

Iniquity and Fear

Psalm 130:3-4, KJV

3 If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

Psalm 130:3-4, NIV

³If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,

Lord, who could stand?

⁴But with you there is

forgiveness,

so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

The psalmist now reveals his reason for crying for mercy. The depths he finds himself in are not those of a storm-swept sea or the fiery furnace. His straits are much worse. He has recognized the deep, dark places of his heart. He sees his sin, and he recognizes that he is utterly helpless before the God who sees the secret thoughts of man's heart (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; Ps. 38:9).

He recognizes, too, the holiness of God.. There is no pretense on his part to have ground for hope in himself. No one who sins (and that includes everyone) has the merit to stand before the Judge of all the earth.

But the psalmist also knows something important. The heart of God toward sinners is merciful (Deut. 30:1-10; cf. Eph. 2:4-5). So, though it is true that no sinner can stand before God on his own, yet God does, indeed, hear the cries of those who plead with Him to be merciful, and He offers forgiveness.

God does not forgive sinners merely to send them on their way so that they can return to their sins. The purpose statement in verse 4 clearly shows that God's merciful forgiveness is meant to lead to repentance and obedience.

7. *How does verse 3 help you better understand the situation of the psalmist and his pleas in verses 1-2?*

8. *What kind of statement is in the second half of verse 4? What does that reveal about the purpose of God's forgiveness?*

Waiting on the Lord

Psalm 130:5-6, KJV

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

6 My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

Psalm 130:5-6, NIV

⁵I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.

⁶I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Having expressed confidence that the Lord offers forgiveness of sins when he knows that he deserves only wrath, the psalmist's whole countenance changes. No longer does the wretchedness of his sin weigh him down to the depths. Instead, he waits.

The kind of waiting that the psalmist experiences is not the tense waiting of someone who earnestly desires something but is unsure if they will receive it or not. He has put his hope in God's "word" (vs. 5), which means that his hope is secure. He has heard God's promise, that those for whom atonement is made are certainly forgiven (see Lev. 4:20). Now he is content; he knows God will keep His word.

The repeated line in verse 6 accentuates the psalmist's confident waiting. Watchmen wait for the morning through those difficult, dark hours of the night before light. They know that dawn will come. They eagerly desire it and know it will not fail. The psalmist is so confident in God's mercy, he's more certain than the watchman awaiting the dawn.

9. *What change came over the psalmist after he expressed his confidence in God?*

10. *How is the psalmist like a watchman waiting for the morning?*

The Corporate Call to Wait

Psalms 130:7-8, KJV

7 Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

8 And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Psalms 130:7-8, NIV

⁷Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.

⁸He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

Verse 7 marks a sudden shift. *I's* dominate verses 1-6 in essentially a confession of faith to God. Now there is a shift. As the psalmist waits for God to redeem him, like an expectant watchman, he calls others to join him.

The psalm is bound up with the expectation of deliverance from sins. He understands that the way God has acted toward him is not out of step with God's character. So he concludes that God will act the same way toward all the people. Thus, he is confident that as he has been redeemed from his sin, so God "will redeem Israel from all their sins" (vs. 8). Their God is one who is characterized by unfailing love. Those with whom He enters into covenant may be sure of God's steadfast love. Even though Israel might have sinned and turned away, the promise was always that if they put their hope in him, he would deliver them and heal them (Deut. 30:1-10).

The certainty of the promise is emphasized by the reflective pronoun "himself" in verse 8. Who will redeem Israel? God Himself. The people are dependent on no one but God alone to do the work of saving. And so, they may rest secure in their hope.

11. *In this psalm, what is the common problem faced by the psalmist and the nation as a whole?*

12. *How does the character of God serve as the foundation for this whole psalm?*

Hope from the Abyss

In today's Scripture, the psalmist is in a place of deepest darkness: "the depths"—a place of no light, no rescue, no hope. But even in that lost and hopeless abyss, he remembers the love and mercy of God and cries out, trusting that somehow the Lord will hear and have mercy on him. And he has good reason for that hope, because this has been Israel's experience and his own experience, with God in the past. In fact, he is so sure of this hope, he calls on Israel to put their hope in the Lord and call out to Him as well. Even though he has not yet been rescued, he is as confident in God's salvation as a night watchman is confident that the sun will rise in the morning.

The psalmist illustrates for us how we can feel two things at the same time that seem contradictory. The situation looks hopeless, yet he has hope. He seems defeated, yet he tells Israel how to be victorious. This is a great illustration of how we can choose what our response will be to life situations, rather than reacting instinctively to the way things appear on the surface. Even when all the evidence says we're defeated, we have a choice to respond to the curveballs of life as people who see only through their physical eyes, or as people who see with the eyes of faith.

People who see faults and limitations, or people who see successes and possibilities. Which will you choose?

13. *Have you felt as discouraged as the psalmist? In what life situations have you felt like you were "in the depths"?*

14. *At that time, were you able to maintain faith that God would rescue you? What helped you do that?*

15. *At your worst times, have you felt that you can point others to God, or did you hold back until you had your life together?*

Multigenerational Waiting

As Christians we've been waiting more than 2,000 years for the fulfilment of Christ's promise to return and pronounce final judgment on the world. But we find many other areas of our lives where we need to be patient and teach our children and grandchildren to do the same. A church's impact in a neighborhood may take many decades of faithful work to be felt and seen in tangible ways.

► *In what areas is your family or Christian community waiting expectantly for the Lord? How can we continue to have hopeful expectation in the Lord and His unfailing love?*

KEY VERSE

Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. —Psalm 130:7, KJV

Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. —Psalm 130:7, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 29 through August 4

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18—Promise of Hope.
- Tues.** Hebrews 10:19-25—Encourage One Another.
- Wed.** 2 Chronicles 30:21-27—A Joyous Celebration.
- Thurs.** Ecclesiastes 4:7-12—Two Are Better Than One.
- Fri.** Galatians 6:1-10—Bear One Another's Burdens.
- Sat.** Psalm 121—My Help Comes from the Lord.
- Sun.** 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5—Encouraged in Faith.

The Fellowship of Encouragement

I don't know how long it's been since I've been fishing," said Alonzo, readjusting his wide-brim straw hat atop his bald head.

"I'm so glad you invited us, Isaiah," said Prince, "but I will be coming home with the biggest catch of the day!"

Isaiah smiled. They were great friends and wonderful men of God. Isaiah asked his friends to accompany him on his favorite pastime because he wanted and needed fellowship. He was under fire from two deacons at church who were trying to stir up trouble for him. They wanted Isaiah to be "dethroned" as head deacon.

He also had to worry about his wife, whose breast cancer had returned four years after her mastectomy. And if that wasn't bad enough, one of his grandsons was facing jail time for a vehicular manslaughter charge.

For the most part, Alonzo and Prince practiced the art of presence. Over the course of the next four hours, they listened intently to their friend, offering encouragement, Scripture, and humor when needed.

"I can't predict the outcome of these trials," Isaiah said, then sighed. "But I do know the Lord will see me through, and I'm so grateful and blessed to have you brothers."

"For sure, man," Alonzo said. "Whatever comes, we're going to be right here with you."

1. *Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" How does this quote help to explain fellowship?*

2. *To whom do you turn to cope with trials in your life?*

3. *How important are encouragement and fellowship with God's people in facing those trials?*

Thanks Be to God

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, KJV

13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

16 Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, NIV

¹³And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. ¹⁴For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews ¹⁵who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone ¹⁶in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

First Thessalonians 2:13-16 is the conclusion to a larger passage in which Paul defends his message and actions while with the Thessalonians. Paul begins with thanksgiving for the brothers and sisters there. After reminding the believers that it was through him that they heard the word, Paul gives the reason for his thankfulness: They received his message as God's word. Further, Paul was confident that the message was at work in them, as

shown by their imitation of the church in Judea which also endured affliction. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6 Paul writes that the Thessalonian believers were imitators of himself and of the Lord Jesus, as they received the word with joy “in the midst of severe suffering.” Just as Paul had been driven from the city (Acts 17:5-10), the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica were now persecuted by former friends and neighbors in their city.

Paul was a Jew and had great love for his people (Rom. 9:1-3), but he was keenly aware that hardness of heart had prevented many Jews from responding to Jesus with faith. Paul knew that even Jesus and the prophets faced opposition. What Paul meant by the “wrath” which has come upon his persecutors is not clear (1 Thess. 2:16). He may have had in mind a recent event, a recent famine or the expulsion of Jews from Rome in A.D. 49, or perhaps he may be looking to a future event. Whether immediate or future, it stands in contrast to the future hope of those in the family of faith. Paul writes, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:9).

4. *Why is Paul certain that the Thessalonians received and believed his preaching as the Word of God?*

5. *How are Paul’s words an encouragement to the Thessalonian believers?*

Love and Concern for the Brothers

1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:5, KJV

17 But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul,

1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:5, NIV

¹⁷But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. ¹⁸For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul,

once and again; but Satan hindered us.

19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

20 For ye are our glory and joy.

1 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. ¹⁹For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes?c Is it not you? ²⁰Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

¹So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. ²We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. ⁴In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. ⁵For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.

In 2:1-16, Paul defended his past actions, but in 2:17-3:5 he defended his current absence from the Thessalonians. As before, Paul emphasized his love and relationship with them by calling them "brothers and sisters" (vs. 17). Paul's

feelings for the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica went beyond friendship and fond memories. Just as he hoped to encourage them, they were his encouragement as well. In looking ahead to the “Lord Jesus when he comes” (vs. 19), he anticipated later discussion of Christ’s return (1 Thess. 4:13–5:3; 2 Thess. 2:1-4).

Also, by calling the Thessalonians his “glory and joy” (vs. 20), Paul communicated their high value to him. Because of his absence, some may have begun to wonder whether Paul really cared about them. Paul wanted to erase all doubts about his love for them.

In 3:1-5, Paul repeats that he “could stand it no longer” in order to show his concern (vss. 1, 5). By this time, those in Thessalonica already knew that he sent his fellow missionary Timothy to them. Paul conveyed his depth of concern and that sending Timothy was costly to himself and his work (“left by ourselves in Athens” [vs. 1]). He provided Timothy’s qualifications and, just as he gave thanks for their continued faith, he expressed his own desire to encourage and strengthen the church in the face of persecution. He reminded them that their affliction was not a surprise.

For Paul, just as his thankfulness for the Thessalonian brothers and sisters was rooted in their faith, so too was his overriding concern for their faith. Particularly in times of trouble and trial, we need to be encouraged. We need to know that we are on the right path, even if it is rocky and hard one. Paul didn’t want persecution to cause his Thessalonian brothers and sisters to doubt or deviate from the faith. So he does what he can by sending Timothy “to strengthen and encourage [them] in [their] faith” (vs. 2).

6. *What does Paul mean by saying that the Thessalonian believers are his hope, joy, and crown?*

7. *What is the significance of Paul’s referring to Timothy as a “co-worker in God’s service” (1 Thess. 3:2)?*

Support Groups Encourage

Access to Christian support groups is essential for those facing life's troubles. Those burdens might be a recent divorce, recovery from drug-abuse, struggles with single-parenting, death of a loved one, mental illness, or being a victim of violence, to name only a few. Our hurdles are often unexpected and leave a person feeling alone, hopeless, and helpless. Support groups counter those feelings with hope and answers. As Scripture says, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:12).

Seeking professional help and support groups are often stigmatized in the Black community, especially for mental health. Either the help is not available or the Black community does not use the assistance that is available. La'Shay Crayton, student founder of Black Christian Therapy, writes on her website, "I saw all too often through data and experience the barriers Black folks have when accessing adequate mental health care."

Christian support groups lift up the broken hearted, putting them in a room with others in similar situations. They provide space for sharing and growth. Support groups are for encouraging, admonishing, comforting, and assisting one another.

As Crayton says, "We do not believe spirituality and cognitive behavior therapy has to be at odds. Thus our website is dedicated to highlighting the way the two are one." It is fine to face your trials with others—as a matter of fact, it is healthy.

8. *How does Ecclesiastes 4:12 help to explain the way that Christians can support one another?*

9. *What support groups does your church have now? What are some you could start?*

10. *Why do you think some hurting people do not desire fellowship when they are in pain?*

Fellowship through the Trials

Too often we feel we have to endure the struggles of life alone. We don't want to bother anyone; we don't want to be the talk of the town. But Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Being in a true fellowship of believers like the Thessalonians had can help us weather the storms that come and go in our lives.

► *Commit today to helping one another with the trials and troubles you are experiencing. Let everyone in your group sign your book as a reminder that we are one in the Spirit and one in the Lord when it comes to facing the struggles of life.*

KEY VERSE

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

—1 Thessalonians 2:13, KJV

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. —1 Thessalonians 2:13, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 5 through August 11

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21—The Love of Christ Compels Us.
- Tues.** Deuteronomy 6:4-13—Love the Lord Your God.
- Wed.** James 2:8-13—Fulfill the Royal Law of Love.
- Thurs.** John 13:31-35—Love One Another.
- Fri.** Zephaniah 3:14-20—Renewed in Love.
- Sat.** Jeremiah 31:1-9—An Everlasting Love.
- Sun.** 1 John 3:1-10—God's Beloved Children.

Christ's Love as the Rule

I need to stop by the ATM for some cash for the card," I said Kiara to her coworker and lunch date.

"What card?" asked Serena, climbing into the passenger's side of the vehicle.

"The wedding card for Julie," informed Kiara.

"I don't want to sign that card, let alone put any money in it," said Serena, frowning. "That woman has been nothing but nasty to us."

"Don't be that way," Kiara said. "God doesn't like ugly."

"Well, He must not like Julie," said Serena. "But I forgot, you've got to do the Jesus thing."

Kiara smiled. She had consistently shared Christ with her coworker, to which Serena often said, "You do you."

Truth was, earlier this year, Kiara was struggling with her interactions with Julie. She had asked God to help her love her manager. The more Kiara prayed, the more help she seemed to get. But that wasn't to say that her assignment had been or even was now—easy.

Back in the office, Kiara found the interoffice envelope. She put in \$50 and wrote a warm note.

"I just don't get you," Serena said as Kiara came back to their cubicle. "How can you ignore your feelings and show love to that woman?"

"It's not easy," replied Kiara. "Love is an action, not a feeling. And the Holy Spirit empowers me to do what is right."

1. *What should be our response to God's sacrificial love for us?*

2. *What does it mean to walk in what is right?*

3. *If you know God personally, why should you always desire to walk in what is right?*

We Are Children of God

1 *John 3:1-5, KJV*

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

1 *John 3:1-5, NIV*

¹See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

In verse 1, John reminded his readers that they were not only his “children” in the faith—more importantly, they (and the apostle himself) were children of God. “And that is what we are!” At the same time, he reminded them that their status as God’s children was only possible because of the “great love the Father has lavished on us.” It was this knowledge and love of God, given from God, that separated them from the world: “The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” Therefore, they were not to be surprised at the alienation and hostility they faced from the world; Jesus faced the same.

It is no surprise that early Christians felt different from the world around them. In their Greek religious environment, few people had even heard the name of Jesus. And Jews who did not accept Jesus as their Messiah were not likely to welcome Jesus' followers in synagogues either.

Therefore, John encouraged believers, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known." Whatever their future glory actually looked like, they could take comfort in the standing they already had before God as His children. John was, however, able to tell his readers one thing for certain: "When Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (vs. 2). The future was unimaginable, but it was glorious. It was eternity with Christ, in Christ, being made like Christ. Therefore, "All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure" (vs. 3). Believers were to participate with the Spirit in being made more like Christ, even as they persevered on Earth.

John then described the opposite of purity: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (vs. 4). To invert verse 3, those who did not hope in Christ did not purify themselves, and did so willfully. Those who persisted in sin did not know God. Again, John reminded readers why Jesus had come to Earth: "so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin" (vs. 5). Because Jesus took believers' sins upon Himself, believers could turn to Him, even when they sinned, to be purified and to return to walk in the light with Him (1 John 1:7, 9). This was to be their hope.

4. *What did John say about believers (vs. 1)? What difficulties would nonetheless result from that?*

5. *What did John tell them about their future? How were they to respond in light of this?*

6. *What did John say about sin and why Jesus came to Earth?*

God's Children Don't Continually Sin

1 *John 3:6-10, KJV*

6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

1 *John 3:6-10, NIV*

⁶No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

⁷Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

¹⁰This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

John then made a startling declaration: "No one who lives in him [Jesus] keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him" (vs. 6). The key phrases here were "keeps on sinning" and "continues to sin." As John made clear elsewhere, believers would stumble; but they also could turn to Jesus to ask Him for forgiveness. In this verse, John spoke to the condition of those who willfully persisted in sin, not those who

stumbled. Turning back to Jesus and abiding in Him are what would keep believers from continuing in, or returning to, their sin.

Those who persisted in sin, therefore, were not to be trusted or followed. As Jesus Himself also declared, believers would be known by their fruit (Matt. 7:15-20). John emphasized the point: "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil" (vss. 7-8). Sin had been the devil's work from the beginning—and it was this work that Jesus had come to destroy (vs. 8). Once more John reiterated, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God" (vs. 9). The new nature Jesus had given believers was in fact what would prevent them from continuing in sin.

Thus, John concluded this section with a simple litmus test to "know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are." Those who did right and loved their brothers and sisters were God's children; those who did not were of the devil (vs. 10). While John's words might have sounded harsh, Jesus said nearly the same when He declared to the Pharisees that they were "children of the devil," rather than "children of Abraham," let alone children of God (John 8:39-47). Belief and action are not separate issues; each proves the other. Those who believe will walk in righteousness and keep walking in it.

7. *What declaration did John make in verse 6? What did he mean by it?*

8. *How were believers to respond to those who persisted in sin? What did John say about such people?*

9. *How were believers to distinguish God's children from the devil's children?*

A Desire to Please

There was no strike of lightning or tongues of fire over my head the night I became God's child. I fell to my knees and asked God to both forgive my sins and to show me His plans for my life. I surrendered my life to God when I prayed and accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord.

My friends, those who witnessed my walking forward at youth camp to make the life-changing decision, didn't understand what I was doing. But inwardly, I knew a change had happened. In choosing to become God's child, I desired to learn how to follow His plan and not my own.

I noticed a change right away. As my friends gathered in secret to smoke after chapel, I went along. But I couldn't join in. The Holy Spirit reminded me of the pastor's message earlier in the week: our bodies are God's temple. As God's child, I knew that I needed to stop harming my body. I wasn't trying to be better than my friends. I just desired to walk in a way that pleased God.

During the next few years of high school, I struggled to walk with God. But as I grew closer to Him by reading and studying His Word, my desires to do or think about things that didn't please God diminished. More and more, I could hear the Holy Spirit guiding me how to live. For example, I lost the desire to watch certain shows all about behaviors displeasing to God. Later I chose friends who were also walking with God. They gave me accountability and encouragement. Those decisions opened opportunities to share Jesus with others in my life.

It's still a daily choice to obey God, but it gets easier the more I experience all that He has done for me. My desire is to please Him daily by living according to His Word.

10. *What does it mean to be a child of God?*

11. *What role do God's Word and the Holy Spirit have in equipping you to walk right?*

12. *How should your life be different from those who don't know God?*

Walking with God

Micah 6:8 said to walk with God in three simple and practical ways: “What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” First, our daily actions should be *just* as we make fair decisions, loving others as we love ourselves. Second, to love *mercy* is demonstrated by showing unconditional love, forgiveness, and compassion to others—even those who don’t deserve mercy. Third, to *walk humbly* with your God is to communicate with your heavenly Father through prayer, meditation, and reading His Word.

► *As God’s child, are you ready to walk rightly before God and others? What are some practical steps you can take to do so?*

KEY VERSE

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. —1 John 3:1, KJV

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

—1 John 3:1, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of August 12 through August 18

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 32:1-6—The Lord Is Just and Upright.
- Tues.** 1 Corinthians 6:9-20—Bought with a Price.
- Wed.** Romans 12:9-21—A Godly Life Overcomes Evil.
- Thurs.** Proverbs 15:20-25—Walking a Straight Path.
- Fri.** Psalm 37:27-40—God Rescues the Righteous.
- Sat.** Jonah 2:1-9—Salvation Comes from the Lord.
- Sun.** Titus 1:1-3; 2:11-15—God’s Grace Purifies.

Upright and Godly

“What do you mean I don’t have to come to work on Wednesday?” asked Tarsha. “I’m scheduled to be your nurse for three hours a day, three days a week.”

Tarsha was on her first job as a home health care nurse, and she was ready. The 24-year-old young lady had passed all her tests and had just started at the Care-4-You agency.

“My last nurse couldn’t make it,” explained Ayanna, a 50-year-old with multiple sclerosis. “I can still get around. She would come half of the time, and she and I would split half her check.”

That didn’t sound right to Tarsha. “You don’t need all the hours you’re getting from Medicaid?”

“No. I want to keep my hours,” said Ayanna. “Couldn’t you use the extra time off? You could work another patient during the hours you’re supposed to be covering me, and we could both get a little extra money. What’s the harm in doing that?”

“Ma’am,” said Tarsha, straightening up. “That’s defrauding the government. I’m not going to do that. I’ll be back on Wednesday at my scheduled time. But if you want someone else, you can make a request.”

After her shift, Tarsha headed back to the agency. She wanted to let the manager know about the proposition. She also wanted another patient, if possible.

1. *What was the primary motivation that drove you to receive Christ as your Savior?*

2. *In what ways do you struggle to lead a righteous life in an ungodly modern society?*

3. *As you have matured in your faith, do you find that your desire to lead a life pleasing to God has increased or diminished? In what ways?*

Paul Appointed

Titus 1:1-3, KJV

1 Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness;

2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

3 But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.

Titus 1:1-3, NIV

¹Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—²in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.

Paul began his personal letter to his protégé Titus by describing himself as servant and apostle, expressions of humility and authority (vs. 1). Paul first called himself a humble “servant of God.” Jesus made it clear that those who were to lead effectively in His kingdom first had to have a servant’s mindset (Mark 10:43). Paul also called himself an apostle of Christ. As an apostle, Paul was sent by Jesus to build up churches. Paul said that the purpose of his dual roles of servant and apostle were “to further the faith” (vs. 1). Perhaps no one (other than Christ Himself) did more to establish the foundational beliefs of the church than the apostle Paul.

These foundational truths cause a cascade of beautiful results, for an unwavering knowledge of the truth would lead to “godliness” (vs. 1)—which means people who reflect the love and character of Christ. This godliness made the “hope of eternal life” all the more certain for those who put their faith and trust in Jesus (vs. 2).

Paul knew that Jesus was God's Messiah. Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies that prepared the people of God for His arrival. And Jesus brings eternal life, which God had planned to share "before the beginning of time" (vs. 2).

God's timing is always perfect. Jesus came "at his appointed season" (vs. 3) during the time of the Roman occupation, creating the perfect storm of conditions for the Lord's redemptive message of repentance and reconciliation to spread. Paul also saw God's perfect timing in the launch of his own ministry on Christ's behalf.

Paul recognized the authority he exercised had been given to him by Jesus. This is what he meant by saying his preaching ministry was "entrusted" to him. Furthermore, Paul described God as "Savior" (vs. 3). Since God had promised to save His people, Jesus did what only God can do. Jesus is "God our Savior."

4. How did Paul describe himself?

5. What had God entrusted to Paul?

Looking to Hope

Titus 2:11-13, KJV

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:11-13, NIV

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul makes it clear to Titus (a Gentile) that the grace of God offers salvation to "all people" (vs. 11). Since the law

of Moses was fulfilled by the atoning work of Jesus, that law was not to be used to exclude anyone from hearing the good news of salvation in Christ.

God's grace has a tangible and visible effect in the life of the believer. Everyone who experiences saving faith is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who in turn empowers them to say "no" to their old ways of living, and to abandon the empty promises of Satan.

In addition to saying "no" to that which is sinful, the Spirit-indwelt believer is also able to embrace self-control, righteous living, and a godly temperament that has a long-lasting effect on all relationships (vs. 12). The words apply to all of us in the "present age," since we also wrestle with sinful natures that beckon to us to disobey God. In the age to come, when all God's people receive glorified bodies, they will no longer have to struggle with internal temptations to sin.

The believer places his or her hope in the "appearing" of Jesus (vs. 13). Every believer ought to long for His return, which will be glorious when it fills heaven and earth with God's presence and leaves no room for darkness.

6. *What does the grace of God enable us to do?*

7. *What is the blessed hope for which all Christians long?*

Encourage and Rebuke

Titus 2:14-15, KJV

14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

Titus 2:14-15, NIV

¹⁴Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

¹⁵These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

The early church clung to a complex (but *orthodox*) view of Christ and rejected heresies that made Jesus unable to accomplish our salvation. Jesus needed to be fully human to represent us on the Cross and fully divine to have the power to save. Otherwise, how was He raised from the dead, breaking the powers of sin and death?

God says in Isaiah 49:26, "I, the LORD, am your Savior." Paul's makes it abundantly clear that God fulfills this promise through Jesus: He is our "God and Savior" (vs. 13).

Jesus willingly gave Himself up for the redemption of humans—those who, with penitent hearts, trust Him for their salvation. Through our repentance, He can then "purify" by His righteousness, and we are accepted into His kingdom as a people "that are his very own" (vs. 14).

We are given the drive and motivation to accomplish the roles that Jesus has commissioned for us. The Spirit helps us become "eager" to do all the good that can be accomplished when we obey Christ and encourage others to do the same.

In his pastoral role, Titus was to encourage and correct those under this care with "authority" (vs. 15) that had been given to him by Christ. When he saw someone exercising spiritual gifts in a way that built others up and glorified God, he was to encourage that person. Titus was also to stay alert for those who were off track and returning to their pre-conversion ways. Sometimes it might take a strong rebuke in order to get that person's attention.

Titus was not to allow anyone to judge or "despise" him (vs. 15). When divisive people undermine legitimate spiritual authority, the whole body suffers. For this reason, he was not to allow disrespectful words and actions, especially toward him, to be ignored or go unanswered.

8. *What did Jesus' death on the cross accomplish for us?*

9. *What admonitions did Paul give to Titus?*

A Call to Godliness amid Ungodly Influences

Historically, Cretans were entrenched in the influence of Greek mythology, believing that their gods were mortal men and women who reached the status of deity by bestowing gifts and service to mankind. The character of these “gods” was immoral, unethical, and selfish. Cretans emulated that behavior in their daily lives and were known for sexual promiscuity, hedonism, and dishonesty. Paul’s letter to Titus tackled issues that arose from mixing old ideologies the truth of the Gospel. Christianity teaches that Christ is God, who became a man to save His people (Titus 1:3; 2:10). The Christian God is righteous and cannot lie (Titus 1:2). God the Father and God the Son call people to depart from evil to pursue godliness.

It’s easy to draw parallels between the ancient Cretan culture and our modern, secular, humanistic one. We live in a society greatly influenced by media, a mixture of world religions, technology, and more. Sexual promiscuity is culturally accepted, violence is normalized in television and movies, and self-indulgence is glorified. Paul’s admonitions to Titus can be applied to the Christian church today. Amid so much worldly influence, it is important that we lead lives which emulate godliness. We serve a God worth imitating! If we act as those who don’t know God or who have rejected the Word of God, how can we hope to draw others to Christ?

10. *Do you encounter Christians in your everyday life who do not seem to exhibit Christlike behavior? What kinds of behaviors do you see on a regular basis that are ungodly?*

11. *In your Christian walk, what kinds of actions have you had to take to resist worldly influences?*

12. *How does a Christian attain godliness? Is it something we can reach through our own good works? Why or why not?*

Christ-righteousness Comes by Faith

W. Ian Thomas, an evangelist, Christian writer, and founder of the Torchbearers Bible schools, once said, “For godliness is not the consequence of your capacity to imitate God, but the consequence of His capacity to reproduce Himself in you; not self-righteousness, but Christ-righteousness; the righteousness which is by faith.”

► *What is godly in your life? What is ungodly? Go to God in prayer and in faith, asking for His power to help you change what is ungodly into behavior that honors Him.*

KEY VERSES

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. —Titus 2:11-13, KJV

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. —Titus 2:11-13, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of August 19 through August 25

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Proverbs 3:27-35—Do Good Wherever You Can.
- Tues.** Proverbs 31:1-9—Defend the Poor and Needy.
- Wed.** Ephesians 2:1-10—Saved by God’s Rich Mercy.
- Thurs.** James 2:14-26—Faith without Works Is Dead.
- Fri.** Isaiah 30:18-26—Walk in God’s Way.
- Sat.** Matthew 5:13-20—Shine Your Light Before Others.
- Sun.** Titus 3:3-11—Saved by God’s Mercy.

Devoted to Good Works

It's so good for Coach Green to take interest in our boys," I said Rashona to Eleesha, the young mother next to her.

Their two 13-year-old sons were in the outfield on the baseball diamond on this sweltering August day in St. Louis.

"My Demery talks about Coach Green all time. He can't get enough of him," continued Rashona.

"It doesn't hurt that he is handsome and is in such good shape," purred Eleesha.

"I'm grateful he formed this baseball league to give our boys something to do and to help keep them out of trouble," Rashona replied, steamrolling past Eleesha's remarks. "And then to teach our kids about the Negro Baseball League. He is just such a good guy."

After the game, excited that their boys' team won, the mothers quickly headed to Coach Colby Green for two very different reasons.

"We really appreciate you, Coach Green," said Rashona. "You're such a good person."

"Thank you," said Colby. "But there is none good but God. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for the love and goodness of God. I was steeped in my sins and mess before the Lord saved me. It's because of the Holy Spirit, who enables me to do good things."

"Really?" asked Rashona.

"It's the Lord who makes me look good." Colby smiled as he stepped back to gain more space.

1. *How would you describe someone who has been living a worldly life?*

2. *How would you describe someone who has been reborn in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit?*

3. *How would you explain the Holy Spirit to a new believer?*

Because of His Mercy

Titus 3:3-6, KJV

3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Titus 3:3-6, NIV

³At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

While there are many types of conversion stories, they all have one thing in common: “Before Christ” and an “after Christ.” Paul describes the “before Jesus” state by using several provocative words, which might, at first, provoke a defensive response. But as we look closely, we might concede, “Yes, that applies to me.”

Being “foolish” (vs. 3) is Paul’s first “before Jesus” trait. Foolishness is simply the rejection of wisdom. Foolish people pursue self-interest above everyone else, including God. The second trait, being “disobedient,” is the willful decision to go against what God commands in a situation. Many times we know the right thing to do, but we decide to carve out a different path, a shortcut.

Paul also stated that before Christ, we were “deceived and enslaved” by a variety of desires. These include the abuse of power, sexual immorality, and out-of-control

appetites. These temptations hold out an empty promise of ultimate satisfaction. While indulging our desires may feel good in the short run, the resulting guilt and natural consequences of sin deflate us and leave us feeling terribly empty.

These sinful actions always lead to tensions in our relationships, especially in our friendship with God. When others see worldly success in us, they are prone to attribute dark motives to us and a bent toward selfishness that ignores the reasonable needs and interests of others. And they are often not wrong. Still, it upsets us when critics challenge our narratives. When we see success in others, we can become envious of the ways God has been generous to others—but not to us. You can imagine that this does not do a great job of generating good will between people. Paul described the resulting emotions as “being hated and hating one another” (vs. 3).

What a contrast when a person accepts Jesus’ offer of salvation and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to abandon those destructive patterns of behavior! Instead of pursuing the world’s version of happiness, one who is redeemed is able to be devoted to the advancement of God’s kingdom, using the gifts and abilities God generously bestows on all believers.

4. *From what does Jesus save all people who trust in Him?*

5. *What is the basis of our salvation?*

Justified by Grace

Titus 3:7-8, KJV

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou

Titus 3:7-8, NIV

7So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. **8**This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these

affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Building on the idea of the “newness” of life given to the person who trusts in Jesus, Paul gives insights into what can be expected on this journey.

The result of this new beginning is the promise of heavenly inheritance that cultivates the “hope” (vs. 7) within us for eternal life. This is no mere idealistic platitude. Paul emphasizes this by reminding us that what he’s teaching is “trustworthy” (vs. 8)—you can go “all in” on this biblical truth without mental reservation. This type of heavenly hope is a daily motivator for serving God and loving others. It fuels the endurance needed during times of suffering. This promise provides an unwavering sense of well-being deep within our souls, no matter what we’re experiencing, or the emotions that those difficult circumstances stir up within us.

Paul wanted Titus to remind those under his spiritual care that they needed to make the expression of these truths a daily practice, especially in the context of their relationships. It is truly in our interactions with others where the integrity of what we believe is tested. Then, according to Paul, the final results will be excellent and profitable—not only to the one who puts these ideas into practice, but also by those who are impacted by the godly and compassionate actions of others. Those who put these things into practice see the fruit in the relationships with friends, coworkers, spouses, children, extended family—and even those who might harbor hostility toward us.

6. *What did Paul want Titus to stress?*

7. *What did Paul describe as excellent and profitable?*

Avoid Arguing

Titus 3:9-11, KJV

9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

Titus 3:9-11, NIV

⁹But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.

¹¹You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

Respectful dialogue can be healthy. We come to understand our convictions and gain greater appreciation for those who are different from ourselves. A satisfying friendship is forged on this foundation. However, when conversations become “foolish” arguments about things that don’t matter, these are conversations to avoid (vs. 9).

Paul gave instructions for dealing with hostile and obstinate people. He told Titus to warn them once, warn them a second time, and then have nothing to do with them (vs. 10). God has called His people to a “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). But that does not mean we must endure endless patterns of divisive behavior or verbal assaults which only feed the appetites of difficult people, those who need to be the center of attention.

Paul did not mince words: There are people who are “warped” in their thinking, “sinful” in their disposition, and who stand “self-condemned” (Titus 3:11). Yet no one is beyond redemption. The goal of church discipline is always redemptive and always restorative.

8. *What did Paul want followers of Christ to avoid?*

9. *How was Titus to deal with relentlessly divisive people?*

No Longer the Backslider

Fred stopped believing in God. He believed that church was a waste of time and was only the white man's religion, given to African Americans because of slavery. As a successful account executive, husband, and father of four, he believed his good life was the result of education, hard work, and luck. Although he grew up in a God-fearing home and married a devout Christian, Fred remained adamant in his beliefs. The icing on the cake was that his lineage included three generations of preachers. Everyone thought Fred would be next. At 16, he was the youth pastor at his grandfather's church. The youth loved and respected him. He was their confidant and friend.

Sadly, things began to change when Fred went to college. His church attendance began to slack, and he eventually stopped attending altogether. It didn't help that none of his peers were Christians. Eventually he denounced God and the church, which broke his parents' hearts.

Twenty years later, Fred's daughter Clarise had a born-again experience which changed her life. Fred watched her renewal and remarked that she reminded him of himself years ago. One Sunday, Clarise ask her dad to attend church with them. Fred hesitated but eventually gave in to his daughter's request. He told his wife, "You know my baby girl gets me to do things I don't normally do." The Holy Spirit met him at the door. The choir was singing mightily; and his grandfather, who was now ailing, preached a heartfelt sermon. He felt the Spirit pricking his heart. His grandfather began to sing, "Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus right now. He will save you."

It wasn't long before Fred fell to his knees at the altar and rededicated his life to the Lord. His entire family rejoiced.

10. *Why would someone who grew up in church leave it?*

11. *Why is the leading of the Spirit essential for a person's renewal?*

12. *In what ways has the Spirit touched your life?*

The Renewing of the Spirit

In the world, there is foolishness, disobedience, and the desire to do everything that is against the will of God. Hate continues to increase. Destruction is on the rise. But despite all that, God continues to love His creation. God's arms are reaching out to everyone with love and forgiveness. His offer of love and kindness is open to all.

► *Pray this prayer or one like it today if you are a believer: "Holy Spirit, may I decrease that You may increase in my life, leading and guiding me to do the right things at the right time. Holy Spirit, my heart is open, and my ears are clear to hear what You are saying because You speak only what the Father says." If you are not a believer, pray that the Holy Spirit would come into your life after you pray the prayer of repentance your leader can give you.*

KEY VERSES

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. —Titus 3:4-5, KJV

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. —Titus 3:4-5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 26 through September 1

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Corinthians 1:16-24—God's Promises Are Always "Yes."
- Tues.** Genesis 12:1-9—A New Life of Obedience.
- Wed.** Genesis 12:10-20—Fear Not Faith.
- Thurs.** Philippians 4:10-19—God Will Fully Satisfy Your Needs.
- Fri.** Colossians 2:6-12—Walk in Christ with Thanksgiving.
- Sat.** Psalm 16—God Gives a Goodly Heritage.
- Sun.** Genesis 13:8-18—Gratefulness for God's Promises.

COMPREHENSIVE BIBLE STUDY

Lesson Cycle

FOR 2022-2025

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2022/23	<p>God's Exceptional Choice (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians)</p>	<p>From Darkness to Light (Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter)</p>	<p>Jesus Calls Us (Studies in the Gospels, Acts)</p>	<p>The Righteous Reign of God (Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)</p>
2023/24	<p>God's Law Is Love (Studies in Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians)</p>	<p>Faith That Pleases God (Studies in Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews)</p>	<p>Examining Our Faith (Studies in the Gospels, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude)</p>	<p>Hope in the Lord (Studies in Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John)</p>
2024/25	<p>*Worship in the Covenant Community (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, 1-2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms)</p>	<p>A King Forever and Ever (Studies in Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke)</p>	<p>Costly Sacrifice (Studies in Exodus, Leviticus, Hebrews, 1 John, Matthew, Revelation, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah)</p>	<p>Sacred Altars and Holy Gifts (Studies in Genesis, the Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter)</p>



Coming Up Next Quarter

September, October, November 2024

Worship in the Covenant of Community

The lessons this quarter are a study of worship practices offered as a grateful response to the covenantal relationship God initiates, first with Abraham, and later with the people of Israel. The patterns of worship reflect the gamut of community life, from praising God's goodness and mercy to calling on God for help in times of crisis.

Unit 1 observes how various leaders of the Israelite people honored God through their worship. These examples include Abraham, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

Unit 2 looks at various songs in the Old Testament that Israel used in worship and prayer.

Unit 3 looks at songs from the Hebrew psalter. We look at Psalm 23, Psalms 146–150 (with 146 and 150 being the songs for emphasis), Psalm 100, and Psalm 139.

Comprehensive Bible Study lessons are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible following the International Sunday School Lessons series. In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes through studies of books in both the Old and New Testaments.

Heartfelt Hope

Amid life's trials and afflictions, it can be difficult to live in genuine, heartfelt hope.

From where can hope arise in the human soul—no matter our external circumstances? The poets and psalmists of the Bible can offer help.

The writer of Lamentations (traditionally Jeremiah) lived through the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and spoke of how he felt “trampled” and his teeth broken in the wake of his enemy's victory (Lam. 3:16). However, a brighter reality—his loving and compassionate God—allowed him to look past the present destruction and forward to a hope grounded in God's great “faithfulness” (vs. 23-24).

The writer of Psalm 71 also cries out to God in distress, yet his plea was for deliverance from “accusers” who were actively seeking to harm him (vs. 13). Despite this threat, the psalmist makes clear his hope is everlasting and details the extent to which he will sing praises to God and tell of God's “power to the next generation” (vss. 14-18).

In Psalm 119, the author prays for God to help him know and trust one thing: His Word. Since God made him, he desires to know God's commands. If the Word of God rules his life, he and all who follow him need no fear of shame.

Psalm 130 is categorized as a penitential or lament psalm. The psalmist pleads for “mercy” and “forgiveness” as he cries out “from the depths” of his being to God (vss. 1-4). But the psalmist also calls Israel to “hope in the LORD” since “with the LORD is unfailing love” and “full redemption” from “all their sins” (vss. 7-8).



This painting by James Tissot (1836-1902) shows the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem lamented by Jeremiah, who cries out to God that, “My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped for from the LORD” (Lam. 3:18).

The Jewish Museum/Public Domain



A teacher in Uganda teaches the Bible to her class. The psalmist asked God, “Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come” (Ps. 71:18).

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The remains of one of the ancient walls of Jerusalem. The psalmist of Psalm 130 says he will “wait for the Lord more than watchmen” on a wall “wait for the morning” (Ps. 130:6).

Bukvoed



David is shown playing a lyre, killing Goliath, and killing a bear and a lion in this illustration from a ninth-century A.D. copy of the psalms. The psalmist of Psalm 119 said, “May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word” (Ps. 119:74).

Public Domain



This painting by Aleksander Grodzicki of a Jewish man praying reminds us of the psalmist praying, “Do not be far from me, my God; come quickly, God, to help me. May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace. As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more” (Ps. 71:12-14).

National Museum of Warsaw/Public Domain

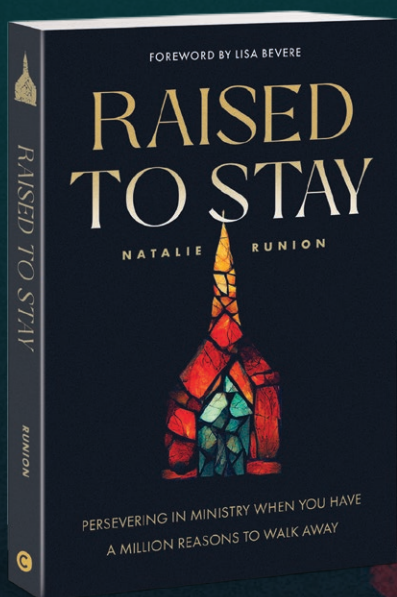


This painting, known as “The Prayer without End” by Nicolaes Maes (1634-1693), shows a woman saying grace and reminds us of the psalmist praying, “Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; LORD, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy” (Ps. 130:1-2).

Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

GOD CAN HEAL CHURCH HURT

Raised to Stay provides healing and hope to those hurt by church people. Written by a pastor's daughter, Natalie Runion has firsthand experience with the painful wounds of church hurt. Her personal healing journey, combined with encouraging biblical advice, will help you passionately pursue Christ and persevere in your calling.



RAISED TO STAY NATALIE RUNION