# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/8/20

# The Impartial Power of God



By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. —[Hebrews 10:14](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Hebrews+10%3A14)

We trample the blood of the Son of God underfoot if we think we are forgiven because we are sorry for our sins. The only reason for the forgiveness of our sins by God, and the infinite depth of His promise to forget them, is the death of Jesus Christ. Our repentance is merely the result of our personal realization of the atonement by the Cross of Christ, which He has provided for us. “…Christ Jesus…became for us wisdom from God— and righteousness and sanctification and redemption…” ([1 Corinthians 1:30](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+1:30)). Once we realize that Christ has become all this for us, the limitless joy of God begins in us. And wherever the joy of God is not present, the death sentence is still in effect.

No matter who or what we are, God restores us to right standing with Himself only by means of the death of Jesus Christ. God does this, not because Jesus pleads with Him to do so but because He died. It cannot be earned, just accepted. All the pleading for salvation which deliberately ignores the Cross of Christ is useless. It is knocking at a door other than the one which Jesus has already opened. We protest by saying, “But I don’t want to come that way. It is too humiliating to be received as a sinner.” God’s response, through Peter, is, “… there is no other name…by which we must be saved” ([Acts 4:12](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+4:12)). What at first appears to be heartlessness on God’s part is actually the true expression of His heart. There is unlimited entrance His way. “In Him we have redemption through His blood…” ([Ephesians 1:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1:7)). To identify with the death of Jesus Christ means that we must die to everything that was never a part of Him.

God is just in saving bad people only as He makes them good. Our Lord does not pretend we are all right when we are all wrong. The atonement by the Cross of Christ is the propitiation God uses to make unholy people holy.

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

Beware of pronouncing any verdict on the life of faith if you are not living it. Not Knowing Whither, 900 R

# CCEL – 12/8/20

**By love serve one another.**—[GAL. 5:13.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Gal.5.html" \l "Gal.5.13)

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.—Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.—Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.—Be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.—Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

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

[Gal. 6:1,2](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Gal.6.html" \l "Gal.6.1).[Jas. 5:19,20](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Jas.5.html" \l "Jas.5.19). -[I Pet. 1:22](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iPet.1.html" \l "iPet.1.22). -[Rom. 13:8](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.13.html" \l "Rom.13.8). -[Rom. 12:10](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.12.html" \l "Rom.12.10). -[I Pet. 5:5](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iPet.5.html" \l "iPet.5.5).[Rom. 15:1](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.15.html" \l "Rom.15.1).

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.” [Revelation 3:4](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rev.3.html" \l "Rev.3.4)

We may understand this to refer to justification. “They shall walk in white;” that is, they shall enjoy a constant sense of their own justification by faith; they shall understand that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them, that they have all been washed and made whiter than the newly-fallen snow.

Again, it refers to joy and gladness: for white robes were holiday dresses among the Jews. They who have not defiled their garments shall have their faces always bright; they shall understand what Solomon meant when he said “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart. Let thy garments be always white, for God hath accepted thy works.” He who is accepted of God shall wear white garments of joy and gladness, while he walks in sweet communion with the Lord Jesus. Whence so many doubts, so much misery, and mourning? It is because so many believers defile their garments with sin and error, and hence they lose the joy of their salvation, and the comfortable fellowship of the Lord Jesus, they do not here below walk in white.

The promise also refers to walking in white before the throne of God. Those who have not defiled their garments here shall most certainly walk in white up yonder, where the white-robed hosts sing perpetual hallelujahs to the Most High. They shall possess joys inconceivable, happiness beyond a dream, bliss which imagination knoweth not, blessedness which even the stretch of desire hath not reached. The “undefiled in the way” shall have all this—not of merit, nor of works, but of grace. They shall walk with Christ in white, for he has made them “worthy.” In his sweet company they shall drink of the living fountains of waters.

# Word Live – 12/8/20

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# Scripture Union – 12/8/20

[**https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/**](https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/)

# Today in the Word – 12/8/20

# To Love Is to Obey

**Read:** [**John 14:23–31**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14%3a23%e2%80%9331)

23Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

25“All this I have spoken while still with you. 26But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

28“You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. 30I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, 31but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

“Come now; let us leave.

Do you believe that being a Christian means denying yourself? While this is a basic biblical truth about discipleship, a recent survey revealed that only 36 percent of churchgoers “strongly agreed” with it. Nineteen percent actually “disagreed.” What we may choose to forget is that biblical obedience means putting God first, above our own selfish desires.

Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. John 14:23

Jesus taught that to love God means to obey Him (vv. 23–24). We may think of “obey” as a cold, dutiful verb, preferring “love” which feels warm and pleasant. But our Lord wove them together. Words or feelings are meaningless without actions to back them up. Obedience is the “proof of the pudding,” as a previous generation would have said. Now we might say, “Walk the talk,” or perhaps “Keep it 100.”

As in the previous chapter (see yesterday’s devotional), Jesus warned the disciples of His imminent departure (vv. 25–27). But He wasn’t leaving them alone. He would send the Holy Spirit, who would help them remember His teachings. It’s implied that the Spirit would also help them obey those teachings. That’s good because the kind of love and obedience Jesus described is beyond human ability. He promised them the gift of His peace, a divine sense of spiritual well-being that would stand against their natural fears and anxieties.

Jesus said the disciples should not be sad about His departure, but joyful (vv. 28–31). Why? Because it would mark the completion of His redemptive mission. Although it might have felt like these events were engineered by “the prince of this world,” Satan, everything happened by the Father’s will and Jesus’ choice (v. 30). Christ’s example of love and obedience now enables our own. That is a reason to rejoice!

**Apply the Word**

What about you? Take time to consider the spiritual truths of Christlike obedience and self-denial by meditating on John 12:23–26. Jesus used the object lesson of a seed to illustrate this important truth.

### **Pray with Us**

We live in a society that promotes self-care and individualism, where denying oneself is not only counterintuitive, but countercultural. Father, please help us obey you out of a genuine, faithful love for you.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/8/20

# On the Same Team

 **Read:** [**1 Thessalonians 5:1–11**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess%205.1%E2%80%9311)

### **The Day of the Lord**

5 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. 7For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

**Read:** [**1 Thessalonians 5:**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess%205.1%E2%80%9311)[**16–18**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thessalonians%205.16%E2%80%9318)

16Rejoice always, 17pray continually, 18give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Encourage one another and build each other up. [1 Thessalonians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess%205.11)

When Philadelphia Eagle’s quarterback Carson Wentz returned to the field after healing from a severe injury, the NFL team’s backup quarterback, Nick Foles, graciously returned to the bench. Although competing for the same position, the two men chose to support each other and remained confident in their roles. One reporter observed that the two athletes have a “unique relationship rooted in their faith in Christ” shown through their ongoing prayers for each other. As others watched, they brought honor to God by remembering they were on the same team—not just as Eagles quarterbacks, but as believers in Jesus representing Him.

The apostle Paul reminds believers to live as “children of the light” awaiting Jesus’ return ([1 Thessalonians 5:5–6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess%205.5%E2%80%936)). With our hope secure in the salvation Christ has provided, we can shrug off any temptations to compete out of jealousy, insecurity, fear, or envy. Instead, we can “encourage one another and build each other up” (v. 11). We can respect spiritual leaders who honor God and “live in peace” as we serve together to accomplish our shared goal—telling people about the gospel and encouraging others to live for Jesus (vv. 12–15).

As we serve on the same team, we can heed Paul’s command: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (vv. 16–18).

By:  [Xochitl Dixon](https://odb.org/author/xochitldixon/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

Who has encouraged you while serving on the same team? How can you encourage someone who serves alongside you?

Jesus, please give me opportunities today to encourage someone who serves with me.

#### **Insight**

The apostle Paul wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians to the young church in Thessalonica, a Roman colony. Thessalonica was the largest and most important city in Macedonia and the province’s capital. Because of its fine harbor, central location, and access to many roads, the city enjoyed flourishing trade. First Thessalonians was probably one of Paul’s first letters, written around ad 51 or 52 from Corinth. Only two or three years earlier, Paul, accompanied by Silas, had visited Thessalonica during his second missionary journey and established the church there. According to [Acts 17:1–4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2017.1%E2%80%934), Paul taught there for just “three Sabbaths” before opposition forced him to flee the city. Paul penned this letter to encourage the new believers in their faith and to assure them of Christ’s return.

# God Calling – 12/8/20

# My Kingdom

And greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto My Father.

While I was on earth, to the great number of those with whom I came in contact, Mine was a lost cause. Even My disciples only believed, half-doubting, half-wondering. When they all forsook Me and fled it was not so much fear of My enemies as the certainty that My Mission, however beautiful they thought it, had failed.

In spite of all I had taught them, in spite of the revelation of the Last Supper, they had secretly felt sure that when the final moment came, and the hatred of the Pharisees was declared against Me I should sound some call to action, and that I should lead My many followers, and found My earthly kingdom. Even the disciples who had eyes to see My Spiritual Kingdom had thought material forces had proved too strong for Me.

But with My Resurrection came hope. Faith revived. They would remind each other of all I had said. They would have the assurance of My Divinity, Messiahship, the lack of which had hindered My work on earth, and they would have all My Power in the unseen - the Holy Spirit - to help them.

Remember, I came to found a Kingdom - the Kingdom.  Those who lived in the Kingdom were to do the work -- greater works than I was able to do. Not a greater Power shown, not a greater Life lived, but, as men recognized My Godhead, opportunities for works in My Name would increase. My work on earth was to gather around Me the nucleus of My Kingdom, and to teach the Truths of My Kingdom to them.  In those Truths they were to live and work.

"But now it is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death,  by man came also the Resurrection of the dead." 1 Corinthians 15:20-21

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/9/20

# The Opposition of the Natural



Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. —[Galatians 5:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Galatians+5%3A24)

The natural life itself is not sinful. But we must abandon sin, having nothing to do with it in any way whatsoever. Sin belongs to hell and to the devil. I, as a child of God, belong to heaven and to God. It is not a question of giving up sin, but of giving up my right to myself, my natural independence, and my self-will. This is where the battle has to be fought. The things that are right, noble, and good from the natural standpoint are the very things that keep us from being God’s best. Once we come to understand that natural moral excellence opposes or counteracts surrender to God, we bring our soul into the center of its greatest battle. Very few of us would debate over what is filthy, evil, and wrong, but we do debate over what is good. It is the good that opposes the best. The higher up the scale of moral excellence a person goes, the more intense the opposition to Jesus Christ. “Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh….” The cost to your natural life is not just one or two things, but everything. Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself…” ([Matthew 16:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16:24)). That is, he must deny his right to himself, and he must realize who Jesus Christ is before he will bring himself to do it. Beware of refusing to go to the funeral of your own independence.

The natural life is not spiritual, and it can be made spiritual only through sacrifice. If we do not purposely sacrifice the natural, the supernatural can never become natural to us. There is no high or easy road. Each of us has the means to accomplish it entirely in his own hands. It is not a question of praying, but of sacrificing, and thereby performing His will.

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

Is He going to help Himself to your life, or are you taken up with your conception of what you are going to do? God is responsible for our lives, and the one great keynote is reckless reliance upon Him. Approved Unto God, 10 R

# CCEL – 12/9/20

**To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.**—[PROV. 21:3.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Prov.21.html" \l "Prov.21.3)

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.—To love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.—Mary . . . sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

[Mic. 6:8](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Mic.6.html" \l "Mic.6.8). -[I Sam. 15:22](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iSam.15.html" \l "iSam.15.22). -[Mark 12:33](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Mark.12.html" \l "Mark.12.33).[Hos. 12:6](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Hos.12.html" \l "Hos.12.6). -[Luke 10:39](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Luke.10.html" \l "Luke.10.39),[42](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Luke.10.html" \l "Luke.10.42).[Phi. 2:13](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Phil.2.html" \l "Phil.2.13).

“Therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you.” [Isaiah 30:18](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Isa.30.html" \l "Isa.30.18)

God often delays in answering prayer. We have several instances of this in sacred Scripture. Jacob did not get the blessing from the angel until near the dawn of day—he had to wrestle all night for it. The poor woman of Syrophoenicia was answered not a word for a long while. Paul besought the Lord thrice that “the thorn in the flesh” might be taken from him, and he received no assurance that it should be taken away, but instead thereof a promise that God’s grace should be sufficient for him. If thou hast been knocking at the gate of mercy, and hast received no answer, shall I tell thee why the mighty Maker hath not opened the door and let thee in? Our Father has reasons peculiar to himself for thus keeping us waiting. Sometimes it is to show his power and his sovereignty, that men may know that Jehovah has a right to give or to withhold. More frequently the delay is for our profit. Thou art perhaps kept waiting in order that thy desires may be more fervent. God knows that delay will quicken and increase desire, and that if he keeps thee waiting thou wilt see thy necessity more clearly, and wilt seek more earnestly; and that thou wilt prize the mercy all the more for its long tarrying. There may also be something wrong in thee which has need to be removed, before the joy of the Lord is given. Perhaps thy views of the Gospel plan are confused, or thou mayest be placing some little reliance on thyself, instead of trusting simply and entirely to the Lord Jesus. Or, God makes thee tarry awhile that he may the more fully display the riches of his grace to thee at last. Thy prayers are all filed in heaven, and if not immediately answered they are certainly not forgotten, but in a little while shall be fulfilled to thy delight and satisfaction. Let not despair make thee silent, but continue instant in earnest supplication.

# Word Live – 12/9/20

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# Scripture Union – 12/9/20

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# Today in the Word – 12/9/20

# Abiding in Love

**Read:** [**John 15:9–17**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+15%3a9%e2%80%9317)

9“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command. 15I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17This is my command: Love each other.We are living between two Advents: Christ’s birth and His return. How should that affect the way we live? A.W. Tozer answered: “In the midst of our lives, and between the two great mountain peaks of God’s acts in the world, we look back and remember, and we look forward and hope!”

I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. John 15:16

In other words, we must abide in Christ (v. 9). “Abide” is not a word we use much today, so translations often replace it with other words such as “remain,” “continue,” or even “reside.” Abide means to make a firm decision to “stay in place.” The key idea is that we “stick close” to Christ, understanding that our life and fruitfulness depend upon Him.

But we’re not just to abide near Christ, we’re to abide or remain in His love (vv. 9–11). How? By keeping His commands, just as He perfectly kept His Father’s commands. Abiding in His love by keeping His commands is the only pathway to godly joy. These verses close the loop on the past few days: To follow Christ means to love Him and one another; to love means to obey His commands, and to obey means we will abide or remain in Him.

The most important command is to love one another (vv. 12–17; 1 John 4:12). We are to love others as Christ loved us, selflessly and sacrificially. To follow Him in this way gives us the privilege of being His friends. After all, He loved us and chose us (in Jesus’ day, disciples usually chose their rabbi, not vice versa), shared “everything that I learned from my Father,” and called us to “go and bear fruit” (vv. 15–16). As we walk through this season of Advent, choose to abide in His love, by obeying His commands and demonstrating His love to others.

**Apply the Word**

This truth makes the devotional application clear: How can we show the love of Christ to another person today? Make a list of possible ideas, and then choose one to act on today!

### **Pray with Us**

Lord, thank you for choosing us to abide in you. Tune our hearts and minds to yours so that we can love others with your love. Guide us today to someone whom we can serve in your name.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/9/20

# God’s Guidance

 **Read:** [**Psalm 1:1–3**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%201.1%E2%80%933)

1Blessed is the one  
    who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
    or sit in the company of mockers,  
2but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
    and who meditates on his law day and night.  
3That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
    which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
    whatever they do prospers.

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. [Psalm 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%201.1)

When their bank accidentally deposited $120,000 into their account, a couple went on a shopping spree. They purchased an SUV, a camper, and two four-wheelers in addition to paying off bills. Discovering the deposit error, the bank told the couple to return the money. Unfortunately, the husband and wife had already spent it. They were then charged with felony theft. When the couple arrived at the local court, the husband said to a reporter, “We took some bad legal advice.” The two learned that following bad advice (and spending what wasn’t theirs) could lead to making a mess of their lives.

In contrast, the psalmist shared wise advice that can help us avoid messing up in life. He wrote that those who find genuine fulfillment—who are “blessed”—refuse to be influenced by the advice of those who don’t serve God ([Psalm 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%201.1)). They know that unwise, ungodly counsel can lead to unseen dangers and costly consequences. Also, they’re motivated by (find “delight” in) and preoccupied with (“meditate on”) the timeless and unshakable truths of Scripture (v. 2). They’ve found that submitting to God’s guidance leads to stability and fruitfulness (v. 3).

When we’re making decisions, big or small, about our careers, money, relationships, and more, may we seek God’s wisdom found in the Bible, godly counsel, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. His guidance is essential and trustworthy for living a fulfilling life and not creating messes.

By:  [Marvin Williams](https://odb.org/author/marvinwilliams/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

Why do you believe Scripture is essential in making godly decisions? Who are your counselors that help you with wise advice?

God, before I seek Your advice about things I don’t know, help me to practice obedience in the areas I do know, and in loving You and others.

#### **Insight**

[Psalm 1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%201) is often classified by scholars as Wisdom Literature because it describes an idealized person—someone whose integrity no one could actually fully live up to. The purpose is to inspire in the audience a desire to pursue such a life of wisdom themselves. In stark contrast to a lifestyle of wisdom, the psalm portrays an alternative destiny, the lifestyle of “mockers” (1:1).

The meaning of the Hebrew word ’ashre (1:1) is difficult to capture accurately in translation. Although often translated “blessed,” the word doesn’t have the modern connotations of being given a gift. Instead, it evokes the idea of the richness and joy of life rooted in God, living out the kind of peace (or shalom) that God intends for humanity. The New Living Translation attempts to capture these connotations by translating the word blessed as “Oh, the joys.”

# God Calling – 12/9/20

# Your Search Rewarded

Lord, all men seek for the Thee.

All men seek for Me, but all men do not know what they want. They are seeking because they are dissatisfied without realizing that I am the object of their quest.

Count it your greatest joy to be the means, by your lives, sufferings, words, and love, to prove to the questing ones you know that their search would end when they saw Me.

Profit by My Example. I left My work -- seemingly the greatest work -- that of saving souls, to seek communion with My Father. Did I know perhaps that with many it was idle curiosity? Did I know that there must be no rush into the Kingdom, that the still small voice, not the shoutings of a mob, would alone persuade men I was the Son of God?

Why be surrounded by multitudes if the multitudes were not really desiring to learn from, and to follow, Me? Follow the Christ into the quiet places of prayer.

"Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he." John 18:7, 8

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/10/20

# The Offering of the Natural



It is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. —[Galatians 4:22](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Galatians+4%3A22)

Paul was not dealing with sin in this chapter of Galatians, but with the relation of the natural to the spiritual. The natural can be turned into the spiritual only through sacrifice. Without this a person will lead a divided life. Why did God demand that the natural must be sacrificed? God did not demand it. It is not God’s perfect will, but His permissive will. God’s perfect will was for the natural to be changed into the spiritual through obedience. Sin is what made it necessary for the natural to be sacrificed.

Abraham had to offer up Ishmael before he offered up Isaac (see [Genesis 21:8-14](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+21:8-14)). Some of us are trying to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God before we have sacrificed the natural. The only way we can offer a spiritual sacrifice to God is to “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice…” ([Romans 12:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+12:1)). Sanctification means more than being freed from sin. It means the deliberate commitment of myself to the God of my salvation, and being willing to pay whatever it may cost.

If we do not sacrifice the natural to the spiritual, the natural life will resist and defy the life of the Son of God in us and will produce continual turmoil. This is always the result of an undisciplined spiritual nature. We go wrong because we stubbornly refuse to discipline ourselves physically, morally, or mentally. We excuse ourselves by saying, “Well, I wasn’t taught to be disciplined when I was a child.” Then discipline yourself now! If you don’t, you will ruin your entire personal life for God.

God is not actively involved with our natural life as long as we continue to pamper and gratify it. But once we are willing to put it out in the desert and are determined to keep it under control, God will be with it. He will then provide wells and oases and fulfill all His promises for the natural (see [Genesis 21:15-19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+21:15-19)).

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

The Bible is a relation of facts, the truth of which must be tested. Life may go on all right for a while, when suddenly a bereavement comes, or some crisis; unrequited love or a new love, a disaster, a business collapse, or a shocking sin, and we turn up our Bibles again and God’s word comes straight home, and we say, “Why, I never saw that there before.” Shade of His Hand, 1223 L

# CCEL – 12/10/20

**No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.**—[JOHN 10:29.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.John.10.html" \l "John.10.29)

I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.—The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.—We are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.—Your life is hid with Christ in God.

Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

[II Tim. 1:12](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiTim.1.html" \l "iiTim.1.12). -[II Tim. 4:18](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiTim.4.html" \l "iiTim.4.18). -[Rom. 8:37-39](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.8.html" \l "Rom.8.37). -[Col. 3:3](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Col.3.html" \l "Col.3.3).[Jas. 2:5](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Jas.2.html" \l "Jas.2.5).[II Thes. 2:16,17](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiThess.2.html" \l "iiThess.2.16).

“So shall we ever be with the Lord.” [1 Thessalonians 4:17](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iThess.4.html" \l "iThess.4.17)

Even the sweetest visits from Christ, how short they are—and how transitory! One moment our eyes see him, and we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, but again a little time and we do not see him, for our beloved withdraws himself from us; like a roe or a young hart he leaps over the mountains of division; he is gone to the land of spices, and feeds no more among the lilies.

“If today he deigns to bless us

With a sense of pardoned sin,

He to-morrow may distress us,

Make us feel the plague within.”

Oh, how sweet the prospect of the time when we shall not behold him at a distance, but see him face to face: when he shall not be as a wayfaring man tarrying but for a night, but shall eternally enfold us in the bosom of his glory. We shall not see him for a little season, but

“Millions of years our wondering eyes,

Shall o'er our Saviour’s beauties rove;

And myriad ages we'll adore,

The wonders of his love.”

In heaven there shall be no interruptions from care or sin; no weeping shall dim our eyes; no earthly business shall distract our happy thoughts; we shall have nothing to hinder us from gazing forever on the Sun of Righteousness with unwearied eyes. Oh, if it be so sweet to see him now and then, how sweet to gaze on that blessed face for aye, and never have a cloud rolling between, and never have to turn one’s eyes away to look on a world of weariness and woe! Blest day, when wilt thou dawn? Rise, O unsetting sun! The joys of sense may leave us as soon as they will, for this shall make glorious amends. If to die is but to enter into uninterrupted communion with Jesus, then death is indeed gain, and the black drop is swallowed up in a sea of victory.

# Word Live – 12/10/20

# <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive/>

# Scripture Union – 12/10/20

[**https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/**](https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/)

# Today in the Word – 12/10/20

# Love in Action

**Read:** [**1 John 3:11–24**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+3%3a11%e2%80%9324)

### **More on Love and Hatred**

11For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous. 13Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters,[[a](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+3%3a11%e2%80%9324#fen-NIV-30593a)] if the world hates you. 14We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

16This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

19This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 23And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 24The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

During a lockdown in Vietnam to combat the COVID-19 virus, some people had difficulty obtaining enough food. In response, a Ho Chi Minh City businessman set up free “rice ATMs” to help. Anyone who needed it could withdraw (at no cost) one day’s worth of rice for a family. His idea caught on in other cities around the nation.

Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:18

What a great practical example of love in action! In today’s reading, John initially explained love via its opposite, hate (vv. 11–15). Cain failed to love his brother, Abel, and instead murdered him out of envy. In the same way, the world will hate and envy us as followers of Christ because we’ve passed from death to life. Love and life are a matched set, as are hate and death.

The key to godly love is action (vv. 16–18). Words by themselves are not enough (see James 2:14–17). As always, Christ is the model we should imitate—He laid down His very life for us! How can we imitate this once-for-all event? By helping a brother or sister in Christ with our material possessions. A believer who fails to do so lacks God’s love and is thus the moral equivalent of a murderer. The phrase “has no pity” (v. 17) can be more strongly translated as “shuts off his compassion” or “closes his heart against him.”

Finally, the apostle expounded on how loving actions help reassure us of our status in Christ (vv. 19–24). Even if our (fallible) heart or conscience condemns us, one proof of our spiritual rebirth in Christ is that we’re able to show the love of Christ in action. This is not to our credit or glory but to God’s, for it’s the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live in this way.

**Apply the Word**

We’ve arrived at the same application as yesterday: How can you show the love of Christ to another person? Today, we encourage you to think specifically of helping in terms of material needs.

### **Pray with Us**

As we prayed yesterday, we ask again, God, that you would lead us to a person to bless with acts of love today. Help us provide for someone’s needs so they may know your great love for them.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/10/20

# The True Servant

 **Read:** [**Philippians 2:6–11**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil%202.6%E2%80%9311)

6Who, being in very nature[[a](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2%3A6%E2%80%9311&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29398a)] God,  
    did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
7rather, he made himself nothing  
    by taking the very nature[[b](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2%3A6%E2%80%9311&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29399b)] of a servant,  
    being made in human likeness.  
8And being found in appearance as a man,  
    he humbled himself  
    by becoming obedient to death—  
        even death on a cross!

9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
    and gave him the name that is above every name,  
10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
    to the glory of God the Father.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Philippians 2:6](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2%3A6%E2%80%9311&version=NIV#en-NIV-29398) Or in the form of
2. [Philippians 2:7](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2%3A6%E2%80%9311&version=NIV#en-NIV-29399) Or the form

Being found in appearance as a man, [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! [Philippians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil%202.8)

In 27 bc, the Roman ruler Octavian came before the Senate to lay down his powers. He’d won a civil war, become the sole ruler of that region of the world, and was functioning like an emperor. Yet he knew such power was viewed suspiciously. So Octavian renounced his powers before the Senate, vowing to simply be an appointed official. Their response? The Roman Senate honored the ruler by crowning him with a civic crown and naming him the servant of the Roman people. He was also given the name Augustus—the “great one.”

Paul wrote of Jesus emptying Himself and taking on the form of a servant. Augustus appeared to do the same. Or had he? Augustus only acted like he was surrendering his power but was doing it for his own gain. Jesus “humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” ([Philippians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil%202.8)). Death on a Roman cross was the worst form of humiliation and shame.

Today, a primary reason people praise “servant leadership” as a virtue is because of Jesus. Humility wasn’t a Greek or Roman virtue. Because Jesus died on the cross for us, He’s the true Servant. He’s the true Savior.

Christ became a servant in order to save us. He “made himself nothing” (v. 7) so that we could receive something truly great—the gift of salvation and eternal life.

By:  [Glenn Packiam](https://odb.org/author/glennpackiam/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

Why is it true that we’re never out of God’s reach? What does it mean for you to know that Jesus is the Servant who suffered and died in order to save you?

Dear Jesus, thank You for giving Your life for me. Your servanthood wasn’t a show but the reality of Your love for me. Fill my heart with love and gratitude today.

#### **Insight**

In [Philippians 2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil%202), Paul uses the word humility only in reference to Jesus’ death (v. 8). Though certainly Christ’s taking on human form was an act of humility, death was the ultimate act of humility for the second person of the Trinity, who is eternal and everlasting.

Paul says Jesus “humbled himself” (v. 8). It’s interesting to note the reflexive language used here. Jesus wasn’t humbled by death; He willingly humbled Himself in obedience so he could die. Because He humbled Himself, God restored Him to the place of honor from which He came. Jesus is the one to whom all creation will bend its knee (v. 10).

# God Calling – 12/10/20

# The Quiet Time

There may be many times when I reveal nothing, command nothing, give no guidance. But your path is clear, and your task, to grow daily more and more into the knowledge of Me. That this quiet time with Me will enable you to do.

I may ask you to sit silent before Me, and I may speak no word that you could write. All the same that waiting with Me will bring comfort and Peace. Only friends who understand and love each other can wait silent in each other's presence.

And it may be that I shall prove our friendship by asking you to wait in silence while I rest with you, assured of your Love and understanding. So wait, so love, so joy.

"My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Song of Solomon 2:10

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/11/20

# Individuality



Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself…" —[Matthew 16:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Matthew+16%3A24)

Individuality is the hard outer layer surrounding the inner spiritual life. Individuality shoves others aside, separating and isolating people. We see it as the primary characteristic of a child, and rightly so. When we confuse individuality with the spiritual life, we remain isolated. This shell of individuality is God’s created natural covering designed to protect the spiritual life. But our individuality must be yielded to God so that our spiritual life may be brought forth into fellowship with Him. Individuality counterfeits spirituality, just as lust counterfeits love. God designed human nature for Himself, but individuality corrupts that human nature for its own purposes.

The characteristics of individuality are independence and self-will. We hinder our spiritual growth more than any other way by continually asserting our individuality. If you say, “I can’t believe,” it is because your individuality is blocking the way; individuality can never believe. But our spirit cannot help believing. Watch yourself closely when the Spirit of God is at work in you. He pushes you to the limits of your individuality where a choice must be made. The choice is either to say, “I will not surrender,” or to surrender, breaking the hard shell of individuality, which allows the spiritual life to emerge. The Holy Spirit narrows it down every time to one thing (see [Matthew 5:23-24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5:23-24)). It is your individuality that refuses to “be reconciled to your brother” ([Matthew 5:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5:24)). God wants to bring you into union with Himself, but unless you are willing to give up your right to yourself, He cannot. “…let him deny himself…”— deny his independent right to himself. Then the real life-the spiritual life-is allowed the opportunity to grow.

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

There is no condition of life in which we cannot abide in Jesus. We have to learn to abide in Him wherever we are placed.  Our Brilliant Heritage, 946 R

# CCEL – 12/11/20

Let not your good be evil spoken of.—[ROM. 14:16.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.14.html" \l "Rom.14.16)

Abstain from all appearance of evil.—Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.—For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.—Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.—Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.—Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

[I Thes. 5:22](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iThess.5.html" \l "iThess.5.22). -[II Cor. 8:21](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiCor.8.html" \l "iiCor.8.21). -[I Pet. 2:15](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iPet.2.html" \l "iPet.2.15).[I Pet. 4:15,16](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iPet.4.html" \l "iPet.4.15).[Gal. 5:13](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Gal.5.html#Gal.5.13). -[I Cor. 8:9](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iCor.8.html" \l "iCor.8.9). -[Matt. 18:6](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Matt.18.html" \l "Matt.18.6). -[Matt. 25:40](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Matt.25.html" \l "Matt.25.40).

“Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” [1 Thessalonians 5:24](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iThess.5.html" \l "iThess.5.24)

Heaven is a place where we shall never sin; where we shall cease our constant watch against an indefatigable enemy, because there will be no tempter to ensnare our feet. There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. Heaven is the “undefiled inheritance;” it is the land of perfect holiness, and therefore of complete security. But do not the saints even on earth sometimes taste the joys of blissful security? The doctrine of God’s word is, that all who are in union with the Lamb are safe; that all the righteous shall hold on their way; that those who have committed their souls to the keeping of Christ shall find him a faithful and immutable preserver. Sustained by such a doctrine we can enjoy security even on earth; not that high and glorious security which renders us free from every slip, but that holy security which arises from the sure promise of Jesus that none who believe in him shall ever perish, but shall be with him where he is. Believer, let us often reflect with joy on the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and honour the faithfulness of our God by a holy confidence in him.

May our God bring home to you a sense of your safety in Christ Jesus! May he assure you that your name is graven on his hand; and whisper in your ear the promise, “Fear not, I am with thee.” Look upon him, the great Surety of the covenant, as faithful and true, and, therefore, bound and engaged to present you, the weakest of the family, with all the chosen race, before the throne of God; and in such a sweet contemplation you will drink the juice of the spiced wine of the Lord’s pomegranate, and taste the dainty fruits of Paradise. You will have an antepast of the enjoyments which ravish the souls of the perfect saints above, if you can believe with unstaggering faith that “faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

# Word Live – 12/11/20

# <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive/>

# Scripture Union – 12/11/20

[**https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/**](https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/)

# Today in the Word – 12/11/20

# Love Never Fails

**Read:** [**1 Corinthians 13**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+13)

13 If I speak in the tongues[[a](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+13#fen-NIV-28667a)] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,[[b](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+13#fen-NIV-28669b)] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [1 Corinthians 13:1](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+cor+13&version=NIV#en-NIV-28667) Or languages
2. [1 Corinthians 13:3](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+cor+13&version=NIV#en-NIV-28669) Some manuscripts body to the flames

“Love Divine, all loves excelling,” begins Charles Wesley’s famous hymn. “Joy of heaven to earth come down / Fix in us thy humble dwelling / All thy faithful mercies crown./ Jesus, thou art all compassion / Pure, unbounded love thou art; / Visit us with thy salvation / Enter every trembling heart.” Praise is a natural response to the perfection of God’s love. First Corinthians 13 gives us a partial description of God’s love, as well as a challenge. Here the apostle Paul explains how we should love one another as Christ loved us! Without love, things that are otherwise considered good have no value (vv. 1–3). The good things used as examples here are spiritual gifts from the previous chapter, but the principle applies across the board. Without love, nothing is truly gained or accomplished.

The greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13

Love has such a high value that we should be deeply interested in defining or describing it (vv. 4–7). Paul lists some of its qualities positively: what love is or does—such as showing patience, being kind, and persevering. We also learn what love isn’t or doesn’t do—such as “not self-seeking,” “not easily angered,” and “does not delight in evil” (vv. 5–6). Consider that Christ perfectly fulfilled each of these standards and more!

The bottom line is that everything fails or runs out except love (vv. 8–13). The world is characterized by change, decay, and death. Our understanding of life, of God, and of our purpose is partial at best. But one day, “when completeness comes”—a reference to Christ’s return—this will end (v. 9). Our knowledge will be far greater, like passing from childhood to adulthood. Most importantly, we’ll know Him clearly and directly. We’ll see Him face to face. How we long for that glorious day!

**Apply the Word**

Today, choose one of the qualities of love listed in verses 4–7. Ask God to show you how you can grow in this particular aspect of love during this Advent season. Make that quality your focus in prayer this weekend.

### **Pray with Us**

Heavenly Father, which quality of love would you have us focus on this weekend? Please sustain us as we strive to emulate Christ’s perfect love toward others.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/11/20

# Morning Mist

**Read:** [**Isaiah 44:9–11**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa%2044.9%E2%80%9311)

9All who make idols are nothing,  
    and the things they treasure are worthless.  
Those who would speak up for them are blind;  
    they are ignorant, to their own shame.  
10Who shapes a god and casts an idol,  
    which can profit nothing?  
11People who do that will be put to shame;  
    such craftsmen are only human beings.  
Let them all come together and take their stand;  
    they will be brought down to terror and shame.

**Read:** [**Isaiah 44:**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa%2044.9%E2%80%9311)[**21–23**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isaiah%2044.21%E2%80%9323)

21“Remember these things, Jacob,  
    for you, Israel, are my servant.  
I have made you, you are my servant;  
    Israel, I will not forget you.  
22I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,  
    your sins like the morning mist.  
Return to me,  
    for I have redeemed you.”

23Sing for joy, you heavens, for the Lord has done this;  
    shout aloud, you earth beneath.  
Burst into song, you mountains,  
    you forests and all your trees,  
for the Lord has redeemed Jacob,  
    he displays his glory in Israel.

I have swept away your offenses . . . like the morning mist. [Isaiah 44:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa%2044.22)

One morning I visited a pond near my house. I sat on an overturned boat, thinking and watching a gentle west wind chase a layer of mist across the water’s surface. Wisps of fog circled and swirled. Mini “tornadoes” rose up and then exhausted themselves. Before long, the sunlight cut through the clouds and the mist disappeared.

This scene comforted me because I connected it with a verse I’d just read: “I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist” ([Isaiah 44:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa%2044.22)). I visited the place hoping to distract myself from a series of sinful thoughts I’d been preoccupied with for days. Although I was confessing them, I began to wonder if God would forgive me when I repeated the same sin.

That morning, I knew the answer was yes. Through His prophet Isaiah, God showed grace to the Israelites when they struggled with the ongoing problem of idol worship. Although He told them to stop chasing false gods, God also invited them back to Himself, saying, “I have made you, you are my servant; . . . I will not forget you” (v. 21).

I don’t fully grasp forgiveness like that, but I do understand that God’s grace is the only thing that can dissolve our sin completely and heal us from it. I’m thankful His grace is endless and divine like He is, and that it’s available whenever we need it.

By:  [Jennifer Benson Schuldt](https://odb.org/author/jenniferbschuldt/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

How is it possible to abuse God’s grace? What steps can you take to break free of sinful habits and experience His forgiveness?

Dear God, thank You for Your gracious presence in my life. I don’t want to live in habitual sin. Help me to feel the freedom that comes when I confess my sin and You erase it completely.

Read Grace: Accepting God’s Gift to You at [DiscoverySeries.org/Q0613.](https://DiscoverySeries.org/Q0613.)

#### **Insight**

The prophet Isaiah is foremost among Israel’s prophets. His book is the longest of the prophetic books and covers a huge sweep of Israel’s coming experiences. Isaiah contains more messianic prophecies than any other Old Testament prophet. It’s also one of the most quoted Old Testament books in the New Testament, referenced more than sixty times, with twenty-five of those found in the Gospels. The most quoted portions of Isaiah are the four “suffering servant songs” (42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–7; and especially 52:13–53:12), which believers in Jesus see as being fulfilled in Christ and His suffering on the cross. In addition to the prophecies of Jesus’ sacrificial death, some of Isaiah’s most beloved prophecies are those of His birth, including [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa%207.14) and [9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isaiah%209.6).

# God Calling – 12/11/20

# A Sunrise Gift

To those whose lives have been full of struggle and care, who have felt as you both have, the tragedy of living, the pity of an agonized heart for My poor world -- to those of My followers I give that Peace and Joy that brings to age its second Spring, the youth they sacrificed for Me, and for My world. . . .

Take each day now as a joyous sunrise gift from Me. Your simple daily tasks done in My strength and Love will bring the consciousness of all your highest hopes. Expect great things. Expect great things.

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; and we will rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/12/20

# Personality

# Personality

…that they may be one just as We are one… —[John 17:22](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=John+17%3A22)

Personality is the unique, limitless part of our life that makes us distinct from everyone else. It is too vast for us even to comprehend. An island in the sea may be just the top of a large mountain, and our personality is like that island. We don’t know the great depths of our being, therefore we cannot measure ourselves. We start out thinking we can, but soon realize that there is really only one Being who fully understands us, and that is our Creator.

Personality is the characteristic mark of the inner, spiritual man, just as individuality is the characteristic of the outer, natural man. Our Lord can never be described in terms of individuality and independence, but only in terms of His total Person— “I and My Father are one” ([John 10:30](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10:30)). Personality merges, and you only reach your true identity once you are merged with another person. When love or the Spirit of God come upon a person, he is transformed. He will then no longer insist on maintaining his individuality. Our Lord never referred to a person’s individuality or his isolated position, but spoke in terms of the total person— “…that they may be one just as We are one….” Once your rights to yourself are surrendered to God, your true personal nature begins responding to God immediately. Jesus Christ brings freedom to your total person, and even your individuality is transformed. The transformation is brought about by love— personal devotion to Jesus. Love is the overflowing result of one person in true fellowship with another.

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

Beware of bartering the Word of God for a more suitable conception of your own.  Disciples Indeed, 386 R

# CCEL – 12/12/20

The Lord is in the midst of thee.—[ZEPH. 3:15.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Zeph.3.html" \l "Zeph.3.15)

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.—Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; He will come and save you.—The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.—Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart.

I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.

[Isa. 41:10](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Isa.41.html" \l "Isa.41.10). -[Isa. 35:3,4](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Isa.35.html" \l "Isa.35.3). -[Zeph. 3:17](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Zeph.3.html" \l "Zeph.3.17). -[Psa. 27:14](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Ps.27.html" \l "Ps.27.14).[Rev. 21:3,4](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rev.21.html" \l "Rev.21.3).

“His ways are everlasting.” [Habakkuk 3:6](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Hab.3.html" \l "Hab.3.6)

What he hath done at one time, he will do yet again. Man’s ways are variable, but God’s ways are everlasting. There are many reasons for this most comforting truth: among them are the following—the Lord’s ways are the result of wise deliberation; he ordereth all things according to the counsel of his own will. Human action is frequently the hasty result of passion, or fear, and is followed by regret and alteration; but nothing can take the Almighty by surprise, or happen otherwise than he has foreseen. His ways are the outgrowth of an immutable character, and in them the fixed and settled attributes of God are clearly to be seen. Unless the Eternal One himself can undergo change, his ways, which are himself in action, must remain forever the same. Is he eternally just, gracious, faithful, wise, tender?—then his ways must ever be distinguished for the same excellences. Beings act according to their nature: when those natures change, their conduct varies also; but since God cannot know the shadow of a turning, his ways will abide everlastingly the same. Moreover there is no reason from without which could reverse the divine ways, since they are the embodiment of irresistible might. The earth is said, by the prophet, to be cleft with rivers, mountains tremble, the deep lifts up its hands, and sun and moon stand still, when Jehovah marches forth for the salvation of his people. Who can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? But it is not might alone which gives stability; God’s ways are the manifestation of the eternal principles of right, and therefore can never pass away. Wrong breeds decay and involves ruin, but the true and the good have about them a vitality which ages cannot diminish.

This morning let us go to our heavenly Father with confidence, remembering that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in him the Lord is ever gracious to his people.

# Word Live – 12/12/20

# <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive/>

# Scripture Union – 12/12/20

[**https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/**](https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/)

# Today in the Word – 12/12/20

# The Seeking Shepherd

**Read:** [**Luke 15:1–7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+15%3a1%e2%80%937)

### **The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

3Then Jesus told them this parable: 4“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ 7I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

What does it mean when we say, “The Lord is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1)? Phillip Keller offers an answer to this question in his book, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23. “This thought alone should stir my spirit, quicken my own sense of awareness, and lend enormous dignity to myself as an individual. To think that God in Christ is deeply concerned about me as a particular person immediately gives great purpose and enormous meaning to my short sojourn upon this planet.”

Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep. Luke 15:6

Today’s parable conveys this message as well. It’s the first in a series of three stories Jesus told about finding lost things (a sheep, a coin, a son). All three stories show how much God values us and how much effort He puts forth “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Even more significantly, the story highlights the loving nature of the Shepherd Himself, Jesus. Our Good Shepherd loves each of us so much that He is willing to leave his 99 sheep (“in the open country,” but protected) and search for the one who was lost (vv. 3–4). Notice it’s not the sheep seeking the shepherd but the other way around. God’s love pursues us, as we see throughout the Bible. And when we’re found, there is great “rejoicing in heaven” (vv. 5–7). Joy is always greater when the need and forgiveness are greater as well (see Luke 7:41–43).

Two audiences were listening to this parable. One was “tax collectors and sinners,” lost sheep in need of a Savior (see Luke 5:31–32). The other was the Pharisees. They were also lost but refused to admit it. They pridefully complained about Jesus’ willingness to associate with the other group (vv. 1–2). In this story, Jesus sadly mocked them as “ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (v. 7). They did, of course, but their hearts were closed to Christ.

**Apply the Word**

You may have sheep and shepherds as a part of your nativity set. If you have time today, read the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10:1–18 and reflect on the fact that God is your shepherd, a powerful image used throughout Scripture.

### **Pray with Us**

Lord, please humble us as we remember that each of us was once a lost sheep. Move us to compassion for the sheep who are still lost and show us how we may join in your loving pursuit of them.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/12/20

# Prayerful Wrestling

 **Read:** [**Genesis 32:24–32**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%2032.24%E2%80%9332)

24So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

27The man asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

28Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,[[a](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A24%E2%80%9332&version=NIV#fen-NIV-957a)] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

29Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”

But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.

30So Jacob called the place Peniel,[[b](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A24%E2%80%9332&version=NIV#fen-NIV-959b)] saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

31The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,[[c](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A24%E2%80%9332&version=NIV#fen-NIV-960c)] and he was limping because of his hip. 32Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob’s hip was touched near the tendon.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Genesis 32:28](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A24%E2%80%9332&version=NIV#en-NIV-957) Israel probably means he struggles with God.
2. [Genesis 32:30](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A24%E2%80%9332&version=NIV#en-NIV-959) Peniel means face of God.
3. [Genesis 32:31](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+32%3A24%E2%80%9332&version=NIV#en-NIV-960) Hebrew Penuel, a variant of Peniel

Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. [Genesis 32:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%2032.24)

Dennis’ life was transformed after someone gave him a New Testament. Reading it captivated him, and it became his constant companion. Within six months, two life-changing events occurred in his life. He placed his faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins, and he was diagnosed with a brain tumor after experiencing severe headaches. Because of the unbearable pain, he became bedridden and unable to work. One painful, sleepless night he found himself crying out to God. Sleep finally came at 4:30 a.m.

Bodily pain can cause us to cry out to God, but other excruciating life circumstances also compel us to run to Him. Centuries before Dennis’ night of wrestling, a desperate Jacob faced off with God ([Genesis 32:24–32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%2032.24%E2%80%9332)). For Jacob, it was unfinished family business. He had wronged his brother Esau (ch. 27), and he feared that payback was imminent. In seeking God’s help in this difficult situation, Jacob encountered God face-to-face (32:30) and emerged from it a changed man.

And so did Dennis. After pleading with God in prayer, Dennis was able to stand up after being bedridden, and the doctor’s examination showed no signs of the tumor. Although God doesn’t always choose to miraculously heal us, we’re confident that He hears our prayers and will give us what we need for our situation. In our desperation we offer sincere prayers to God and leave the results to Him!

By:  [Arthur Jackson](https://odb.org/author/arthurjackson/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

What are you struggling with that you could bring before God in prayer? What are some of the benefits of praying from the depths of our hearts even when He chooses not to change the situation?

Father, help me to see that life’s difficulties and challenges are opportunities for me to seek You in prayer and to grow in my understanding of who You are.

#### **Insight**

The name Jacob means “heel-grabber” and refers to someone who tries to advance themselves by tripping up someone else by means of scheming or manipulation. This characteristic of Jacob is first seen in the event that gave him his name. Following the birth of his twin brother, Esau, Jacob came out of the womb literally grasping his twin’s heel ([Genesis 25:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%2025.26)). This event also foreshadowed his character. So, when Jacob manipulated Esau to take his birthright (vv. 29–34), and then also schemed against their father, Isaac, to steal Esau’s blessing (ch. 27), he was living out the name that his first action described. Jacob would go on to live with his mother’s brother, Laban, but there he would reap what he had sown. Laban schemed against Jacob by giving him his daughter Leah as his wife (ch. 29), rather than Rachel, the daughter Jacob deeply loved.

# God Calling – 12/12/20

# Care-free

Perfect love casteth out fear.

Love and fear cannot dwell together. By their very natures they cannot exist side by side. Evil is powerful, and fear is one of evil's most potent forces.

Therefore a weak vacillating love can be soon routed by fear, whereas a perfect Love, a trusting Love, is immediately the Conqueror, and fear, vanquished, flees in confusion.

But I am Love because God is Love, and I and the Father are one. So the only way to obtain this perfect Love, that dispels fear, is to have Me more and more in your lives. You can only banish fear by My Presence and My Name.

Fear of the future -- Jesus will be with us.

Fear of poverty -- Jesus will provide. (And so to all the temptations of fear.)

You must not allow fear to enter. Talk to Me. Think of Me. Talk of Me. Love Me. And that sense of My Power will so possess you that no fear can possess your mind. Be strong in this My Love.

"And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve." Isaiah 14:3

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/13/20

# Intercessory Prayer



…men always ought to pray and not lose heart. —[Luke 18:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Luke+18%3A1)

You cannot truly intercede through prayer if you do not believe in the reality of redemption. Instead, you will simply be turning intercession into useless sympathy for others, which will serve only to increase the contentment they have for remaining out of touch with God. True intercession involves bringing the person, or the circumstance that seems to be crashing in on you, before God, until you are changed by His attitude toward that person or circumstance. Intercession means to “fill up…[with] what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” ([Colossians 1:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1:24)), and this is precisely why there are so few intercessors. People describe intercession by saying, “It is putting yourself in someone else’s place.” That is not true! Intercession is putting yourself in God’s place; it is having His mind and His perspective.

As an intercessor, be careful not to seek too much information from God regarding the situation you are praying about, because you may be overwhelmed. If you know too much, more than God has ordained for you to know, you can’t pray; the circumstances of the people become so overpowering that you are no longer able to get to the underlying truth.

Our work is to be in such close contact with God that we may have His mind about everything, but we shirk that responsibility by substituting doing for interceding. And yet intercession is the only thing that has no drawbacks, because it keeps our relationship completely open with God.

What we must avoid in intercession is praying for someone to be simply “patched up.” We must pray that person completely through into contact with the very life of God. Think of the number of people God has brought across our path, only to see us drop them! When we pray on the basis of redemption, God creates something He can create in no other way than through intercessory prayer.

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

The Bible is the only Book that gives us any indication of the true nature of sin, and where it came from. The Philosophy of Sin, 1107 R

# CCEL – 12/13/20

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.—[II TIM. 2:1.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiTim.2.html" \l "iiTim.2.1)

Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power.—As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.—Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.—Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.—Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Fight the good fight of faith.—In nothing terrified by your adversaries.

[Col. 1:11](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Col.1.html" \l "Col.1.11). -[Col. 2:6,7](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Col.2.html" \l "Col.2.6). -[Isa. 61:3](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Isa.61.html" \l "Isa.61.3). -[Eph. 2:20](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.2.html" \l "Eph.2.20),[22](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.2.html" \l "Eph.2.22).[Acts 20:32](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Acts.20.html" \l "Acts.20.32). -[Phi. 1:11](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Phil.1.html" \l "Phil.1.11).[I Tim. 6:12](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iTim.6.html" \l "iTim.6.12). -[Phi. 1:28](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Phil.1.html" \l "Phil.1.28).

“Salt without prescribing how much.” [Ezra 7:22](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Ezra.7.html" \l "Ezra.7.22)

Salt was used in every offering made by fire unto the Lord, and from its preserving and purifying properties it was the grateful emblem of divine grace in the soul. It is worthy of our attentive regard that, when Artaxerxes gave salt to Ezra the priest, he set no limit to the quantity, and we may be quite certain that when the King of kings distributes grace among his royal priesthood, the supply is not cut short by him. Often are we straitened in ourselves, but never in the Lord. He who chooses to gather much manna will find that he may have as much as he desires. There is no such famine in Jerusalem that the citizens should eat their bread by weight and drink their water by measure. Some things in the economy of grace are measured; for instance our vinegar and gall are given us with such exactness that we never have a single drop too much, but of the salt of grace no stint is made, “Ask what thou wilt and it shall be given unto thee.” Parents need to lock up the fruit cupboard, and the sweet jars, but there is no need to keep the salt-box under lock and key, for few children will eat too greedily from that. A man may have too much money, or too much honour, but he cannot have too much grace. When Jeshurun waxed fat in the flesh, he kicked against God, but there is no fear of a man’s becoming too full of grace: a plethora of grace is impossible. More wealth brings more care, but more grace brings more joy. Increased wisdom is increased sorrow, but abundance of the Spirit is fulness of joy. Believer, go to the throne for a large supply of heavenly salt. It will season thine afflictions, which are unsavoury without salt; it will preserve thy heart which corrupts if salt be absent, and it will kill thy sins even as salt kills reptiles. Thou needest much; seek much, and have much.

# Word Live – 12/13/20

# <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive/>

# Scripture Union – 12/13/20

[**https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/**](https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/)

# Today in the Word – 12/13/20

# The Third Week of Advent: Joy

**Read:** [**John 3:22–31**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3a22%e2%80%9331)

### **John Testifies Again About Jesus**

22After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. 23Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. 24(This was before John was put in prison.) 25An argument developed between some of John’s disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. 26They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”

27To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. 28You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ 29The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30He must become greater; I must become less.”[[a](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3a22%e2%80%9331#fen-NIV-26151a)]

31The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.

Your church may celebrate the season using a traditional Advent wreath embedded with five candles. The wreath is often made of evergreens, which symbolize eternal life. Four of the candles are arranged in a circle, one lit for each Sunday of Advent. The fifth in the center is lit during the Christmas Eve service. This final “Christ candle” is usually white, signifying light and purity, while three of the others are purple, signifying Christ’s kingship.

He must become greater; I must become less. John 3:30

The remaining candle, lit today on the third Sunday of Advent, is rose pink, signifying joy. Today’s reading begins our focus on joy in the context of humility. After baptizing Jesus, John the Baptist continued his ministry of proclaiming the kingdom and calling people to repentance. He could have seen Jesus’ overlapping ministry as competition and could have shared the envy expressed by some of his own disciples (vv. 25–26). Instead, John had a clear understanding of God’s plan and his role in it. What mattered most was the identity and authority of Jesus, the Messiah (v. 28). He was the Son of God from heaven (v. 31). Metaphorically, He was the Bridegroom at a long-prophesied wedding (v. 29). John saw his own identity and mission entirely in relation to Christ. John was the forerunner, sent ahead to announce the Messiah (vv. 27–28). He was otherwise a normal man (v. 31). Metaphorically, he was the friend of the Bridegroom, or what we might call today the “best man” (v. 29).

John’s response to these truths is instructive. Far from feeling envious, he felt complete joy (v. 29). The Messiah had come, the Bridegroom had arrived! John’s mission and joy mandated that Jesus “must become greater; I must become less” (v. 30). Such humility is the exact opposite of worldly “joy” and ambition.

**Apply the Word**

To help launch this week’s Advent theme of joy, consider singing or listening to the Christmas carol, “Joy to the World,” or a popular chorus, “The Joy of the Lord Is My Strength” (see Neh. 8:10).

### **Pray with Us**

We delight in Christ, the Son of God, and the Bridegroom of the Church! Today we echo John’s words, praying that we would be humbled and Christ magnified.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/13/20

# The Christmas Gift of Speech

 **Read:** [**Luke 1:62–75**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%201.62%E2%80%9375)

62Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” 64Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. 65All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

### **Zechariah’s Song**

67His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
    because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
69He has raised up a horn[[a](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A62%E2%80%9375&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24963a)] of salvation for us  
    in the house of his servant David  
70(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),  
71salvation from our enemies  
    and from the hand of all who hate us—  
72to show mercy to our ancestors  
    and to remember his holy covenant,  
73    the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
74to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
    and to enable us to serve him without fear  
75    in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Luke 1:69](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A62%E2%80%9375&version=NIV#en-NIV-24963) Horn here symbolizes a strong king.

[Zechariah’s] mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. [Luke 1:64](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%201.64)

A post-surgical stroke had robbed Tom of his ability to speak, and he faced a long rehab journey. Weeks later, we were pleasantly surprised when he showed up at our church’s Thanksgiving service. We were even more surprised when he stood up to speak. Searching for what to say, he jumbled his words, repeated himself, and confused days and time. But one thing was clear: he was praising God! It’s possible to have your heart break and be blessed at the same moment. This was that kind of moment.

In the “pre-Christmas story” we meet a man who lost the gift of speech. Gabriel the angel appeared to Zechariah the priest and told him he would be the father of a great prophet (see [Luke 1:11–17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%201.11%E2%80%9317)). Zechariah and his wife were elderly, so he doubted it. That’s when Gabriel told him he would not speak “until the day this happens” (v. 20).

The day did happen. And at the ceremony to name the miracle baby, Zechariah spoke. With his first words he praised God (v. 64). Then he said, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them” (v. 68).

Like Zechariah, as soon as he was able, Tom’s response was to praise God. Their hearts were inclined toward the One who made their tongues and their minds. Regardless of what faces us this season, we can respond the same way.

By:  [Tim Gustafson](https://odb.org/author/timgustafson/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

How do you respond when a crisis comes? What’s your reaction when you come through it?

Thank You, Father, for the gift of speech. In my times of doubt, be with me to strengthen my faith. Help me learn how to use language to draw near to and honor You.

#### **Insight**

The Bible contains a rich heritage of unlikely pregnancies. Abraham and Sarah were elderly and Sarah was infertile, but she gave birth to Isaac in fulfillment of God’s promise ([Genesis 17:15–19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%2017.15%E2%80%9319)). Isaac’s wife Rebekah was childless until God responded to Isaac’s prayer, resulting in the birth of Esau and Jacob (25:21–26). Jacob’s wife Rachel was unable to conceive (29:31) until God intervened and she gave birth to Joseph (30:22–24). Manoah’s wife was infertile but gave birth to Samson according to God’s promise ([Judges 13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg%2013)). Hannah pleaded with God for a child and gave birth to Samuel ([1 Samuel 1:1–20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Sam%201.1%E2%80%9320)).

In [Luke 1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%201), an angel announced that Elizabeth, who was elderly and unable to conceive (vv. 5–7), would bear a son named John (vv. 11–17, 57–60). These miraculous births produced significant people for the plan of God. John prepared the way for the most significant of all—Jesus, born of a virgin.

# God Calling – 12/13/20

# Perpetual Guidance

Fullness of Joy. The Joy of Perpetual Guidance. The Joy of knowing that every detail of your lives is planned by Me, but planned with a wealth of tenderness and Love.

Wait for Guidance in every step. Wait to be shown My way. The thought of this loving leading should give you great Joy. All the responsibility of Life taken off your shoulders. All its business worry taken off your shoulders. It is indeed a Joy for you to feel so free and yet so planned for.

Oh! the wonder of this a God-guided life. To think anything impossible in such circumstances is to say it cannot be done by Me. To say that is surely a denial of Me.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son." 1 John 1:3

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/14/20

# The Great Life



Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled… —[John 14:27](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=John+14%3A27)

Whenever we experience something difficult in our personal life, we are tempted to blame God. But we are the ones in the wrong, not God. Blaming God is evidence that we are refusing to let go of some disobedience somewhere in our lives. But as soon as we let go, everything becomes as clear as daylight to us. As long as we try to serve two masters, ourselves and God, there will be difficulties combined with doubt and confusion. Our attitude must be one of complete reliance on God. Once we get to that point, there is nothing easier than living the life of a saint. We encounter difficulties when we try to usurp the authority of the Holy Spirit for our own purposes.

God’s mark of approval, whenever you obey Him, is peace. He sends an immeasurable, deep peace; not a natural peace, “as the world gives,” but the peace of Jesus. Whenever peace does not come, wait until it does, or seek to find out why it is not coming. If you are acting on your own impulse, or out of a sense of the heroic, to be seen by others, the peace of Jesus will not exhibit itself. This shows no unity with God or confidence in Him. The spirit of simplicity, clarity, and unity is born through the Holy Spirit, not through your decisions. God counters our self-willed decisions with an appeal for simplicity and unity.

My questions arise whenever I cease to obey. When I do obey God, problems come, not between me and God, but as a means to keep my mind examining with amazement the revealed truth of God. But any problem that comes between God and myself is the result of disobedience. Any problem that comes while I obey God (and there will be many), increases my overjoyed delight, because I know that my Father knows and cares, and I can watch and anticipate how He will unravel my problems.

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

The life of Abraham is an illustration of two things: of unreserved surrender to God, and of God’s complete possession of a child of His for His own highest end. Not Knowing Whither, 901 R

# CCEL – 12/14/20

Make his praise glorious.—[PSA. 66:2.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Ps.66.html" \l "Ps.66.2)

This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.—I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth.—By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.—Who is like unto thee, O Lord, . . . glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?—I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving.—They sing the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty.

[Isa. 43:21](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Isa.43.html" \l "Isa.43.21). -[Jer. 33:8,9](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Jer.33.html" \l "Jer.33.8). -[Heb. 13:15](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Heb.13.html" \l "Heb.13.15).[Psa. 86:12,13](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Ps.86.html" \l "Ps.86.12). -[Exo. 15:11](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Exod.15.html" \l "Exod.15.11). -[Psa. 69:30](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Ps.69.html" \l "Ps.69.30). -[Rev. 15:3](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rev.15.html" \l "Rev.15.3).

“They go from strength to strength.” [Psalm 84:7](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Ps.84.html" \l "Ps.84.7)

They go from strength to strength. There are various renderings of these words, but all of them contain the idea of progress.

Our own good translation of the authorized version is enough for us this morning. “They go from strength to strength.” That is, they grow stronger and stronger. Usually, if we are walking, we go from strength to weakness; we start fresh and in good order for our journey, but by-and-by the road is rough, and the sun is hot, we sit down by the wayside, and then again painfully pursue our weary way. But the Christian pilgrim having obtained fresh supplies of grace, is as vigorous after years of toilsome travel and struggle as when he first set out. He may not be quite so elate and buoyant, nor perhaps quite so hot and hasty in his zeal as he once was, but he is much stronger in all that constitutes real power, and travels, if more slowly, far more surely. Some gray-haired veterans have been as firm in their grasp of truth, and as zealous in diffusing it, as they were in their younger days; but, alas, it must be confessed it is often otherwise, for the love of many waxes cold and iniquity abounds, but this is their own sin and not the fault of the promise which still holds good: “The youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.” Fretful spirits sit down and trouble themselves about the future. “Alas!” say they, “we go from affliction to affliction.” Very true, O thou of little faith, but then thou goest from strength to strength also. Thou shalt never find a bundle of affliction which has not bound up in the midst of it sufficient grace. God will give the strength of ripe manhood with the burden allotted to full-grown shoulders.

# Word Live – 12/14/20

# <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive/>

# Scripture Union – 12/14/20

[**https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/**](https://scriptureunion.org/encounters/)

# Today in the Word – 12/14/20

# The Joy of the Downcast

**Read:** [**Psalm 42**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42)**[**[**a**](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42#fen-NIV-14557a)**][**[**b**](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42#fen-NIV-14557b)**]**

#### For the director of music. A maskil[[c](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42#fen-NIV-14557c)] of the Sons of Korah.

1As the deer pants for streams of water,  
    so my soul pants for you, my God.  
2My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
    When can I go and meet with God?  
3My tears have been my food  
    day and night,  
while people say to me all day long,  
    “Where is your God?”  
4These things I remember  
    as I pour out my soul:  
how I used to go to the house of God  
    under the protection of the Mighty One[[d](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42#fen-NIV-14560d)]  
with shouts of joy and praise  
    among the festive throng.

5Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
    Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
    for I will yet praise him,  
    my Savior and my God.

6My soul is downcast within me;  
    therefore I will remember you  
from the land of the Jordan,  
    the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.  
7Deep calls to deep  
    in the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your waves and breakers  
    have swept over me.

8By day the Lord directs his love,  
    at night his song is with me—  
    a prayer to the God of my life.

9I say to God my Rock,  
    “Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
    oppressed by the enemy?”  
10My bones suffer mortal agony  
    as my foes taunt me,  
saying to me all day long,  
    “Where is your God?”

11Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
    Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
    for I will yet praise him,  
    my Savior and my God.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Psalm 42:1](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42#en-NIV-14557) In many Hebrew manuscripts Psalms 42 and 43 constitute one psalm.
2. [Psalm 42:1](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42#en-NIV-14557) In Hebrew texts 42:1-11 is numbered 42:2-12.
3. [Psalm 42:1](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42#en-NIV-14557) Title: Probably a literary or musical term
4. [Psalm 42:4](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42#en-NIV-14560) See Septuagint and Syriac; the meaning of the Hebrew for this line is uncertain.

Though the funeral of Charles Dickens was private, the grand doors of Westminster Abbey opened afterward, allowing thousands to pay their respects to the famed novelist. People placed flowers into the grave, along with written tributes on scraps of paper or cloth. Because of his novels such as David Copperfield, Dickens was seen as a champion of the poor and the downtrodden.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Psalm 42:2

Christmas can be an especially difficult season for the downcast. But we know that true hope and joy is found in God alone. This is the main theme of today’s reading. This is why the psalmist thirsts for God above all else (vv. 1–2). While he longs to worship once again with God’s people (vv. 3–4), at present he feels sorrowful, abandoned by God, and mocked by others. Notice that he doesn’t dismiss these emotions or try to will himself toward acting happy. Instead, he meditates on the fact that God is greater than his problems, and by doing so, hope prevails. This becomes a refrain or chorus throughout the psalm (see v. 11; Ps. 43:5).

The psalmist recognizes that God is the only real source of hope (vv. 6–10). Even though his soul is discouraged, and he feels like he’s drowning or overwhelmed, forgotten and oppressed, in pain and attacked, nonetheless he trusts and hopes in the Lord his Rock. In the midst of all these negatives, he experiences God’s love (v. 8).

At Christmas, we celebrate Jesus as the only true joy and hope of the downcast. Without Him, we would be doomed to spiritual death with no hope of rescue. Like the psalmist, we, too, thirst for Him, hope in Him, and take our stand on Christ our Rock!

**Apply the Word**

Are you feeling downcast today? The psalms are a comfort to those who are struggling as they put into words our emotions, bringing them to God. Pray through the psalms during this season and know that the joy of the Lord will give you strength.

### **Pray with Us**

Even in a season of joy we are often laden with fears, hurts, and sorrows. Lord, help us always remember that you are already victorious over evil and pain. You are a limitless source of hope, joy, and strength in every season.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/14/20

# Who You Are

### Today's Devotional **Read:** [**Psalm 8**](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%208) **[**[**a**](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14014a)**]**

#### For the director of music. According to gittith.[[b](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14014b)] A psalm of David.

1Lord, our Lord,  
    how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory  
    in the heavens.  
2Through the praise of children and infants  
    you have established a stronghold against your enemies,  
    to silence the foe and the avenger.  
3When I consider your heavens,  
    the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
    which you have set in place,  
4what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
    human beings that you care for them?[[c](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14017c)]

5You have made them[[d](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14018d)] a little lower than the angels[[e](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14018e)]  
    and crowned them[[f](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14018f)] with glory and honor.  
6You made them rulers over the works of your hands;  
    you put everything under their[[g](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14019g)] feet:  
7all flocks and herds,  
    and the animals of the wild,  
8the birds in the sky,  
    and the fish in the sea,  
    all that swim the paths of the seas.

9Lord, our Lord,  
    how majestic is your name in all the earth!

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Psalm 8:1](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#en-NIV-14014) In Hebrew texts 8:1-9 is numbered 8:2-10.
2. [Psalm 8:1](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#en-NIV-14014) Title: Probably a musical term
3. [Psalm 8:4](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#en-NIV-14017) Or what is a human being that you are mindful of him, / a son of man that you care for him?
4. [Psalm 8:5](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#en-NIV-14018) Or him
5. [Psalm 8:5](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#en-NIV-14018) Or than God
6. [Psalm 8:5](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#en-NIV-14018) Or him
7. [Psalm 8:6](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV#en-NIV-14019) Or made him ruler . . . ; / . . . his

What is mankind that you are mindful of them? [Psalm 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%208.4)

His name is Dnyan, and he considers himself a student of the world. And “this is a very big school,” he says of all the cities and towns he’s passed through. He began a four-year journey on his bicycle in 2016 to meet and learn from people. When there’s a language barrier, he finds that sometimes people can understand just by looking at each other. He also depends on a translation app on his phone to communicate. He doesn’t measure his journey in the miles he’s traveled or the sights he’s seen. Instead, he measures it in the people who’ve left an imprint on his heart: “Maybe I do not know your language, but I would like to find out who you are.”

It’s a very big world, yet God knows everything about it and the people in it—fully and completely. The psalmist David was in awe of God when he considered all the works of His hands: the making of the heavens, the moon, and the stars ([Psalm 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%208.3)). He wondered, “What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” (v. 4).

God knows you more thoroughly than anyone else possibly can and He cares for you. We can only respond, “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (vv. 1, 9).

By:  [Anne Cetas](https://odb.org/author/annecetas/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

How do you feel knowing that God knows all about you and loves you? What does believing this truth look like in your life today?

Dear God, it’s awesome to realize that You’re all-knowing about Your whole creation. I love You for knowing me personally too.

#### **Insight**

In the opening verse of this beautiful hymn of praise, David declares the greatness of God through His power and glory evident in heaven and earth. In [Psalm 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%208.2) he states, “Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies.” Some Bible versions put it this way: “you have ordained strength” (nkjv); “you have established strength” (esv). Here David considers the power and glory of God displayed through babies and small children. This idea touches on the familiar theme in the Bible that God uses the weak to display His strength and majesty ([1 Corinthians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Cor%201.27)). The remaining verses of [Psalm 8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%208) point to the creation story in [Genesis 1–2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%201%E2%80%932) and the fact that God’s creation of humanity was His crowning achievement.

# God Calling – 12/14/20

# Storms

Our loving Lord, we thank Thee for Thy marvelous keeping power.

There is no miracle so wonderful as the miracle of a soul being kept by My Power. Forces of evil batter and storm, but are powerless. Tempests rage unavailingly.

It is like a cool garden with sweet flowers and bees and butterflies and trees and playing fountains set in the midst of a mighty roaring city. Try to see your lives as that.

Not only as calm and unmoved, but as breathing fragrance, expressing beauty. Expect storms. Know this -- you cannot be united in your great friendship and bond to do My work, and in your great Love for Me, and not excite the envy, hatred, and malice of all whom you meet who are not on My side.

Where does the enemy attack? The fortress, the stronghold, not the desert waste.

"Except the Lord to build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Psalm 127:1