# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/24/19

# The Hidden Life



…your life is hidden with Christ in God. —[Colossians 3:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Colossians+3%3A3)

The Spirit of God testifies to and confirms the simple, but almighty, security of the life that “is hidden with Christ in God.” Paul continually brought this out in his New Testament letters. We talk as if living a sanctified life were the most uncertain and insecure thing we could do. Yet it is the most secure thing possible, because it has Almighty God in and behind it. The most dangerous and unsure thing is to try to live without God. For one who is born again, it is easier to live in a right-standing relationship with God than it is to go wrong, provided we heed God’s warnings and “walk in the light” ([1 John 1:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+1:7)).

When we think of being delivered from sin, being “filled with the Spirit” ([Ephesians 5:18](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+5:18)), and “walk[ing] in the light,” we picture the peak of a great mountain. We see it as very high and wonderful, but we say, “Oh, I could never live up there!” However, when we do get there through God’s grace, we find it is not a mountain peak at all, but a plateau with plenty of room to live and to grow. “You enlarged my path under me, so my feet did not slip” ([Psalm 18:36](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+18:36)).

When you really see Jesus, I defy you to doubt Him. If you see Him when He says, “Let not your heart be troubled…” ([John 14:27](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14:27)), I defy you to worry. It is virtually impossible to doubt when He is there. Every time you are in personal contact with Jesus, His words are real to you. “My peace I give to you…” ([John 14:27](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14:27))— a peace which brings an unconstrained confidence and covers you completely, from the top of your head to the soles of your feet. “…your life is hidden with Christ in God,” and the peace of Jesus Christ that cannot be disturbed has been imparted to you.

**WISDOM FROM OSWALD CHAMBERS**

We can understand the attributes of God in other ways, but we can only understand the Father’s heart in the Cross of Christ.

The Highest Good—Thy Great Redemption, 558 L

# CCEL – 12/24/19

**If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.**—[ROM. 8:13.](http://www.ccel.org/study/Romans_8:13)

Now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these; adultery, fornication and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.

[Gal. 5:19](http://www.ccel.org/study/Galatians_5:19),[21-25](http://www.ccel.org/study/Galatians_5:21-25).[Tit. 2:11-14](http://www.ccel.org/study/Titus_2:11-14).

“For your sakes he became poor.” [2 Corinthians 8:9](http://www.ccel.org/study/2_Corinthians%208:9)

The Lord Jesus Christ was eternally rich, glorious, and exalted; but “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.” As the rich saint cannot be true in his communion with his poor brethren unless of his substance he ministers to their necessities, so (the same rule holding with the head as between the members), it is impossible that our Divine Lord could have had fellowship with us unless he had imparted to us of his own abounding wealth, and had become poor to make us rich. Had he remained upon his throne of glory, and had we continued in the ruins of the fall without receiving his salvation, communion would have been impossible on both sides. Our position by the fall, apart from the covenant of grace, made it as impossible for fallen man to communicate with God as it is for Belial to be in concord with Christ. In order, therefore, that communion might be compassed, it was necessary that the rich kinsman should bestow his estate upon his poor relatives, that the righteous Saviour should give to his sinning brethren of his own perfection, and that we, the poor and guilty, should receive of his fulness grace for grace; that thus in giving and receiving, the One might descend from the heights, and the other ascend from the depths, and so be able to embrace each other in true and hearty fellowship. Poverty must be enriched by him in whom are infinite treasures before it can venture to commune; and guilt must lose itself in imputed and imparted righteousness ere the soul can walk in fellowship with purity. Jesus must clothe his people in his own garments, or he cannot admit them into his palace of glory; and he must wash them in his own blood, or else they will be too defiled for the embrace of his fellowship.

O believer, herein is love! For your sake the Lord Jesus “became poor” that he might lift you up into communion with himself.

# Word Live – 12/24/19

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

# Scripture Union – 12/24/19

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

# Today in the Word – 12/24/19

# Our Savior from Sin

**Read:** [**Matthew 1:18–25**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325)

### **Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son**

18This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325#fen-NIV-23163a)]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325#fen-NIV-23164b)] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325" \l "fen-NIV-23166c" \o "See footnote c)] because he will save his people from their sins.”

22All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325" \l "fen-NIV-23168d" \o "See footnote d)] (which means “God with us”).

24When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Matthew 1:18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325#en-NIV-23163) Or The origin of Jesus the Messiah was like this
2. [Matthew 1:19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325#en-NIV-23164) Or was a righteous man and
3. [Matthew 1:21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325#en-NIV-23166) Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means the Lord saves.
4. [Matthew 1:23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3a18%e2%80%9325#en-NIV-23168) Isaiah 7:14

In the United States, Christmas involves lots of money. During one recent Christmas, $22.7 billion was spent in retail department stores . . . in December alone! Nearly 50 million Christmas trees were sold, including 27.4 million real ones and 21.1 million fake ones. And, last year, the average American family planned to spend $794 on gifts during Christmas.

You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Matthew 1:21

It is clear that we can easily forget the true reason for the season! Christmas is first and foremost about Jesus. He came, not to usher in a heartwarming holiday, but to save us from our sins (v. 21). In the words of Paul: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

After Gabriel’s announcement to Mary, an angel told Joseph the news in a dream. Joseph was Mary’s fiancé, and her story of a “virgin birth” didn’t sound very believable. Still, Joseph was a good man and didn’t want to embarrass Mary publicly, so he’d decided to divorce her quietly (engagement was a more binding relationship in that culture than in ours).

When the angel confirmed the truth of Mary’s news (v. 20), as did Scripture (vv. 22–23), Joseph had an important choice to make. It wasn’t automatic. He chose to trust his fiancée, trust God, believe in a humanly impossible conception, and prepare for gossip and ridicule from the world.

From this perspective, Joseph’s obedience seems extraordinary (vv. 24–25). He acted as soon as he awoke, without delay. He took a big risk in both his relationship with Mary and his walk with the Lord. By faith, he accepted the impossible as true. He even held off on consummating the marriage so there would be no questions later about the virgin birth of Christ. Last but not least, he obediently named the baby “Jesus.”

### **Apply the Word**

There is no better way for us to begin this Christmas than to thank God for His gift of redemption through His Son. And, if you don’t know Jesus as your personal Savior, why not pray to Him today? As Peter proclaimed: “Salvation is found in no one else” (Acts 4:12). Merry Christmas, and welcome to the family!

### **Pray with Us**

This Christmas Eve, as we begin our Christmas celebration with family and friends, may the Lord give us peace and quietness amid all the busyness, gift-giving, and travel. We pray that we’ll always keep our eyes on Jesus, our Savior from sin.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/24/19

# A Christmas Visitor

 **Read: Luke 2:25–33**

25Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
    you may now dismiss[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A25%E2%80%9333&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25003a)] your servant in peace.  
30For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
31    which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
32a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
    and the glory of your people Israel.”

33The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Luke 2:29](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A25%E2%80%9333&version=NIV#en-NIV-25003) Or promised, / now dismiss

Sovereign Lord, . . . you may now dismiss your servant in peace. Luke 2:29

On Christmas Eve 1944, a man known as “Old Brinker” lay dying in a prison hospital, waiting for the makeshift Christmas service led by fellow prisoners. “When does the music start?” he asked William McDougall, who was imprisoned with him in Muntok Prison in Sumatra. “Soon,” replied McDougall. “Good,” replied the dying man. “Then I’ll be able to compare them with the angels.”

Although decades earlier Brinker had moved away from his faith in God, in his dying days he confessed his sins and found peace with Him. Instead of greeting others with a sour look, he would smile, which “was quite a transformation,” said McDougall.

Brinker died peacefully after the choir of eleven emaciated prisoners sang his request, “Silent Night.” Knowing that Brinker once again followed Jesus and would be united with God in heaven, McDougall observed, “Perhaps Death had been a welcome Christmas visitor to old Brinker.”

How Brinker anticipated his death reminds me of Simeon, a holy man to whom the Holy Spirit revealed that “he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah” (Luke 2:26). When Simeon saw Jesus in the temple, he exclaimed, “You may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation” (vv. 29–30).

As with Brinker, the greatest Christmas gift we can receive or share is that of saving faith in Jesus.

By: [Amy Boucher Pye](https://odb.org/author/amyboucherpye/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

Why do you think McDougall saw death as a welcome visitor for Brinker? How does Jesus bring you joy and change you?

Jesus, thank You for ushering in peace through Your death and resurrection. Help me to share Your gift of salvation with someone I know or meet.

#### **Insight**

Simeon (Greek, Simon) is a common name among the Jews and means “listen” or “he has heard.” Eleven men with this name are mentioned in the New Testament (Matthew 4:18; 10:4; 13:55; 26:6; 27:32; Luke 2:25; Luke 7:40; John 6:71; Acts 8:9; 9:43; 13:1).

Nothing more is known of the Simeon in Luke 2 except what is told in this passage. Simeon, Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth (the parents of John the Baptist; Luke 1:5–7), and Anna (an elderly prophetess; 2:36) constituted the righteous remnant of Jews who were “eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel” (v. 25 nlt). Luke says that “the Holy Spirit was on [Simeon]” (v. 25), a description that’s used of Old Testament prophets speaking for God (Numbers 11:25; 1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 19:20, 23). Since Anna was a prophetess and was in the temple “at that very moment” (Luke 2:36–38), scholars believe that Simeon was also a prophet.

# God Calling – 12/24/19

# He Is Coming

**Our Lord, Thou art here. Let us feel thy nearness.**

Yes! but remember the first Hail must be that of the Magi in the Bethlehem stable. Not as King and Lord in Heavenly triumph must you first hail Me. But as amongst the lowliest, bereft of earth's pomp like the Magi.

So to the humble the worship of humility -- the Bethlehem Babe -- must be the first Hail.

Then the worship of repentance. As earth's sinner, you stand by Me in the Jordan, baptized of John, worshiping Me the Friend and Servant of sinners.

Dwell much on My Life. Step out beside Me. Share it with Me. Humility, Service, Worship, Sacrifice, Sanctification -- Steps in the Christian Life.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." John 1:14

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/25/19

# His Birth and Our New Birth



"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." —[Matthew 1:23](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Matthew+1%3A23)

**His Birth in History**. “…that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God ([Luke 1:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1:35)). Jesus Christ was born into this world, not from it. He did not emerge out of history; He came into history from the outside. Jesus Christ is not the best human being the human race can boast of— He is a Being for whom the human race can take no credit at all. He is not man becoming God, but God Incarnate— God coming into human flesh from outside it. His life is the highest and the holiest entering through the most humble of doors. Our Lord’s birth was an advent— the appearance of God in human form.

**His Birth in Me**. “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you…” ([Galatians 4:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+4:19)). Just as our Lord came into human history from outside it, He must also come into me from outside. Have I allowed my personal human life to become a “Bethlehem” for the Son of God? I cannot enter the realm of the kingdom of God unless I am born again from above by a birth totally unlike physical birth. “You must be born again” ([John 3:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3:7)). This is not a command, but a fact based on the authority of God. The evidence of the new birth is that I yield myself so completely to God that “Christ is formed” in me. And once “Christ is formed” in me, His nature immediately begins to work through me.

**God Evident in the Flesh.** This is what is made so profoundly possible for you and for me through the redemption of man by Jesus Christ.

**WISDOM FROM OSWALD CHAMBERS**

It is an easy thing to argue from precedent because it makes everything simple, but it is a risky thing to do. Give God “elbow room”; let Him come into His universe as He pleases. If we confine God in His working to religious people or to certain ways, we place ourselves on an equality with God.

Baffled to Fight Better, 51 L

# CCEL – 12/25/19

**The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.**—[TIT. 3:4.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Titus.3.html" \l "Titus.3.4)

I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.—The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.—Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.

As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

[Jer. 31:3](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Jer.31.html#Jer.31.3).[I John 4:9,10](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iJohn.4.html" \l "iJohn.4.9).[Gal. 4:4,5](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Gal.4.html" \l "Gal.4.4). -[John 1:14](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.John.1.html" \l "John.1.14). -[I Tim. 3:16](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iTim.3.html" \l "iTim.3.16).[Heb. 2:14](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Heb.2.html" \l "Heb.2.14).

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

### [Isaiah 7:14](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Isa.7.html" \l "Isa.7.14)

Let us today go down to Bethlehem, and in company with wondering shepherds and adoring Magi, let us see him who was born King of the Jews, for we by faith can claim an interest in him, and can sing, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” Jesus is Jehovah incarnate, our Lord and our God, and yet our brother and friend; let us adore and admire. Let us notice at the very first glance his miraculous conception. It was a thing unheard of before, and unparalleled since, that a virgin should conceive and bear a Son. The first promise ran thus, “The seed of the woman,” not the offspring of the man. Since venturous woman led the way in the sin which brought forth Paradise lost, she, and she alone, ushers in the Regainer of Paradise. Our Saviour, although truly man, was as to his human nature the Holy One of God. Let us reverently bow before the holy Child whose innocence restores to manhood its ancient glory; and let us pray that he may be formed in us, the hope of glory. Fail not to note his humble parentage. His mother has been described simply as “a virgin,” not a princess, or prophetess, nor a matron of large estate. True the blood of kings ran in her veins; nor was her mind a weak and untaught one, for she could sing most sweetly a song of praise; but yet how humble her position, how poor the man to whom she stood affianced, and how miserable the accommodation afforded to the new-born King!

Immanuel, God with us in our nature, in our sorrow, in our lifework, in our punishment, in our grave, and now with us, or rather we with him, in resurrection, ascension, triumph, and Second Advent splendour.

# Word Live – 12/25/19

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

# Scripture Union – 12/25/19

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

# Today in the Word – 12/25/19

# Prince of Peace

**Read:** [**Luke 2:1–20**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3a1%e2%80%9320)

### **The Birth of Jesus**

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3a1%e2%80%9320#fen-NIV-24976a)] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to their own town to register.

4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
    and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Luke 2:2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3a1%e2%80%9320#en-NIV-24976) Or This census took place before

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, following the death of his wife and in the midst of the American Civil War. The sixth stanza reads: “And in despair I bowed my head; ‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said; ‘For hate is strong, And mocks the song, Of peace on earth, good-will to men!’” Despite his grief, he clung to hope and faith: “Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: ‘God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The Wrong shall fail, The Right prevail, With peace on earth, good-will to men.’”

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

Jesus was born as our Prince of Peace (v. 14; Isa. 9:6). The word “peace,” or shalom in Hebrew, means well-being, flourishing, and wholeness. Whereas sin had made us enemies of God, Christ made possible peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Sin had broken human relationships, but Christ has made possible peace with others.

Peace is given to “those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). As we know from our month’s study, God’s “favor” or grace rests on those who trust in the name of His Son for salvation. This is the only way to please God. On our own, shalom is unattainable. That’s why Christ came, and that’s why He’ll come again. When He returns, the whole earth will enjoy shalom and worship Him alone (Isa. 9:1–10).

The shepherds modeled the best possible response to this good news (Luke 2:10–11): In faith, they heeded the angels’ message and went to find the baby (vv. 15–16). In faith, they told others about their amazing experience (vv. 17–18). In faith, they gave all the glory to God (v. 20).

### **Apply the Word**

Merry Christmas from all of us at Today in the Word! May the peace of Christ rest upon you. If you are craving a quiet moment, listen to the beautiful hymn, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” Let Christ’s promise of peace fill your heart and your home as you enjoy worshiping Jesus on this day, His birthday.

### **Pray with Us**

As we celebrate the wonder of Christmas today, join us in thanking the Father for sending His Son, our Prince of Peace, and praise Him for His love, care, and guidance in your life. May His peace, shalom, reign in our lives!

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/25/19

# Growing into Giving



**Read: 2 Corinthians 8:1–9**

### **The Collection for the Lord’s People**

8 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. 5And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. 6So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+8%3A1%E2%80%939&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28940a)]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

8I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [2 Corinthians 8:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+8%3A1%E2%80%939&version=NIV#en-NIV-28940) Some manuscripts and in your love for us

Freely you have received; freely give. Matthew 10:8

“I got you a present!” my two-year-old grandson shouted excitedly as he pressed a box into my hands. “He picked it out all by himself,” my wife smiled.

I opened the box to find a Christmas ornament of his favorite cartoon character. “Can I see it?” he asked anxiously. Then he played with “my” present for the rest of the evening, and as I watched him, I smiled.

I smiled because I remembered gifts I had given loved ones in the past, like the music album I gave my older brother one Christmas when I was in high school that I really wanted to listen to (and did). And I realized how years later God was still stretching me and teaching me to give more unselfishly.

Giving is something we grow into. Paul wrote, “But since you excel in everything . . . see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7). Grace fills our giving as we understand that all we have is from God, and He has shown us “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

God generously gave us the most unselfish gift of all: His only Son, who would die on a cross for our sins and be raised to life. Any who receive this ultimate gift are rich beyond measure. As our hearts are focused on Him, our hands open in love to others.

By: [James Banks](https://odb.org/author/jamesbanks/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

In what ways do you need to grow in giving? What could you do today?

Thank You, Father, for giving me the best gift of all: Your Son!  Help me to share Your generosity with others today.

#### **Insight**

Paul motivates the Corinthian church by citing the inspiring example of the Macedonians. He’s also asking for a generosity that will demonstrate unity between churches. Division between the Jewish and gentile believers in Jesus plagued the early church. By giving to the church in Jerusalem, gentile disciples of Christ in Corinth and Macedonia would be contributing to a Jewish congregation, sending an implicit message of love and acceptance. Paul further notes how the Macedonian believers faced severe trials, yet gave out of “overflowing joy” and “extreme poverty” (2 Corinthians 8:2–3). This joy is a natural response to “the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches” (v. 1). Our circumstances don’t destroy our ability to give, and they can’t steal the joy that flows out of the grace God gives us.

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

# God Calling – 12/25/19

# Babe of Bethlehem

Kneel before the Babe of Bethlehem. Accept the truth that the Kingdom of Heaven is for the lowly, the simple.

Bring to Me, the Christ-child, your gifts, truly the gifts of earth's wisest.

The Gold -- your money.

Frankincense -- the adoration of a consecrated life.

Myrrh -- your sharing in My sorrows and those of the world.

"And they presented unto Him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh."

"Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off." Psalm 138:6

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/26/19

# “Walk in the Light”



If we walk in the light as He is in the light…the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. —[1 John 1:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=1+John+1%3A7)

To mistake freedom from sin only on the conscious level of our lives for complete deliverance from sin by the atonement through the Cross of Christ is a great error. No one fully knows what sin is until he is born again. Sin is what Jesus Christ faced at Calvary. The evidence that I have been delivered from sin is that I know the real nature of sin in me. For a person to really know what sin is requires the full work and deep touch of the atonement of Jesus Christ, that is, the imparting of His absolute perfection.

The Holy Spirit applies or administers the work of the atonement to us in the deep unconscious realm as well as in the conscious realm. And it is not until we truly perceive the unrivaled power of the Spirit in us that we understand the meaning of [1 John 1:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+1:7) , which says, “…the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” This verse does not refer only to conscious sin, but also to the tremendously profound understanding of sin which only the Holy Spirit in me can accomplish.

I must “walk in the light as He is in the light…”— not in the light of my own conscience, but in God’s light. If I will walk there, with nothing held back or hidden, then this amazing truth is revealed to me: “…the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses [me] from all sin” so that God Almighty can see nothing to rebuke in me. On the conscious level it produces a keen, sorrowful knowledge of what sin really is. The love of God working in me causes me to hate, with the Holy Spirit’s hatred for sin, anything that is not in keeping with God’s holiness. To “walk in the light” means that everything that is of the darkness actually drives me closer to the center of the light.

**WISDOM FROM OSWALD CHAMBERS**

The great word of Jesus to His disciples is Abandon. When God has brought us into the relationship of disciples, we have to venture on His word; trust entirely to Him and watch that when He brings us to the venture, we take it.

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

# CCEL – 12/26/19

**Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.**—[I COR. 15:58.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iCor.15.html" \l "iCor.15.58)

Ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.—As ye have . . . 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.—He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.—That on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

By faith ye stand.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

[I Cor. 15:58](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iCor.15.html#iCor.15.58). -[Col. 2:6,7](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Col.2.html" \l "Col.2.6). -[Matt. 24:13](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Matt.24.html" \l "Matt.24.13). -[Luke 8:15](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Luke.8.html" \l "Luke.8.15).[II Cor. 1:24](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiCor.1.html" \l "iiCor.1.24).[John 9:4](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.John.9.html" \l "John.9.4).[Gal. 6:8-10](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Gal.6.html" \l "Gal.6.8).

“The last Adam.” [1 Corinthians 15:45](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iCor.15.html" \l "iCor.15.45)

Jesus is the federal head of his elect. As in Adam, every heir of flesh and blood has a personal interest, because he is the covenant head and representative of the race as considered under the law of works; so under the law of grace, every redeemed soul is one with the Lord from heaven, since he is the Second Adam, the Sponsor and Substitute of the elect in the new covenant of love. The apostle Paul declares that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchizedek met him: it is a certain truth that the believer was in the loins of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, when in old eternity the covenant settlements of grace were decreed, ratified, and made sure forever. Thus, whatever Christ hath done, he hath wrought for the whole body of his Church. We were crucified in him and buried with him (read [Col. 2:10-13](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Col.2.html" \l "Col.2.10)), and to make it still more wonderful, we are risen with him and even ascended with him to the seats on high ([Eph. 2:6](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.2.html" \l "Eph.2.6)). It is thus that the Church has fulfilled the law, and is “accepted in the beloved.” It is thus that she is regarded with complacency by the just Jehovah, for he views her in Jesus, and does not look upon her as separate from her covenant head. As the Anointed Redeemer of Israel, Christ Jesus has nothing distinct from his Church, but all that he has he holds for her. Adam’s righteousness was ours so long as he maintained it, and his sin was ours the moment that he committed it; and in the same manner, all that the Second Adam is or does, is ours as well as his, seeing that he is our representative. Here is the foundation of the covenant of grace. This gracious system of representation and substitution, which moved Justin Martyr to cry out, “O blessed change, O sweet permutation!” this is the very groundwork of the gospel of our salvation, and is to be received with strong faith and rapturous joy.

# Word Live – 12/26/19

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

# Scripture Union – 12/26/19

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

# Today in the Word – 12/26/19

# The Messiah

**Read:** [**Matthew 2:1–12**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3a1%e2%80%9312)

### **The Magi Visit the Messiah**

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3a1%e2%80%9312#fen-NIV-23171a)] from the east came to Jerusalem 2and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
    are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
    who will shepherd my people Israel.’[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3a1%e2%80%9312#fen-NIV-23176b)]”

7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Matthew 2:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3a1%e2%80%9312#en-NIV-23171) Traditionally wise men
2. [Matthew 2:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3a1%e2%80%9312#en-NIV-23176) Micah 5:2,4

Did you ever think about the parallels between the biblical story of Ruth and Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth? In Small Faith, Great God, one Bible scholar notes: “The city of David, which Ruth and Naomi reached without hope except in God, became the birthplace of the Son of God in whom all the nations would hope. That is why the kings of the world came, at Epiphany, to the city of David—to pay homage to great David’s greater Son. In doing so, they followed Ruth exactly, in coming as foreigners to acknowledge Israel’s God, Naomi’s God, as the one who is sovereign over all human affairs.”

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. Matthew 2:2

Jesus the Messiah came as part of God’s plan for Israel and for the world (Luke 2:6; Acts 2:36). The Gentile magi, upon their unexpected and very public arrival in Jerusalem, asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” (Luke 2:2). Herod was disturbed (v. 3), because to him the coming Messiah-King represented a potential change in the political status quo. He liked the status quo, in which he held a decent amount of power.

Resident Bible scholars knew, based on a prophecy of Micah, the birthplace of the Messiah—Bethlehem, the city of David, about six miles south of Jerusalem (vv. 5–6). The magi went there and were led by the star straight to the house with the child Jesus (vv. 9–11). “Overjoyed” at the fulfillment of their quest, “they bowed down and worshiped him” (vv. 10, 11). They also presented Him gifts worthy of a king.

Herod lied to the magi, but God warned them of his deception so they could return home another way (v. 12). How did they know the one true God and the prophecy of a Messiah? Only God knows that full story!

### **Apply the Word**

There’s no better time than Christmas to learn more about Jesus! Earlier this year, The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy was released, edited by Michael Rydelnik (who is an author in our Q&A section) and Edwin Blum. If you enjoy learning about biblical prophecy, you may want to add this book to your personal library.

### **Pray with Us**

We praise Christ today as the Messiah of Israel, the one whom the prophets of the Old Testament were waiting for. And now, as people living on this side of the Cross, we pray we live the lives worthy of our Messiah, in anticipation of His Second Coming.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/26/19

# The Big Shuffle

** Read: Ephesians 2:4–10**

4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8

In The Call of Service, author Robert Coles, exploring our reasons for serving, tells the moving story of an older woman’s service to others. As a bus driver, she showed great care toward the children she drove to school each day—quizzing them on homework and celebrating their successes. “I want to see these kids make it in life,” she said of her motivation. But there was another reason too.

As a youth, the words of an aunt had shaken this woman to the core. “She’d tell us that we had to do something God would notice,” she told Coles, “or else we’d get lost in the big shuffle!” Worried at the prospect of hell after the “big shuffle” of judgment, this woman had devised ways to “get God’s attention”—going to church so “He’d see me being loyal” and working hard to serve others so God might “hear from others what I was doing.”

I grieved reading her words. How had this dear woman never known that she already had God’s attention? (Matthew 10:30). How had she not heard that Jesus took care of the big shuffle for us, offering freedom from judgment forever? (Romans 8:1). How had she missed that salvation can’t be bought with good deeds but is a gift to anyone who believes? (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Christ’s life, death, and resurrection take care of our future with God and set us free to serve others with joy.

By: [Sheridan Voysey](https://odb.org/author/svoysey/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

Why is it easy to mistakenly believe you must do good things to be accepted by God? How does understanding the gospel help you to love others better?

God, help me to trust that You’ve done what’s needed for me to be accepted by You.

#### **Insight**

Around ad 60 or 61 Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians to the church in Ephesus—whom he loved dearly—after spending three years with them (Acts 20:17–31). He’d longed to make a friendly visit to them, but instead was imprisoned in Rome in “his own rented house” (28:30). Yet in that enforced confinement, Paul was free to have visitors and to write and preach. In fact, there “he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (v. 31). While Paul awaited trial before Caesar, he wrote his letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians.

By: [**Alyson Kieda**](https://odb.org/author/akieda/)

# God Calling – 12/26/19

# Health and Wealth

Be not afraid, health and wealth are coming to you both. My wealth which is sufficiency for your needs, and for My work you long to do.

Money, as some call wealth, to hoard, to display, you know is not for My Disciples.

Journey through this world simply seeking the means to do My Will and work. Never keep anything you are not using. Remember all I give you will be Mine, only given to you to use. Could you think of Me hoarding My Treasures? You must never do it. Rely on Me.

To store for the future is to fear and to doubt me. Check every doubt of Me at once. Live in the Joy of My constant Presence. Yield every moment to Me. Perform every task, however humble, as at My gentle bidding, and for Me, for love of Me. So live, so love, so work.

You are the Apostles of the Little Services.

"Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set your heart upon them." Psalm 62:10

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/27/19

# Where the Battle is Won or Lost

# Where the Battle is Won or Lost

"If you will return, O Israel," says the Lord… —[Jeremiah 4:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Jeremiah+4%3A1)

Our battles are first won or lost in the secret places of our will in God’s presence, never in full view of the world. The Spirit of God seizes me and I am compelled to get alone with God and fight the battle before Him. Until I do this, I will lose every time. The battle may take one minute or one year, but that will depend on me, not God. However long it takes, I must wrestle with it alone before God, and I must resolve to go through the hell of renunciation or rejection before Him. Nothing has any power over someone who has fought the battle before God and won there.

I should never say, “I will wait until I get into difficult circumstances and then I’ll put God to the test.” Trying to do that will not work. I must first get the issue settled between God and myself in the secret places of my soul, where no one else can interfere. Then I can go ahead, knowing with certainty that the battle is won. Lose it there, and calamity, disaster, and defeat before the world are as sure as the laws of God. The reason the battle is lost is that I fight it first in the external world. Get alone with God, do battle before Him, and settle the matter once and for all.

In dealing with other people, our stance should always be to drive them toward making a decision of their will. That is how surrendering to God begins. Not often, but every once in a while, God brings us to a major turning point— a great crossroads in our life. From that point we either go toward a more and more slow, lazy, and useless Christian life, or we become more and more on fire, giving our utmost for His highest— our best for His glory.

**WISDOM FROM OSWALD CHAMBERS**

Re-state to yourself what you believe, then do away with as much of it as possible, and get back to the bedrock of the Cross of Christ.

My Utmost for His Highest, November 25, 848 R

# CCEL – 12/27/19

**We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.**—[II COR. 4:18.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiCor.4.html" \l "iiCor.4.18)

Here have we no continuing city.—Ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.—There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.

We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.—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: for the former things are passed away.

The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.—Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

[Heb. 13:14](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Heb.13.html" \l "Heb.13.14). -[Heb. 10:34](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Heb.10.html" \l "Heb.10.34).[Luke 12:32](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Luke.12.html" \l "Luke.12.32).[I Pet. 1:6](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iPet.1.html" \l "iPet.1.6). -[Job 3:17](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Job.3.html#Job.3.17).[II Cor. 5:4](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiCor.5.html" \l "iiCor.5.4). -[Rev. 21:4](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rev.21.html#Rev.21.4).[Rom. 8:18](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.8.html" \l "Rom.8.18). -[II Cor. 4:17](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiCor.4.html" \l "iiCor.4.17).

“Can the rush grow up without mire?” **[Job 8:11](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Job.8.html" \l "Job.8.11)**

The rush is spongy and hollow, and even so is a hypocrite; there is no substance or stability in him. It is shaken to and fro in every wind just as formalists yield to every influence; for this reason the rush is not broken by the tempest, neither are hypocrites troubled with persecution. I would not willingly be a deceiver or be deceived; perhaps the text for this day may help me to try myself whether I be a hypocrite or no. The rush by nature lives in water, and owes its very existence to the mire and moisture wherein it has taken root; let the mire become dry, and the rush withers very quickly. Its greenness is absolutely dependent upon circumstances, a present abundance of water makes it flourish, and a drought destroys it at once. Is this my case? Do I only serve God when I am in good company, or when religion is profitable and respectable? Do I love the Lord only when temporal comforts are received from his hands? If so I am a base hypocrite, and like the withering rush, I shall perish when death deprives me of outward joys. But can I honestly assert that when bodily comforts have been few, and my surroundings have been rather adverse to grace than at all helpful to it, I have still held fast my integrity? Then have I hope that there is genuine vital godliness in me. The rush cannot grow without mire, but plants of the Lord’s right hand planting can and do flourish even in the year of drought. A godly man often grows best when his worldly circumstances decay. He who follows Christ for his bag is a Judas; they who follow for loaves and fishes are children of the devil; but they who attend him out of love to himself are his own beloved ones. Lord, let me find my life in thee, and not in the mire of this world’s favour or gain.

# Word Live – 12/27/19

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# Scripture Union – 12/27/19

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# Today in the Word – 12/27/19

# Bridegroom of the Church

**Read:** [**Matthew 25:1–13**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25%3a1%e2%80%9313)

### **The Parable of the Ten Virgins**

25 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

7“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

9“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

10“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

12“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

13“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Weddings today are usually a grand event, many costing thousands of dollars. Prospective brides spend months, even years, preparing for the big day: reserving a church and a banquet hall, finding the perfect dress, ordering flowers, even creating websites to track their preparations. Often, the couple will send out a save-the-date card, inviting their friends and families to anticipate their marriage with them. Christ’s Second Coming will be the Wedding Day of the church! Today begins the final section of our study, focusing on Christ’s return and eschatology (the study of the “last things”).

The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Revelation 19:7

Since the church is the bride, then Christ is her Bridegroom. God and Israel were often described this way in the Old Testament, with God as the faithful husband and Israel as a promiscuous wife (see Jer. 3:1–3). We’re living in what could be called the “engagement” period. John the Baptist understood this, as he framed his ministry as being the “best man” (John 3:29). We’re to prepare ourselves for the Wedding Day by doing the righteous acts God gives us an opportunity to do, pictured in Revelation as fine linen to wear (Eph. 2:10; Rev. 19:7–9).

When will the big day come? We don’t know (Matt. 25:13), but Jesus charged us to be ready. In this parable, the five wise virgins brought enough oil for their lamps, but five foolish ones did not (vv. 2–4). When the bridegroom arrived, the call came: “Come out to meet him!” (v. 6). The foolish were unprepared. What were the consequences? Only the first five were allowed to enter the wedding feast with the bridegroom. The lesson? “Keep watch,” meaning that through obedience we should keep ourselves in a state of spiritual readiness “because you do not know the day or the hour” (v. 13). There is no save-the-date card for our Lord’s return!

### **Apply the Word**

If you have been married, take a moment to remember how you felt in the days leading up to your wedding. Spend a bit of time reminiscing—recalling the emotions of that day. Then consider the final wedding day in your future, when we will be reunited with Christ, face to face. What a wonderful day that will be!

### **Pray with Us**

Lord Jesus, we ask you to guide us and teach us how to be always ready for your return. In our reading today it says, “You do not know the day or the hour,” so show us how to keep enough “oil” in our lamps to be ready for the wedding of the Lamb.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/27/19

# Led by His Word

 **Read: Psalm 119:1[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+119%3A1+%2C+133%E2%80%93136&version=NIV#fen-NIV-15900a)**]**

#### א Aleph

1Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,  
    who walk according to the law of the Lord.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Psalm 119:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+119%3A1+%2C+133%E2%80%93136&version=NIV#en-NIV-15900) This psalm is an acrostic poem, the stanzas of which begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet; moreover, the verses of each stanza begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

**Read: Psalm 119:133–136**

133Direct my footsteps according to your word;  
    let no sin rule over me.  
134Redeem me from human oppression,  
    that I may obey your precepts.  
135Make your face shine on your servant  
    and teach me your decrees.  
136Streams of tears flow from my eyes,  
    for your law is not obeyed.

Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me. Psalm 119:133

At the BBC in London, Paul Arnold’s first broadcasting job was making “walking sounds” in radio dramas. While actors read from scripts during a walking scene, Paul as stage manager made corresponding sounds with his feet—careful to match his pace to the actor’s voice and spoken lines. The key challenge, he explained, was yielding to the actor in the story, “so the two of us were working together.”

A divine version of such cooperation was sought by the author of Psalm 119, which emphasizes living by the precepts of God’s Word. As Psalm 119:1 says, “Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.” Led this way by God and following His instructions, we can remain pure (v. 9), overcome scorn (v. 22), and escape greed (v. 36). He will enable us to resist sin (v. 61), find godly friends (v. 63), and live in joy (v. 111).

Theologian Charles Bridges commented on verse 133: “When I take therefore a step into the world, let me ask—Is it ordered in God’s word, which exhibits Christ as my perfect example?”

Walking this way, we show the world Jesus. May He help us walk so closely with Him that people glimpse in us our Leader, Friend, and Savior!

By: [Patricia Raybon](https://odb.org/author/patriciaraybon/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

How closely do you walk with God? Finding your answer in Psalm 119, identify one key step you can make to follow God more closely. What benefit can you gain?

Dear God, order my steps in the wisdom found in Scripture today, helping me to walk like You.

#### **Insight**

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm and chapter in the Bible; its 176 verses speak of the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures. The author isn’t named. One rabbinic tradition says Ezra penned it, whose devotion for Scripture is well-attested (Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 8:1–9). But most scholars say David composed the psalm because it sounds Davidic in tone and expression, and reflects his own experience. Oppressed and persecuted by many powerful enemies, the psalmist writes of the encouragement and strength he received from trusting and meditating on the Scriptures (vv. 11, 15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148). Acknowledging the Scriptures have protected and preserved his life, the writer commits himself to obeying them (v. 129).

# God Calling – 12/27/19

# Glorious Work

I have stripped you of much, that it should be truly a life of well-being. Build up stone by stone upon a firm foundation, and that Rock is your Master -- that Rock is Christ.

A life of discipline and a joyous fulfillment is to be yours . . . . Never lose sight of the glorious work to which you have been called.

Let no riches, no ease entice you from the path of miracle-working with Me upon which your feet are set. Love and Laugh. Trust and pray. Ride on now in a loving humility to victory.

"Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death." Proverbs 11:4

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/28/19

# Continuous Conversion



…unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. —[Matthew 18:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Matthew+18%3A3)

These words of our Lord refer to our initial conversion, but we should continue to turn to God as children, being continuously converted every day of our lives. If we trust in our own abilities, instead of God’s, we produce consequences for which God will hold us responsible. When God through His sovereignty brings us into new situations, we should immediately make sure that our natural life submits to the spiritual, obeying the orders of the Spirit of God. Just because we have responded properly in the past is no guarantee that we will do so again. The response of the natural to the spiritual should be continuous conversion, but this is where we so often refuse to be obedient. No matter what our situation is, the Spirit of God remains unchanged and His salvation unaltered. But we must “put on the new man…” ([Ephesians 4:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+4:24)). God holds us accountable every time we refuse to convert ourselves, and He sees our refusal as willful disobedience. Our natural life must not rule— God must rule in us.

To refuse to be continuously converted puts a stumbling block in the growth of our spiritual life. There are areas of self-will in our lives where our pride pours contempt on the throne of God and says, “I won’t submit.” We deify our independence and self-will and call them by the wrong name. What God sees as stubborn weakness, we call strength. There are whole areas of our lives that have not yet been brought into submission, and this can only be done by this continuous conversion. Slowly but surely we can claim the whole territory for the Spirit of God.

**WISDOM FROM OSWALD CHAMBERS**

The message of the prophets is that although they have forsaken God, it has not altered God. The Apostle Paul emphasizes the same truth, that God remains God even when we are unfaithful (see 2 Timothy 2:13). Never interpret God as changing with our changes. He never does; there is no variableness in Him.

Notes on Ezekiel, 1477 L

# CCEL – 12/28/19

**Thy sins be forgiven thee.**—[MARK 2:5.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Mark.2.html" \l "Mark.2.5)

I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.—Who can forgive sins but God only?

I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.—Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lordimputeth not iniquity.—Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?

God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.—The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.—Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

[Jer. 31:34](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Jer.31.html" \l "Jer.31.34). -[Mark 2.7](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Mark.2.html" \l "Mark.2.7).[Isa. 43:25](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Isa.43.html" \l "Isa.43.25). -[Psa. 32:1,2](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Ps.32.html" \l "Ps.32.1). -[Mic. 7:18](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Mic.7.html" \l "Mic.7.18).[Eph. 4:32](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.4.html" \l "Eph.4.32). -[I John 1:7-9](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iJohn.1.html" \l "iJohn.1.7).[Psa. 103:12](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Ps.103.html" \l "Ps.103.12). -[Rom. 6:14](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.6.html" \l "Rom.6.14),[18](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.6.html" \l "Rom.6.18).

“The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

### **[Galatians 2:20](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Gal.2.html" \l "Gal.2.20)**

When the Lord in mercy passed by and saw us in our blood, he first of all said, “Live;” and this he did first, because life is one of the absolutely essential things in spiritual matters, and until it be bestowed we are incapable of partaking in the things of the kingdom. Now the life which grace confers upon the saints at the moment of their quickening is none other than the life of Christ, which, like the sap from the stem, runs into us, the branches, and establishes a living connection between our souls and Jesus. Faith is the grace which perceives this union, having proceeded from it as its firstfruit. It is the neck which joins the body of the Church to its all-glorious Head.

“Oh Faith! thou bond of union with the Lord,

Is not this office thine? and thy fit name,

In the economy of gospel types,

And symbols apposite—the Church’s neck;

Identifying her in will and work

With him ascended?”

Faith lays hold upon the Lord Jesus with a firm and determined grasp. She knows his excellence and worth, and no temptation can induce her to repose her trust elsewhere; and Christ Jesus is so delighted with this heavenly grace, that he never ceases to strengthen and sustain her by the loving embrace and all-sufficient support of his eternal arms. Here, then, is established a living, sensible, and delightful union which casts forth streams of love, confidence, sympathy, complacency, and joy, whereof both the bride and bridegroom love to drink. When the soul can evidently perceive this oneness between itself and Christ, the pulse may be felt as beating for both, and the one blood as flowing through the veins of each. Then is the heart as near heaven as it can be on earth, and is prepared for the enjoyment of the most sublime and spiritual kind of fellowship.

# Word Live – 12/28/19

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

# Scripture Union – 12/28/19

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

# Today in the Word – 12/28/19

# Lord of Glory

**Read:** [**1 Corinthians 2:6–13**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+2%3a6%e2%80%9313)

### **God’s Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit**

6We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen,  
    what no ear has heard,  
and what no human mind has conceived”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+2%3a6%e2%80%9313#fen-NIV-28404a)]—  
    the things God has prepared for those who love him—

10these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+2%3a6%e2%80%9313" \l "fen-NIV-28408b" \o "See footnote b)]

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [1 Corinthians 2:9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+2%3a6%e2%80%9313#en-NIV-28404) Isaiah 64:4
2. [1 Corinthians 2:13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+2%3a6%e2%80%9313#en-NIV-28408) Or Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual

When we say something is “glorious” we mean it is spectacular, amazingly beautiful, almost defying description. The English word “glory” has its origin in the French gloire (c. 1200) meaning “the splendor of God or Christ.” It refers to the honor we give a person of great renown or fame. Jesus is the Lord of Glory, both kingly and divine (Ps. 24:7–10). The Hebrew word for glory refers to brightness, splendor, magnificence, or majesty. What a stark contrast to His death on the cross!

Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty. Psalm 24:8

Paul says the gospel is a mystery that was previously hidden (v. 7). Why? Because if the powers of evil, both human and supernatural, had understood God’s plan, “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (v. 8). Since by Him we are saved, we, too, are part of this mystery. The resurrected Christ proved to be truly God. And one day the entire “earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Hab. 2:14).

You and I were destined to share Christ’s glory from eternity past (1 Cor. 2:7; Rom. 8:17; 2 Thess. 2:14). The blessings of salvation are such that no one has ever seen anything like them and no imagination can reach the heights of what “God has prepared for those who love him” (v. 9). Our eternal future is certainly glorious!

The Spirit of God has revealed what was previously hidden and inconceivable: God sent His own Son to become a man, die for the sins of the world, bring in the Gentiles, and make eternal life possible for all who believe (vv. 10–12). We have seen this glory! By this same Spirit, we’re empowered to preach the wisdom of the gospel to a foolish world (vv. 6, 13; 1 Cor. 1:20–25).

### **Apply the Word**

Is your list growing? What new things have you learned about Christ this month? Take time to review your list and highlight one or two truths that stand out for you. How has learning more about Jesus changed the way you will live for Him? And, as you reflect on today’s reading, add this note to your list: His glory, not mine!

### **Pray with Us**

We thank our glorious Lord today for laying aside His heavenly glory to become a servant, for clothing Himself in complete humility. And our prayer is that He will teach us to turn away from pride, jealousy, and vain ambition and make us ready to serve one another.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/28/19

# Never Forgotten



**Read: Isaiah 49:8–16**

### **Restoration of Israel**

8This is what the Lord says:

“In the time of my favor I will answer you,  
    and in the day of salvation I will help you;  
I will keep you and will make you  
    to be a covenant for the people,  
to restore the land  
    and to reassign its desolate inheritances,  
9to say to the captives, ‘Come out,’  
    and to those in darkness, ‘Be free!’

“They will feed beside the roads  
    and find pasture on every barren hill.  
10They will neither hunger nor thirst,  
    nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them.  
He who has compassion on them will guide them  
    and lead them beside springs of water.  
11I will turn all my mountains into roads,  
    and my highways will be raised up.  
12See, they will come from afar—  
    some from the north, some from the west,  
    some from the region of Aswan.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+49%3A8%E2%80%9316&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-18649a" \o "See footnote a)]”

13Shout for joy, you heavens;  
    rejoice, you earth;  
    burst into song, you mountains!  
For the Lord comforts his people  
    and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

14But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me,  
    the Lord has forgotten me.”

15“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
    and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget,  
    I will not forget you!  
16See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;  
    your walls are ever before me.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [Isaiah 49:12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+49%3A8%E2%80%9316&version=NIV#en-NIV-18649) Dead Sea Scrolls; Masoretic Text Sinim

I will not forget you! Isaiah 49:15

Egged on by my children to prove I’d endured years mastering the basics of piano, I sat down and started playing the C Major scale. Having played very little piano in nearly two decades, I was surprised I remembered! Feeling brave, I proceeded to play seven different scales by heart one right after the other. I was shocked! Years of practicing had imprinted the notes and technique so deeply in my fingers’ “memory” that they instantly knew what to do.

There are some things that can never be forgotten. But God’s love for His children is far more deeply imprinted than any of our fading memories—in fact, God can’t forget them. This is what the Israelites needed to hear when the exile left them feeling abandoned by Him (Isaiah 49:14). His response through Isaiah was unequivocal: “I will not forget you!” (v. 15). God’s promise to care for His people was more certain than a mother’s love for her child.

To assure them of His unchanging love, He gave them a picture of His commitment: “See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands” (v. 16). It’s a beautiful image of God’s constant awareness of His children; their names and faces always before Him.

Still today, we can easily feel overlooked and forgotten. How comforting to remember that we’re “etched” on God’s hands—always remembered, cared for, and loved by our Father.

By: [Lisa M. Samra](https://odb.org/author/lisasamra/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

When have you felt forgotten or abandoned? In what ways has God always been present with you to remind you of His constant love?

Jesus, thank You that I’m never forgotten by You. When I feel abandoned by others, help me to remember and rest in Your never-ending, constant love.

#### **Insight**

The book of Isaiah is one of the Major Prophets of the Old Testament, categorized as such because of its length. It’s sometimes referred to as a “miniature Bible” because it has sixty-six chapters divided into two major divisions of thirty-nine and twenty-seven chapters. The Bible contains sixty-six books and is divided into the Old Testament with thirty-nine books and the New Testament with twenty-seven books. Isaiah is the Old Testament book referenced most often in the New Testament, apart from the Psalms.

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

# God Calling – 12/28/19

# Signs and Feelings

**Our Lord, Thou art here. Let us feel Thy nearness.**

I am here. Do not need feeling too much. To ask for feeling too much is to ask for a sign, and then the answer is the same as that I gave when on earth. "There shall no sign be given but the sign of the prophet Jonah. . . . For as Jonah was three days and three nights . . . so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Veiled from sight to the unbeliever. To the believer the veiling is only temporary, to be followed by a glorious Resurrection. . . .

What does it matter what you feel? What matters is what I am, was, and ever shall be to you -- A Risen Lord. . . . the feeling that I am with you may depend upon any passing mood of yours -- upon a change of circumstances, upon a mere trifle.

I am uninfluenced by circumstances. . . . My Promise given is kept. I am here, one with you in tender loving friendship.

"Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth." Psalm 119:151

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/29/19

# Deserter or Disciple?



From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. —[John 6:66](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=John+6%3A66)

When God, by His Spirit through His Word, gives you a clear vision of His will, you must “walk in the light” of that vision ([1 John 1:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+1:7)). Even though your mind and soul may be thrilled by it, if you don’t “walk in the light” of it you will sink to a level of bondage never envisioned by our Lord. Mentally disobeying the “heavenly vision” ([Acts 26:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+26:19)) will make you a slave to ideas and views that are completely foreign to Jesus Christ. Don’t look at someone else and say, “Well, if he can have those views and prosper, why can’t I?” You have to “walk in the light” of the vision that has been given to you. Don’t compare yourself with others or judge them— that is between God and them. When you find that one of your favorite and strongly held views clashes with the “heavenly vision,” do not begin to debate it. If you do, a sense of property and personal right will emerge in you— things on which Jesus placed no value. He was against these things as being the root of everything foreign to Himself— “…for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” ([Luke 12:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+12:15)). If we don’t see and understand this, it is because we are ignoring the underlying principles of our Lord’s teaching.

Our tendency is to lie back and bask in the memory of the wonderful experience we had when God revealed His will to us. But if a New Testament standard is revealed to us by the light of God, and we don’t try to measure up, or even feel inclined to do so, then we begin to backslide. It means your conscience does not respond to the truth. You can never be the same after the unveiling of a truth. That moment marks you as one who either continues on with even more devotion as a disciple of Jesus Christ, or as one who turns to go back as a deserter.

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

Jesus Christ can afford to be misunderstood; we cannot. Our weakness lies in always wanting to vindicate ourselves.  The Place of Help, 1051 L

# CCEL – 12/29/19

**Understanding what the will of the Lord is.**—[EPH. 5:17.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.5.html" \l "Eph.5.17)

This is the will of God, even your sanctification.—Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.—This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.—We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

We . . . do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.—The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, . . . give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.

[I Thes. 4:3](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iThess.4.html" \l "iThess.4.3). -[Job 22:21](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Job.22.html" \l "Job.22.21). -[John 17:3](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.John.17.html" \l "John.17.3). -[I John 5:20](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iJohn.5.html" \l "iJohn.5.20).[Col. 1:9](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Col.1.html" \l "Col.1.9). -[Eph. 1:17-19](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.1.html" \l "Eph.1.17).

“Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” [1 Samuel 7:12](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iSam.7.html" \l "iSam.7.12)

The word “hitherto” seems like a hand pointing in the direction of the past. Twenty years or seventy, and yet, “hitherto the Lord hath helped!” Through poverty, through wealth, through sickness, through health, at home, abroad, on the land, on the sea, in honour, in dishonour, in perplexity, in joy, in trial, in triumph, in prayer, in temptation, “hitherto hath the Lord helped us!” We delight to look down a long avenue of trees. It is delightful to gaze from end to end of the long vista, a sort of verdant temple, with its branching pillars and its arches of leaves; even so look down the long aisles of your years, at the green boughs of mercy overhead, and the strong pillars of lovingkindness and faithfulness which bear up your joys. Are there no birds in yonder branches singing? Surely there must be many, and they all sing of mercy received “hitherto.”

But the word also points forward. For when a man gets up to a certain mark and writes “hitherto,” he is not yet at the end, there is still a distance to be traversed. More trials, more joys; more temptations, more triumphs; more prayers, more answers; more toils, more strength; more fights, more victories; and then come sickness, old age, disease, death. Is it over now? No! there is more yet-awakening in Jesus’ likeness, thrones, harps, songs, psalms, white raiment, the face of Jesus, the society of saints, the glory of God, the fulness of eternity, the infinity of bliss. O be of good courage, believer, and with grateful confidence raise thy “Ebenezer,” for—

He who hath helped thee hitherto

Will help thee all thy journey through.

When read in heaven’s light how glorious and marvellous a prospect will thy “hitherto” unfold to thy grateful eye!

# Word Live – 12/29/19

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

# Scripture Union – 12/29/19

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

# Today in the Word – 12/29/19

# Our Returning King

**Read:** [**1 Thessalonians 4:14–18**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+4%3a14%e2%80%9318)

14For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Are you eager for Christ’s return? Evangelist Billy Sunday once preached: “The mission of the church—the bride of Christ, or body of Christ—is to be ready to meet the bridegroom. When the body of Christ is completed He will reveal Himself to the members who are alive and in this world at that time, and at the same moment they will be caught up to meet those who have gone on before in the air, and from that moment they are forever with the Lord.”

The Lord himself will come down from heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:16

The “Rapture” is the name we use to talk about meeting Christ in the air, as described in today’s reading (v. 17). This will be followed by the Tribulation and then Christ’s Second Coming. From the moment Jesus ascended to the Father, the church has been looking forward to His return: “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The Thessalonians believed in Christ’s return, but it seems they thought everyone had to stay alive until that time. As pagan Gentiles, they saw death as the end and therefore any believer who died before His return would lose their chance at eternal life. Paul corrected that error, teaching that when Christ comes back, the dead will rise first (vv. 15–16) and those still alive will meet Him in the air (v. 17). No one who trusts in Jesus will miss out!

One day we will hear “the trumpet call of God” and “the voice of the archangel” and our waiting will be over (v. 16). We long for this day: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

### **Apply the Word**

We are to encourage one another to remain faithful. Today’s reading says, “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (v. 18). How can you encourage a brother or sister in the Lord today? Send a message on social media, make a phone call, or pay a visit. Together, we can hold tight to the promise that Christ will return!

### **Pray with Us**

As we near the end of our Bible study, pray through the list of Jesus’ names we’ve learned this month. During your quiet time pray to the Lord mentioning each name from your list, one by one, with praise, thanksgiving, and worship.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/29/19

# Washed in Love

 **Read: James 2:14–26**

### **Faith and Deeds**

14What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

20You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2%3A14%E2%80%9326&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30314a)]? 21Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2%3A14%E2%80%9326&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-30317b" \o "See footnote b)] and he was called God’s friend. 24You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

25In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. [James 2:20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2%3A14%E2%80%9326&version=NIV#en-NIV-30314) Some early manuscripts dead
2. [James 2:23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2%3A14%E2%80%9326&version=NIV#en-NIV-30317) Gen. 15:6

You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. James 2:24

A small church in Southern California recognized an opportunity to express God’s love in a practical way. Believers in Jesus gathered at a local laundromat to give back to their community by washing clothes for those in financial need. They cleaned and folded clothes together, and sometimes provided a hot meal or bags of groceries for recipients.

One volunteer discovered the greatest reward was in the “actual contact with people . . . hearing their stories.” Because of their relationship with Jesus, these volunteers wanted to live out their faith through loving words and actions that helped them nurture genuine relationships with others.

The apostle James affirms that every act of a professing believer’s loving service is a result of genuine faith. He states that “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:14–17). Declaring we believe makes us children of God, but it’s when we serve Him by serving others that we act as believers who trust and follow Jesus (v. 24). Faith and service are as closely interdependent as the body and the spirit (v. 26), a beautiful display of the power of Christ as He works in and through us.

After personally accepting that God’s sacrifice on the cross washes us in perfect love, we can respond in authentic faith that overflows into the ways we serve others.

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

#### **Reflect & Pray**

How has someone helped you be more open to knowing Jesus personally? How can you demonstrate your faith in Christ through loving words and actions?

Jesus, please flood our lives with Your perfect, cleansing love, so that we can pour it into the lives of others.

#### **Insight**

The book of James has been compared to the book of Proverbs because both contain practical advice for living out a life of faith in God. James 2:14–26 is foundational for understanding the relationship between our faith and works. James introduces this topic early in his letter (1:27) and continues to tell his readers that true faith is demonstrated by actions.

# God Calling – 12/29/19

# Work and Prayer

Work and prayer represent the two forces that will ensure your success. Your work and My work.

For prayer, believing prayer, is based on the certainty that I am working for you and with you and in you.

Go forward gladly and unafraid. I am with you. With men your task may be impossible, but with God all things are possible.

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Philippians 2:13

# My Utmost for His Highest – 12/30/19

# “And Every Virtue We Possess”



…All my springs are in you. —[Psalm 87:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=31&search=Psalm+87%3A7)

Our Lord never “patches up” our natural virtues, that is, our natural traits, qualities, or characteristics. He completely remakes a person on the inside— “…put on the new man…” ([Ephesians 4:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+4:24)). In other words, see that your natural human life is putting on all that is in keeping with the new life. The life God places within us develops its own new virtues, not the virtues of the seed of Adam, but of Jesus Christ. Once God has begun the process of sanctification in your life, watch and see how God causes your confidence in your own natural virtues and power to wither away. He will continue until you learn to draw your life from the reservoir of the resurrection life of Jesus. Thank God if you are going through this drying-up experience!

The sign that God is at work in us is that He is destroying our confidence in the natural virtues, because they are not promises of what we are going to be, but only a wasted reminder of what God created man to be. We want to cling to our natural virtues, while all the time God is trying to get us in contact with the life of Jesus Christ— a life that can never be described in terms of natural virtues. It is the saddest thing to see people who are trying to serve God depending on that which the grace of God never gave them. They are depending solely on what they have by virtue of heredity. God does not take our natural virtues and transform them, because our natural virtues could never even come close to what Jesus Christ wants. No natural love, no natural patience, no natural purity can ever come up to His demands. But as we bring every part of our natural bodily life into harmony with the new life God has placed within us, He will exhibit in us the virtues that were characteristic of the Lord Jesus.

And every virtue we possess Is His alone.

**Wisdom From Oswald Chambers**

We are only what we are in the dark; all the rest is reputation. What God looks at is what we are in the dark—the imaginations of our minds; the thoughts of our heart; the habits of our bodies; these are the things that mark us in God’s sight.  The Love of God—The Ministry of the Unnoticed, 669 L

# CCEL – 12/30/19

**Blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**—[I COR. 1:8.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iCor.1.html" \l "iCor.1.8)

You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.—That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.—Sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.

[Col. 1:21-23](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Col.1.html" \l "Col.1.21). -[Phi 2:15](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Phil.2.html" \l "Phil.2.15). [II Pet. 3:14](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiPet.3.html" \l "iiPet.3.14). -[Phi. 1:10](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Phil.1.html" \l "Phil.1.10).[Jude 24,25](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Jude.1.html" \l "Jude.1.24).

“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” [Ecclesiastes 7:8](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eccl.7.html" \l "Eccl.7.8)

Look at David’s Lord and Master; see his beginning. He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Would you see the end? He sits at his Father’s right hand, expecting until his enemies be made his footstool. “As he is, so are we also in this world.” You must bear the cross, or you shall never wear the crown; you must wade through the mire, or you shall never walk the golden pavement. Cheer up, then, poor Christian. “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” See that creeping worm, how contemptible its appearance! It is the beginning of a thing. Mark that insect with gorgeous wings, playing in the sunbeams, sipping at the flower bells, full of happiness and life; that is the end thereof. That caterpillar is yourself, until you are wrapped up in the chrysalis of death; but when Christ shall appear you shall be like him, for you shall see him as he is. Be content to be like him, a worm and no man, that like him you may be satisfied when you wake up in his likeness. That rough-looking diamond is put upon the wheel of the lapidary. He cuts it on all sides. It loses much—much that seemed costly to itself. The king is crowned; the diadem is put upon the monarch’s head with trumpet’s joyful sound. A glittering ray flashes from that coronet, and it beams from that very diamond which was just now so sorely vexed by the lapidary. You may venture to compare yourself to such a diamond, for you are one of God’s people; and this is the time of the cutting process. Let faith and patience have their perfect work, for in the day when the crown shall be set upon the head of the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, one ray of glory shall stream from you. “They shall be mine,” saith the Lord, “in the day when I make up my jewels.” “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.”

# Word Live – 12/30/19

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

# Scripture Union – 12/30/19

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

# Today in the Word – 12/30/19

# Judge of the Living and the Dead

**Read:** [**Acts 10:34–43**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+10%3a34%e2%80%9343)

34Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. 36You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Theologian Jonathan Edwards said in “The Excellency of Christ”: “[Jesus Christ] is the Judge of the world, and the infinitely just Judge of it, and will not at all acquit the wicked, or by any means clear the guilty. . . . Yet how wonderfully is infinite mercy towards sinners displayed in him! Though he be the just Judge of a sinful world, yet he is also the Savior of the world.”

He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. Acts 10:42

When He returns, Christ will judge the world. As Peter spoke in the house of Cornelius, he summarized Jesus’ life and ministry: “the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (v. 36). Peter began with the ministry of John the Baptist (v. 37), continued on to Jesus’ miracles and other good works (v. 38), then the Crucifixion and Resurrection (vv. 39–41), and finally the mission of the apostles and the church to preach this good news “and to testify that [Jesus] is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead” (v. 42). The bottom line: “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (v. 43).

When we stand before the Judge, the basis of His judgment will be faith in Him. There will be no favoritism or injustice in any form (v. 34). There will certainly be no ethnic or cultural prejudice (v. 35), a lesson Peter learned from the “sheet vision” (vv. 9–23). Everyone who trusts in Christ will go to heaven, and everyone who doesn’t will go to hell. Thankfully, Cornelius’s household responded in faith (vv. 44–48). As we draw near to the close of this study and this year, it is a good time to consider whether or not you have placed your faith in Jesus.

### **Apply the Word**

Did you know favoritism is injustice? Favoritism is a sin we often seem willing to tolerate. We need to see it through God’s eyes. James commanded against this sin vehemently, including an example of discrimination against the poor (2:1–13). Showing favoritism is disobedience to the “royal command” to love our neighbor (vv. 8–9)!

### **Pray with Us**

As we look back on the past year, we hope that God used Today in the Word to minister to you. Thank God for the way He has worked in your life in 2019. We look forward to exploring together our Bible study topics in the new year.

## BY Brad Baurain

# Our Daily Bread – 12/30/19

# A Designed Deficiency

 **Read: Isaiah 22:8–11**

8The Lord stripped away the defenses of Judah,  
    and you looked in that day  
    to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest.  
9You saw that the walls of the City of David  
    were broken through in many places;  
you stored up water  
    in the Lower Pool.  
10You counted the buildings in Jerusalem  
    and tore down houses to strengthen the wall.  
11You built a reservoir between the two walls  
    for the water of the Old Pool,  
but you did not look to the One who made it,  
    or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.

You did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago. Isaiah 22:11

There’s a natural spring that rises on the east side of the city of Jerusalem. In ancient times it was the city’s only water supply and was located outside the walls. Thus it was the point of Jerusalem’s greatest vulnerability. The exposed spring meant that the city, otherwise impenetrable, could be forced to surrender if an attacker were to divert or dam the spring.

King Hezekiah addressed this weakness by driving a tunnel through 1,750 feet of solid rock from the spring into the city where it flowed into the “Lower Pool” (see 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:2–4). But in all of this, Hezekiah “did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago” (Isaiah 22:11). Planned what?

God Himself “planned” the city of Jerusalem in such a way that its water supply was unprotected. The spring outside the wall was a constant reminder that the inhabitants of the city must depend solely on Him for their salvation.

Can it be that our deficiencies exist for our good? Indeed, the apostle Paul said that he would “boast” in his limitations, because it was through weakness that the beauty and power of Jesus was seen in him (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). Can we then regard each limitation as a gift that reveals God as our strength?

By: [David H. Roper](https://odb.org/author/davidhroper/)

#### **Reflect & Pray**

What are your deficiencies? How are they helping you gain trust in God?

God, I’m weak. I pray that others would see that You are my strength.

#### **Insight**

During the reign of King Hezekiah (728–686 bc), the Southern Kingdom of Judah faced a significant military threat from the Assyrians, who’d already destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722 bc). To prepare Judah to fight the Assyrians, Hezekiah adopted the defensive strategy of denying the invading army access to their water supply (2 Chronicles 32:1–8). He “blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land” (v. 4) and at the same time dug tunnels to bring water into the city to ensure they’d have sufficient water to last them through a prolonged siege (2 Kings 20:20). He also fortified the wall defenses that protected the city and the water supply and made large numbers of weapons and shields (2 Chronicles 32:5).

# God Calling – 12/30/19

# Fishers of Men

When you think of those of whom you read who are in anguish, do you ever think how My Heart must ache with the woe of it, with the anguish of it?

If I beheld the city and wept over it, how much more should I weep over the agony of these troubled hearts, over lives that seek to live without My sustaining Power.

"They will not come into Me that they might have Life."

Live to bring others to Me, the only Source of Happiness and Heart-Peace.

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." John 4:35