

CONTINUING OUR LEGACY



A 40-DAY DEVOTION GUIDE

For Such A Time As This

And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
Esther 4:13-14

For what purpose does God have you where you are right now? Esther found herself crowned queen of the largest empire in the world, Persia, when a decree from the king had been issued to destroy all the Jews. Up to this point, Esther had not revealed her heritage as a Jew, when her cousin, Mordecai, informed her of the decree and pleaded with her to go to the king in hopes of saving their people. Esther was left with a grave decision: continue concealing her ethnicity in the hopes of evading the decree, or risk being put to death by approaching the king without invitation to make supplication for her people.

Every minute of every hour of every day God is at work in the lives of His people, whether we recognize it or not. As Mordecai proclaimed, we can either choose to be obedient to God and be about the work of His kingdom or not, but regardless, God's sovereign plan of deliverance will be fulfilled. Why not be an integral part of God's grand plan for His kingdom? We must not sit idly by in our "palaces" while we wait for just the right opportunity to be on mission for the gospel. God has you right where you are right now for a purpose, His purpose. God providentially brought you into His kingdom for such a time as this.

-Devon Burris

The Weight Of Failure

The weight of failure can be heavy on us. Because no matter whether the failure was tied to a sin or not, and no matter whether we had much control over our success or not, the pain of falling short is hard to overcome. What comes afterward might take years to clean up. Failure does not disqualify us from our potential. We all fail, but we are not failures, even when the enemy convinces us to define ourselves by that word. What or who defines us? God's Holy Word!

- Always forgiven (1 John 1:9)
- Fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14)
- A new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- Accepted (Romans 8:1)
- Dearly loved (Colossians 3:12)

Failure is not the end but the beginning. The thing we must remember is our failure is NEVER more powerful than our God. That truth must sink into our souls. Like a child who runs to his parents when he falls off a bike, children of God run to Him when we fail. God is more than capable of taking what we messed up and then He turns it upside down. He takes our messes and causes them to work for our good and His ultimate glory. But if we don't believe what He says, we might completely miss out on seeing Him work in and through us. Not even our failure, no matter how great, can redirect God's plan for us! When we have a relationship with God, failure doesn't categorize us anymore. We have been brought from death to life. Success is having a right standing with God. Success is God transforming our hearts to be kindhearted and loving toward our fellow man. Isaiah 14:27 reminds us, "The LORD of Heaven's Armies has spoken - who can change His plans? When His hand is raised, who can stop Him?" Nothing we have done or will do will erase that great potential that God sees in all of us.

-Robin Gentry

Uncompromisingly Loving

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

These two verses are often quoted individually, but really need to be considered together. Verse 13 tells us to be on the lookout; to stand firm in our faith and principles, to be strong and courageous and never compromise what we know to be right and true based on God's Word. While that is an absolute truth, we sometimes get caught up in "being right" and lose sight of "doing the right thing". On the other hand, it is easy to cling to verse 14 alone and fall into the trap that doing things in love means backing down or ignoring what we know to be right to avoid conflict. That can even mean backing away from telling someone about God's gift of salvation through Christ, for fear of being offensive or causing discomfort.

Jesus taught us to love one another and treat those around us well; the way we would like to be treated. It was quite popular a few decades ago to wear bracelets, t-shirts and other apparel that reminded us to ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?". Perhaps that should have been followed with, "and how would Jesus do it?". His example was to respond to even the most egregious criticism, lies and accusations with the utmost grace and love. He didn't get defensive or denigrate His opposition by tearing them down or screaming at them. So, while it is imperative to stand our ground and live according to God's Word and the urging of the Holy Spirit, we must find ways to communicate His message in a loving way. I doubt anyone has ever been browbeaten into salvation. In fact, most folks will just dig their heels in further when aggressively confronted. How do we find that balance, especially those of us that like to feel in control? It requires much prayer, but also giving total control over to the Lord! That's the toughest part. Want to stand your ground in a loving way? Get out of the way and let God take over!

Sing To The Lord

*Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord.
Psalm 134:2*

This Psalm has always meant a lot to me, since I use my hands to communicate. For me, sign language is my native language, a very joyous and expressive language. And as a believer, it's a way I can worship God for who He is and all He's done, and a way I can feel His presence.

Psalm 134 is one of a group of fifteen Psalms called the Songs of Ascent. Psalm 120-134 were traditionally sung by the children of God as they ascended the uphill road to Jerusalem to engage in three annual festivals in the Temple: Passover, Pentecost, and Sukkot. King David wrote Psalms 122, 124, 131, and 133; and his son King Solomon wrote Psalm 127. The author(s) of the remaining 10, remain unknown. The Songs of Ascent speak of pilgrims' physical ascent to Jerusalem and the Temple, but beyond that they speak of God's protection, their longing for national independence, and eventual salvation through Messiah. You can sense an air of expectancy as these Songs are read/sung.

What do you have to praise Him for today? For all of us, our Song, our praise goes way beyond simply raising our physical hands in worship. As we come into His presence daily, we are encouraged, even commanded to lift our hearts, our minds, our souls, our strength to Him, in praise, in thanksgiving, and in obedience. These Psalms were written during the period of Judah's exile in Babylon. Whether in times of distress or in times of peace, in times of anguish or times of triumph we cry out to our God for His mercy, His power to overcome, and His grace to endure.

-Angela Atkinson,

Unqualified?

And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Exodus 3: 9-12

In these verses, God asks Moses to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt after a long period of enslavement. It sounds simple enough when God states it, but if most people were honest, they would probably respond in a way very similar to Moses, immediately questioning why they would be qualified for such a monumental task. The beauty of this passage, though, lies in the fact that Moses perhaps wasn't qualified at all, and yet didn't need to be. Why? Because God would be with him.

Often times, it is so easy to focus on the day-to-day of our lives that we end up forgetting the growth that can happen when we operate outside our comfort zone as Christians. So much of life is filled with tasks that we believe we can handle ourselves, things that are well within our perceived control. But is that doing us any good? In this passage, God calls Moses to a task that has him questioning his ability to accomplish it. And God answers not to assure Moses that he can do it, but instead to simply remind Moses that God will be with him in it, which is all Moses will need to carry out the seemingly insurmountable task God asked of him.

It is easy for us to forget that this should be the way we operate in our lives too. When God calls us to feats unattainable in our human strength, we should lean into them all the more because it brings us closer to Him. These feats lead us to a necessary dependence on the God that is wholly capable. These verses are a perfect reminder that whatever it is that God is calling you to in your life - whether related to work, to finances, to family, or otherwise - you may not by your own strength and power be able to fulfill that call, but that puts you in the perfect position to trust and lean completely and totally on the Father that IS.

-Alexandra Cox

Don't Worry, Seek Him

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

As the world turns their faces from God, I find that we constantly need to remember that God has all of today's problems and concerns handled, and that we must turn to Him in faith and prayer. As I keep up with the news and occurrences locally and worldwide, I realize that God's Will is perfect and that the prophecies found in the Bible are being realized daily. I know that God's Peace can come only through obedience to God's Word and through prayer to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I worry that people are becoming fooled by the mainstream media and Satan's forces. The only relief Christians can have is to rely on the Truth of the Bible and to remain in constant prayer for understanding and guidance from the Holy Spirit. These have helped me in my times of impatience and irritation to remember this verse and the promise that God's Will shall be done in Heaven as it is done on Earth.

-Bill Darby

The God Of Plenty

...Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your lap. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

Luke 6:38

I don't believe it is possible to outgive God. I believe He wants us to see the joy of giving and sacrificing - He does this by rewarding a giving spirit. There are many ways to give - not just financially. We can give sacrificially of our time, talents, and concern for others. We have a loving God, an unselfish God, and a God who desires that we share with others what He has given to us.

Give and receive the happiness that you will receive by being obedient and the blessings He will pour out on you. As a young businessman, I asked an older, wiser friend how I should tithe... on the gross income or the net income? His answer was, "Well, do you want God to bless you on the gross or the net?" Thank You God for wise counsel.

-Bob Nipper

Worthy Citizens

Just one thing: As citizens of Heaven, live your life worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

Philippians 1:27

If it feels like everything has changed, that's because it has. Every day it seems like our culture is deteriorating more and more. What is accepted and celebrated in our society can leave us, who love Christ, shocked and discouraged. Our beliefs are mocked, our values are condemned, and our Lord is routinely rejected by those who shape popular culture. While it feels like this is a recent trend, Isaiah saw the same thing happening eight centuries before Christ. He said, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

If the current state of the world has you discouraged, remember the history the Bible reveals is one marred by sin and its consequences. No matter which political party is in power. Or what the latest trends are in philosophy and psychology. Or how many copies of the latest self-help book are sold, men and women are dead in sin until they are made new creations in Christ. Apart from Christ, nothing will get better.

While reality is harsh, properly understanding it should encourage and motivate us! Being a child of God means this life, as discouraging as it may be, is not the end. In fact, we're told that this isn't even our home. In Christ, we are now citizens of Heaven, and we anticipate, with gratitude, being there one day. But, until then, we live with the answers the world needs. God has chosen to use us to share the love of Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can make known the transforming power of Christ. So, when the world tries to tear down, discredit, and ostracize you remember who you belong to, and what He has asked you to do. And, next time a sinful world makes you shake your head in frustration, remember Romans 5:8. "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

-Matthew Potochnik

Through The Waters

Having had the joy of being in leadership in my incredible church, I have had the honor and privilege of praying for, walking alongside and helping many sisters and brothers just "take the next step" in the face of a myriad of adversities. These situations ranged from simply sad, to tragic and, at times, absolutely horrific. There are many comforting verses in Scripture, but my favorite passage is found in *Isaiah 43:1b-3*.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name, you are mine. When you pass THROUGH the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass THROUGH the RIVERS, they will not sweep over you. When you walk THROUGH the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God. The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

When any of us are in a dark valley and cannot, at the time, see a way out, I claim and share these verses, focusing on the word "THROUGH" as this one word paints the most beautiful picture of God's protection and grace. To me it means there is a beginning, middle and end and that Jesus is walking with me, the entire time. He holds my hand in the beginning of my sorrow, all through my sorrow, and, best of all, He will be with me until he "picks me up and lifts me out" with his outstretched, nail scarred hand. Only a sweet Sovereign Savior could love me, or anyone, that much!!

And the best news of all, is that we can trust Him to show us this kind love and compassion every single time because.....after all He NEVER BREAKS HIS PROMISES.

-Debbie Haun

What Are You Looking At?

*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.
2 Corinthians 4:18*

In these verses, Paul encourages us to focus on eternal, unseen realities over temporal things that are visible. This shift in our natural perspective is crucial for aligning with God's eternal purposes. It challenges us to look beyond ourselves and our immediate circumstances and to prioritize eternal truths.

C.T. Studd, a British Anglican missionary to China and Africa, said it like this, "Only one life will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."

With this in mind, what really matters and what will determine your thoughts and actions today? Will it be about looking for opportunities to see how God can use you in your job, in your school, in your family, in your neighborhood? Will you / we be looking for opportunities to respond in a Christlike way to things and people that annoy us? Or will we be thinking about how much money we are making or how we look or our next vacation or our favorite sports team? Have we made our life so busy that we don't take time to find the eternal in our daily comings and goings. This life, which seems long to us, is a second in time compared to eternity. It just seems long to us because it is all we know.

Eternity has always been the focus of this church. Every weekly program, every special event, every dollar spent has been with eternity in mind because the only thing that REALLY matters is what will matter 100, 1,000, 1,000,000.... years from now and that is "Only what's done for Christ will last"!

-Dianne White

Test Me And See!

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Malachi 3:10

After college, I decided to surrender my life to God and started to attend church. Almost immediately, God tested my faith to allow me to see whether it was real or not. The pastor preached a sermon on tithing which was a new concept for me. I wondered how I would be able to give ten percent of my income as I had just bought a new car. If I tithed, I wouldn't be able to make my car payment that was due in a week. I decided that I would obey God and give my tithe. To my surprise, I received an unexpected insurance refund just before my car payment that was within a few dollars of that payment amount.

God showed me that He is faithful to those who obey Him. Ever since that time, my wife and I have faithfully tithed, given sacrificially to church building campaigns, supported missions, and helped the poor financially. Every time, God has returned the blessings to us, sometimes spiritually and sometimes financially far outgiving the amount we gave. Malachi 3:10 is the only occurrence in the Bible where God says to "test me." He is faithful to His word when we are obedient. Have you put God to the test with your financial giving? If not, you may never know the blessings that He wants to pour out of the floodgates of heaven in your life.

-Wayne Sams

Brand New

*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
2 Corinthians 5:17*

I became a believer when I was 22 years old. Before I accepted Christ as my savior, I had heard of Him; I grew up practicing faith in a different denomination that did not emphasize the importance of a personal relationship with the Lord. I grew up singing songs about Jesus in church but never fully knew Him or recognized Him.

As I became a young adult, I recognized the need in my life for Christ as more than just a vague idea. Once I submitted to Him, it was completely freeing in a way that I had never experienced. My desire to know Him and love Him became the most important thing to me as I learned more about Him. I truly felt like a new creation! The old things passed away, and new things came into my life! This verse embodies the excitement a new Christian feels and continues to remain true, no matter how long you've been a believer. We as new creations no longer can be defined by our past hurts and regrets once repentance occurs!

This verse is the first one I ever memorized as a new believer and it holds a dear place in my heart. The reality of complete freedom from sin and shame is very powerful, and as I started growing as a new Christian, the Church was there to embrace me, teach me, and love me where I was and encouraged me to grow to become more like Jesus! Continuing Our Legacy is so important so we can foster this in younger generations of Christians. Every day I see the Lord working in the lives of the students in our BigLife Student Ministry and I am humbled to watch them surrender to the New Creation Christ calls them to be.

Grace Is Enough

My name is Janice Thomas. I have the privilege of working with the high school girls' life group on Sunday mornings and the women's prison ministry on Thursday evenings. Each week both groups explore and discuss the challenges faced by women in modern society: social media, peer pressure, family woes, and the consequences of bad decisions. Then we look at how we can apply prayer and our faith to guide us and grow us closer to Jesus.

Lately, like many of us, I have found myself deep in "the valley:" moving my mom to a memory care facility located far from where I live; the unexpected passing of my 36-year-old nephew; a friend's battle with breast cancer; unsettling concerns about the future of our country; and near constant worry for my sister in Christ whose 3-year-old grandson is terminally ill. Amid all the sadness, God continues to provide blessings: the birth of a healthy grandson and the spiritual embrace of an unlikely "band of sisters" in my youth and prison ministries.

Balancing life's ups and downs is a true challenge. I rely heavily on scripture and prayer to guide me. Romans 5:3-5 stands out; re-reading Job's story; and, most recently, listening how God reassured Paul in his sufferings.

But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

For Christ's sake, I will delight in the weakness and the difficulties. For the Bible teaches that when I am weak, I am strong. And in my sorrow, I am loved and lifted up by the women around me. Indeed, I am both the servant and the recipient of God's Grace.

Every day, I will rejoice and give thanks. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 reminds us to "rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Amen.

To Serve The Lord

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:28

What comes to mind in today's culture when asked, what is most important to you? We live in a society that is driven by self-desire. No one is more concerned about anything, other than what makes them happy or satisfied. But Jesus tells us and demonstrated that it is not our needs, but the needs of others that matter more. To be selfless with our time and money. Because it is not ours, but His that He has given to us to use for His glory.

Jesus tells us that whoever desires to be first among us, must become last (Matt. 20:27). So how do we show or serve those around us? It does not mean to give all your time just to the church (they know Jesus). But to serve those you encounter during your daily activities. To be intentional with your time and actions and how we love those around us. Let us love our families, neighbors, co-workers in a way that shows Jesus to them. I leave you with this one question.

If you were arrested for being a Christ follower and had to stand before a judge and a jury of your peers, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

-Michael Schrier

Immeasurably More

All to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.
Ephesians 3:20

We ask so many “Why, God?” questions in this life. So much is beyond our understanding. When God moved our family with three young children away from First Baptist Jacksonville we asked, “God, why would you want us to leave one of America’s greatest churches we love so much?” Our young children grew up under Bro. Bobby’s strong biblical teaching and a strong youth ministry. Three of our children married Christians from the youth group. Our fourth child met his future bride at the Baptist Student Union at the University of Florida. Now they are serving the Lord in other churches. What a joy it has been to do our sacrificial part in giving beyond our tithe.

Every Sunday we drive onto our amazing property over a bridge we had a small part in building. What we thought was God taking away from us was actually God giving us much more than we had ever dreamed. I was taught as a small child you can never out give the Lord! In God’s economy, $2+2 =$ whatever God chooses. When you don’t understand, He has a plan for greater than you know. Trust your heavenly Father! Pray and ask God “What part do you want me to have in building a kingdom legacy at FBC? You’ll be clipping coupons in God’s economy for all eternity!

-Danella Nipper

Jesus, the Cornerstone

So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the Saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

This passage not only identifies the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Is.57:19) and the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3) as being Christ's church, but also defines the process of building the spiritual temple of God by joining together, in Christ, many "living stones" (1Pet 2:5), all connected in love, to each other and to the Cornerstone, Jesus.

It is clear to me by the spiritual fruit (new members, baptisms, life group and outreach-ministry participation) that is being produced by the Holy Spirit at our church, that God, in a mighty way, is using our congregation of "living stones" to do His will in leading people to Jesus. It is also clear that the vision our spiritual leaders, our pastors, are receiving for our congregation is directed and ordained by God.

The same Spirit that is in the heart of every born-again believer has caused our physical growth through His causing of spiritual growth within us and our new members. He is the same Spirit that is casting a vision of what is needed here to contain this growth so that souls for Christ will continue to multiply.

Our duty is clear: We are to sacrificially use our time, treasure and talent to support the vision that God has for our congregation. I recommend that you, in prayer, ask God to tell you what that means for you.

-Don Lombardi

Walk By Faith

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:7

The Bible is filled with examples of people walking in faith. When God called Abraham out of Ur, God said to him I will show you the land. He did not tell him up front where the land was. Abraham walked by faith.

When the Children of Israel reached the Red Sea, God parted the waters and they walked by faith on dry ground. God did not cause them to walk through the shallows but rather He took them through the deep part of the Red Sea. As the waters parted, they walked by faith believing that God would hold the waters back and protect them from the Egyptian Army.

When the Children of Israel came to the Jordan River, God brought them to the banks during flood stage, not during the dry season. When the Priest carrying the Ark of the Covenant reached the banks of the Jordan, they were told to step out in faith. At the point they took that first step of faith, the waters parted and they walked across on dry ground. They walked by faith not by sight trusting God.

When the Children of Israel came to Jericho, God told them to march around the city and he would bring the walls down. Each day they walked in faith believing that God would deliver the city into their hands. They walked in faith not by sight. Gideon and his 300 men walked in faith not by sight believing that God would deliver the Midianite army into their hands. They trusted God to deliver the victory. We are called daily to walk by faith, not by sight. Often, God does not take us on the easy route or even the most direct route. Faith walking requires us to trust Him in all aspects of our life. Faith walking requires us to lean on Him, not on our own understanding.

I am continuing to learn what it means to walk by faith, not by sight. So often, I want to see where God is taking me rather than simply yielding to Him and saying I am walking with You by faith. Thank You, LORD, for providing meaningful examples of people who have walked by faith, not by sight. Have a great day serving and loving our LORD and Savior and others in the same fashion as Jesus loves them.

-Ken Parker

Selfless Service

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others greater than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:3-11

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ, one has to be willing to surrender ownership of one's life to the Lordship of Jesus. This means Jesus controls our thinking, attitudes and actions. It also shows our affection for and obedience to God's Word.

Discipleship requires forsaking one's natural tendencies to be prideful and thinking only of our own self interests and becoming humble and considering how our attitudes and decisions will affect those around us.

When making life decisions always ask:

- Does this exalt and bring honor to the Lord Jesus Christ?
- How will the decision affect others?
- Am I becoming a humble servant to others?

The answer to these questions will reveal how much we are becoming like Jesus. Our life goal should be to bring honor and glory to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in our thoughts, our attitudes and our actions.

Consider others with humility

Look out for the interest of others

Use the life of Jesus as our example for our attitudes and actions

Jesus was a humble servant all the way to the cross

God exalted Jesus as Lord to His glory

Our lives should bring glory to God

Can You Hear It?

So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if He calls you say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

1 Samuel 3:9-10

Upon being asked to do a short devotion, it came to me the story of Samuel and how he was to become a prophet of God. He was an answer to a prayer of his mother that was barren and wanted so much to have a child that she could give back to God. God answered her prayer and He gave her child back to her for service in the tabernacle, to be trained by Eli the priest. The Lord came to Samuel and called him by name. Scripture says Samuel did not know the Lord at this time and he thought it was Eli that called him. Three different times he went to Eli. Then Eli told Samuel it was the Lord, calling him and to answer him a certain way.

Today it is the Holy Spirit that speaks to us inside. He calls us to salvation to repentance. How blessed we are when we hear and obey. My prayer is to hear and recognize Him when He calls and to be willing to obey. God answered Hannah's prayers, and Samuel heard God's voice and obeyed.

-Jerry Fields

Called By Name

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God.

Isaiah 43:1-3

The words of one of my favorite songs is titled "Called by Name." These words are taken from this passage in the 43rd chapter of Isaiah. "In the valley of despair I hear Him say, fear not for I am with you come what may." Although these words were spoken to the children of Israel in the past, these promises bring comfort to believers today.

God knows each one of us who have trusted Him and calls us by name. When the difficulties of life come, our Heavenly Father tells us not to fear. What peace and comfort this brings. We don't always understand the trials that come into our lives. But no matter how difficult they may be, remember that our Heavenly Father has promised to bring us through these trials.

-Barbara Hunt

A Gift For You And Others

You may be thinking, how can I give myself a gift and at the same time give it to others? This gift is an odd gift in that money cannot buy it, it is not one of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us, and no one is born with this gift. Somewhere along the way each Christian has to decide if he wants this gift and wants to bless others by having it.

As we are around individuals many times we can tell who has it and who does not. I can remember not having it. As a child, I can remember taking walks in the woods with my parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. No matter how far we walked or how long we stayed, I was not ready to turn around. I always wanted to go further. I did not complain, I was just not totally happy with the situation.

As I grew up there were other situations I was not content with. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 (NKJ) we read; *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* But instead of being very grateful and thankful for the nice house the church provided for us to live in (at one time churches did that for pastors and families) I saw what I did not like about the house. I did not think the brown rugs, green walls, and white drapes looked very good and did not match the things we had. The kitchen floor was old and ugly and everything that fell on it stuck and had to be scrubbed off. It was very hard to keep, especially since we had three very little ones then. The church fenced in a very large backyard for us. I should have been thankful for that and lived happily with the rest. The Lord did help me come to my senses. Because of some church issues we had to move out of their house. Then I was thankful just to have a roof over our heads. It was a very small, ugly blue house, not air conditioned, with royal blue rugs that looked horrible with what we had and had to be vacuumed everyday. There, I learned one of my first lessons of being content. We are better off if we are content. A gift to ourselves.

Those around us are also much better off if they are not having to figure out how to keep us content. Therefore our being content is a gift to them also. How do we obtain this gift of contentment? Paul in

Philippians 4:11-12 (NKJ) tells us: “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”.

It is learned. Paul goes on to state in verse 13: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.* Meaning, I can do it, I can be content. Maybe you need to learn to be content and give yourself and those around you the gift of your being content.

Ambassadors For Christ

Having been involved in Royal Ambassadors since I was 8 years of age, this verse has been one of my favorites. This verse of Scripture, adopted as the Royal Ambassador motto and the Royal Ambassador Pledge, *"As a Royal Ambassador, I will do my best to become a well informed, responsible follower of Christ, to have a Christ-like concern for all people, to learn how to carry the message of Christ around the world, to work with others in sharing Christ, and to keep myself clean and healthy in mind and body."* has been voiced by an estimated 3 million boys over the last 116 years.

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.....We plead on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." Why do we plead on Christ's behalf? The subordinate conjunction, "therefore" relates back to previous verses. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, Paul states, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is plain to your conscience." What is the "fear of the Lord"? Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, "And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell." Who is this "Him" that we fear? God alone has the power to destroy both soul and body in Hell. Because of this, we are ambassadors for Christ.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. Now everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us, we plead on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

May we daily reconcile our differences with God and man.

-Richard Hendrix

Declared Glory

The Heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the earth.
Psalm 19:1-4

I have always loved looking at the sky: beautiful sunrises on the beach, breathtaking sunsets, unique cloud formations, starry nights away from city lights, super moons and solar eclipses. Their majesty and beauty speaks "silently out loud". This summer, in particular, Ron and I have witnessed some of the most brilliant sunsets right on our church property as we were leaving Wednesday night choir rehearsals. And who could forget the rainbow over our beach baptism? We often stop to take a moment to praise the God of all creation, for who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised He will do. We thank God for allowing us to live long enough to see what He is doing in our church.

I'm reminded of the story of Abram in Genesis 15 where God is calling him to be the father of a nation. Abram is discouraged because he is old and doesn't have any children. He is looking down, all around, trying to come up with a solution by himself. But in verse 4, the Lord "took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if indeed you can." God promised Abram that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars. Verse 6 says, "Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness."

When I am discouraged, worried about the future, wondering how I can get through a crisis or meet an obligation, I need to be reminded to stop looking down, all around for the answer. Look up! See the glory of God!

Psalm 121: 1-2 says "I lift up my eyes unto the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of Heaven and earth."

-Bunny Wing

Fret Not...

Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret-it leads only to evil.

Psalm 37:1-8

In 2019 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It wasn't your usual announcement. I had gone for testing, but never got the results. Upon waiting for my doctor's appointment, I was reading a devotion that read "sometimes God will put a Goliath in your life for you to find the David within you." Right then I knew I had breast cancer.

What better way to find out or hear a diagnosis than thru reading your devotion? Thank you Holy Spirit for your tenderness and your timing. Psalm 37:1-8 became my life verse while going through my cancer journey. In verse one, it starts out saying fret not and it says it four more times in the next seven verses. Fret not... don't worry.

Verses two through eight say to trust in the Lord, delight, thyself in the Lord, commit thy ways to the Lord, and rest in the Lord. I'm thankful to God for his deliverance and how his word came alive in my life. All praise and glory to God

-Connie Fields

THE CROSS OF JESUS DIVIDES US ALL

And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

Luke 23:33

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was crucified in the center of two criminals? He could have easily been put on the left or the right rather than in the middle. The picture painted by the three crosses is no coincidence. Those two criminals represent the entire human race. The criminal on Jesus' left showed no sign of remorse nor did he ask for mercy. The criminal on Jesus' right understood who Christ was and asked to be remembered; he asked for forgiveness.

Just think about it, ultimately, the world is not divided Geographically, Racially, Economically, or even Politically. It is the Cross of Jesus Christ that divides us all. Jesus looked upon humanity with love, grace, and mercy, as He opened heaven's door for all believers.

Therefore, we must all make the choice as to which side of the Cross of Jesus we will die on.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

-Ed Fields

Raised Up And Seated

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience...But God, who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us. Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

This entire passage is the core of everyone's salvation experience. This passage is very personal because the Holy Spirit revealed the truth of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done on my behalf. All the Lord wanted from me was a step of faith, a seeking Him, as ever weak as it was, and He did the rest. His Word revealed, in one powerful experience of the Holy Spirit, everything I was looking for. The Holy Spirit revealed Jesus love, truth, forgiveness, grace, mercy, literally lifting the weight of sin off my shoulders.

As you meditate on this passage, I pray that you remember your own salvation experience, as fresh today as the day it happened. Hebrews 13:8 says "Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Jesus's promises of love, truth, forgiveness, grace, and mercy for all of us will never change. Let us live our faith towards others the same way Jesus lives His faith towards us.

-Bill Mista

Open Your Eyes

In one of my favorite passages in the Old Testament, the king of Aram sends his army after one man, the prophet Elisha. One day, Elisha's servant wakes up and sees, on top of the hills completely surrounding them, the army of the king of Aram. As a good servant, he immediately notifies Elisha of the problem. Elisha calmly prays, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see," and then the servant could see God's army of chariots of fire between them and the Aramean army. After a series of miracles, there is no battle, all threats disappear, and God is glorified. Elisha saw what his servant could not.

Describing Abraham, Hebrews 11 says, "He looked for a city which hath foundation whose ruler and maker is God." Genesis tells us of Abraham's travels among sand and sky, rocks and hills, trees and water; but it does not tell us he was looking for a city. He never found a city for himself. Hebrews is figurative. While he was determining where to make his next step in that rocky, dry land with unpredictable, dangerous people, he was thinking about a world that is totally different, a world that perfectly reflects God. Hebrews 11 is telling us of people who saw through eyes of faith.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 describes what was going on with Elisha and Abraham: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

We can't avoid the world that we see, touch, hear, smell, and taste - we're not supposed to. But there's another world, a parallel universe, if you like to think that way, that is much more wonderful than even the best things in the seen physical universe, and it is just as present. It is unseen with eyes; it is seen only as we live by faith with God.

Our culture does not point us toward the wonderful unseen. We grow in our ability to live there through the Bible, prayer, obedience, and being with others who live there. The important question is not, "What's in your wallet?" but, "What are you looking at?"

-Jerry Enoch

Sheltered And Protected

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I will look to you for protection I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill His purpose for me.

Psalm 57:1-2 NLT

Last year I developed cancer and had to receive 45 doses of radiation to treat it. These verses are special to me because each day I got into the machine to receive the radiation I prayed these verses back to God. No matter what trial, problem or adversity we go through God's mercy, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and grace is sufficient to see us through. If we are faithful He will fulfill His purpose.

-Jim Trantham

Fear Not...I Am The Lord

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Isaiah 43:1b-3a

For years, my special Bible passage has been Isaiah 43:1b-3a. During a particularly turbulent time in my adult life, my sister asked me if I had a Life Verse that I could cling to, and I responded that I did not. She suggested that I ask God to lead me to such a verse, and told me that she also would pray with me about this. Within a few days, I came upon this passage in Isaiah which I felt was speaking specifically to my situation...and I believed this was the verse that God had provided to me (but I didn't mention it to anyone). Just a few days later, I received a greeting card in the mail from that same sister, and the verse imprinted on the card was none other than Isaiah 43:1-3!

I certainly felt this was confirmation of "my verse", and have held onto that conviction ever since. To me, these words are wisdom and hope that many can cling to during the rough times. Thank you, Lord!

-Becky Darby

Let It Be Known!

There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; then these men were brought before the king. Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Daniel 3:12-18 NASB

Let it be known! What a power statement. These three didn't need time to think or pray about their answer to the king. The king had asked them something that would go against everything they believed and know to be true. They stood their ground knowing that it's better to serve the one true God instead of a god substitute. They had a line that they would not cross - do you? The world is fine with us worshiping God - they have a problem when we say He is the one and only true God. We are all going to either face the fire or feel it's heat at some point in our lives for those who have put their trust in Jesus. You need to decide now, am I going to stand firm and serve the Lord or am I going to shrink away. Let it be known that as for me and my house we will serve the Lord! (Joshua 24:15b)

Set Your Mind

ROMANS 12:2 / ROMANS 8:5-7 / COLOSSIANS 3:2 / EPHESIANS 4:23

When we accept Christ as our savior, we become new creations who are transformed into a new way of living, thinking, acting. In order to live the victorious Christian life, we as believers need to change the way we think. We need to change or transform our minds. In ROMANS 12:2, Paul tells us to not be conformed to this world, but rather to be “transformed by the renewal of our mind.” (Ephesians 4:23) The renewal or transformation of our minds is a process in which we as believers begin to think differently in a new and right way as we meditate on God’s word and seek the Holy Spirit. We are different, changed. In the movie series TRANSFORMERS, small cars are changed into powerful warriors fighting evil forces. Instead of living defeated lives who still are influenced by the world, culture and our flesh, believers need to change (be transformed) into warriors for Christ by changing how we think as we live our lives! How do we do this?

Paul tells us in ROMANS 8:5-7, that we need to “set our minds” on the things of the spirit, not on the things of the flesh. Setting our minds on the flesh or the world is death. Continuously thinking about things characteristic of a fallen, sinful nature is to think the same way as the unbelieving world thinks. What are you continuously setting your mind on? Do you still think the same way you did prior to becoming a disciple of Christ? Or are you allowing your mind to be renewed so you can live according to the will of God. Our thinking should be opposite or upside down to the way the world thinks. It’s a radical new way of living!

COLOSSIANS 3:2 tells us since we have been raised with Christ, we should actively seek the things that are above. To do that we are told to “set our minds” on things that are above, not on things that are of this world.

Who is winning the battle for your mind? Are you setting your minds on the Spirit? Or are you still seeking the things of the flesh? In order to live a victorious Christian life, we need to stop thinking like we used to and to be transformed by the renewing of our mind so that we can discern what the true and perfect will of God is.

-Bill Seitz

God Provides

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Matthew 6:33

Putting God first in all aspects of our lives is how we show that we trust and follow Him. This seemingly straightforward verse reminds us that, as Christians, we are to seek God first in all areas of our life, family, work, finances, relationships. But do we?

The first thing that strikes me about this verse is the word "seek." When I reflect on my childhood, and playing hide and seek with my friends, the act of seeking the person who was hiding was very action oriented. You cannot find something hidden without going out and looking for it. This reminds me that as we go through life, we need to proactively pursue God's righteousness and seek His wisdom in all aspects of our lives and then be brave enough to trust Him.

Second, we need to know what we are seeking. We cannot find what we are looking for if we don't know what it is. This verse commands us to seek God and His righteousness. Simply put, we need to seek God's will in all our decisions...**All our decisions.** No request is too small for God. I firmly believe when we seek God in the small things God also covers the big things. When the desires, commands, teachings, of God come first and our will becomes secondary, then we are seeking His kingdom.

Finally, if we proactively seek the will of God in all we do, and then do it, there is a promise, "all of these things shall be added." What is added? All those things you need to survive and thrive in the world. You see God wants us to rely on Him, not ourselves. God wants us to put Him first, not ourselves. God wants to provide for us, as the good Father. If we seek to put God first in everything, God will provide everything according to His wisdom.

This verse challenges us everyday to put God first and then trust that His provision is perfect for us. Regardless of what is going on in others lives, regardless of what the world says, we must trust in God first. Are you seeking God's kingdom and righteousness in all areas of your life? Start today.

-Mark Parsons

"Itching Ears"

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts, shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned onto fables.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

Now, more than ever, it is easy to see the significance of this passage. In the modern world, at the touch of a finger, we can heap to ourselves teachers. After our own lusts, we can quickly discover any opinion, advice, commentary, or doctrine that fits neatly into the answer we desire.

I often turn to these verses when my own ears start to itch. It is a constant reminder that a trap is set before me of my own choosing; who I listen to, what I read, and any influence I allow in my life.

This warning from Paul is crucial for all believers. As we "keep our faith" and "fight, the good fight"(v.7), pray for wisdom and discernment. Pray the Holy Spirit guides, as you seek the truth, and resist the urge to scratch every itch. The humility required for this can be found in 1 Corinthians 2:2, when Paul says simply, *"For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."*

-Seth Carlton

Delight In The Lord

Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. -Psalm 37:4

This verse is my life verse and over the years the Lord has allowed it to take different shapes in my heart as I have studied it. When I was a new believer, I loved this verse because in a shallow sense, I thought it meant that if I was merely a believer in Jesus that God would give me the things that my heart desired. Being in college, that meant, debt-free school, money for shopping, a new car and eventually a job I would love and a man to marry.

As I grew in my relationship with Jesus, this verse began to take new life in my heart and I began to realize that as I studied His Word and spent time with Him, I grew in my love for the things He loved. He changed my desires to be for things He wanted me to have. He gave me joy in ministry, the singles group in which I was involved, and being an aunt to my nieces and nephews. Throughout whatever stage of life I was in, I saw that if God had me there, there was purpose for it and it was His desire for me to be there. But through some hardships in my life; feeling like a failure in ministry, the loss of my dad to cancer, broken relationships, and being single a lot longer than I had hoped, the Lord brought me to view this verse in a beautifully new, life-giving, not about me, way. He wanted me to know that struggles, trials, and hardships would come and through it all, as I delighted myself in Him, He would simply give me more of Himself...more of His character, His love, His grace, His Truth. He would make me speechless over His majesty and justice and that deep down, He is truly all my heart desires.

David writes this Psalm in his old age (Psalm 37:25), and I can't help but think of the angst he must have felt as he penned these words. The Psalm is written with the age-old question in mind, "Why do the wicked prosper, when godly people painfully struggle?" David had personally experienced this truth, and reminded the Israelites that no matter what comes their way in life, God Himself will fully satisfy every desire they have, even in their painful struggles. And God will make all things come to pass in His way and in His timing, as He sees fit. They can delight themselves in Him and He will reveal to them more of Himself, His character, and His Truth. Which is ultimately their deepest need. And no one can take that away from them, or us!

Tempted and Tried

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

Have you ever thought or even said aloud, "but you don't understand...." Hebrews 4:15 tells us that our High Priest, Jesus, understands us completely. Jesus understands our reality and what we are facing. I sometimes wonder how the disciples comprehended that the man who walked beside them was also fully God. On the contrary, I sometimes struggle to see Jesus as fully man who experienced emotions, hunger, exhaustion and, yes, even temptation.

How is this encouraging? Well, we all like to be understood. In fact, there is no part of our lives we can keep hidden from Him. "Fully known and fully loved" as one contemporary Christian artist puts it. The fact that Jesus overcame temptation gives us a role model as we go through our own trials. Jesus responded to temptation with Scripture. I can do that! Hebrews 4:15 also reminds us that Jesus remained "without sin". He is the perfect sacrifice to intercede on our behalf and pay for our sins. He is the only way to God. On our own we will always fall short. That is why salvation is such a gift – we cannot earn it or achieve it on our own.

-Debbie Francey

Rejoice Always

Rejoice always, pray with out ceasing, give thanks in everything for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always...As a child, always laughing, smiling, and finding joy.

Rejoice always...Focusing on the things the Lord has here for us to enjoy.

Rejoice always...Seeing all He is through creation and His amazing wonderful love for us.

Rejoice always...Praying and giving thanks in all things.

Living through Christ Jesus we have a freedom that is like no other...to communicate with our heavenly Father who hears our voice. What a joy to know that we can pray without ceasing and He hears our every word.

As His children, we are all unique. No two voices *rejoicing, praying or giving thanks* are the same, and yet He hears and desires them all. Paul tells us, "for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." When I think about the Master of all, powerful and mighty, inviting us with open arms, through the Holy Spirit, to experience His amazing love in the shed blood of His Son Jesus, **how can we not Rejoice, Pray, and Give Thanks.** He loves All, shed his blood for All, and gave His Son for All to be saved.

Lord : help me to seek you, pray and give thanks

-Joe Taber

Fear No Evil

The lack of trust in God made me live in fear. That insecurity, caused by fear, not only robbed me of peace, but also anguished me and kept me awake at night. But I learned that a child of God must live trusting in the love He has for His children. **God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him.** So wrote the apostle John in his 1st letter 4:16. Also, he adds in verse 18a: ***In love there is no fear, but perfect love casts out fear...***

Surely you have confidence in someone who you know will hardly fail you. However, if there is one thing I am sure of, it is that sooner or later they all fail. A little or a lot, everyone fails at some point. Why not have absolute confidence in He who never fails?

If we want to eradicate fear from our lives we must trust God completely. He never fails: ***He is the one who holds us by His right hand.*** God accompanies us during the darkest trials. But remember that God does not say that we will not face difficulties in this life.

Now I'm sure of this: *Even though I walk through valleys of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for God will be with me; His rod and His staff will give me confidence.*
Psalm 23:4.

How grateful I am to God for his blessed Word. For in it, I found these words of encouragement, of peace and security. And I hope they will bless you too. May it be so in the mighty name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

-Andres Villalpando

Firmly Planted

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

Psalms 1:4

I've heard it said before that having a vision for your life is like having a picture of what you want your life to look like in the future. I'm a firm believer in the power of a picture and I'm so grateful God gives us so many wonderful word pictures in Scripture. If you were to ask me what picture the Lord is using most in my life, at this stage of my life, it would have to be the picture of this tree. There is seldom a day that goes by that I do not think about this illustration and ask the Lord to conform my life to its image. Why you ask? Because this is what the Lord wants to do in every person's life who is seeking to follow Him. He wants our lives:

- Growing... because we are being nourished by the water of God's Word as we delight and meditate on it.
- Fruitful... because only as we abide in Jesus will we bear fruit. Jesus said that the Father is glorified when we bear much fruit.
- Stable... because unlike the chaff, which the wind drives away, there is only one place of stability for any life. And that place is on the rock of Jesus Christ.
- Prosperous... because no matter the trial or difficult circumstance, God's purposes will be accomplished through us as we plant our life in His truth.

I know my life is a work in progress and although at times I get discouraged, I am reminded of the verse that says *"it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* I am trusting in the "growing" process knowing that as I delight myself in His word, He is making me into a tree that not only brings Glory to my Lord and Savior Jesus, but also blesses every person in my life who experiences the fruit of its branches.

-Lowell Lucas

Mind Your Words

So also, the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

James 3:5-10

James 3:5-10 is a daily guide for me that I try to get right. Words once spoken can never be taken back. Sure, we can ask to be forgiven but the damage will always be there. Growing up I have heard words and been called names that I will never forget. I heard them from classmates, the community and yes, at times, family. Although I did not grow up in a Christian home I tried not to be harsh with my words because I knew personally how it felt. In saying that, I didn't always get it right and messed up.

When I became a believer of Jesus and started reading scripture, the book of James became a wonderful guide for me and a reminder of how evil the tongue can be. My daily desire is to put into practice these words in James 3:5-10 by reading it every day. What a difference it makes when I have not been in the Word to start my day. My prayer every morning is that the Lord guide my tongue and to keep me from saying anything that is displeasing to Him.

Father God, may Your Word become real to me and others daily that we may live a life pleasing to You. And may You only receive the praise and glory that You alone deserve. In Jesus Name Amen.

-Gloria Delay

Finish Well

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Acts 20:24

In this, the apostle Paul shows us a life fully devoted to God's calling. Paul was headed to Jerusalem and confident that he would face hostility to both the gospel message and him the messenger. Confident in the Lord, he declares that his life holds no value unless he completes the mission Christ entrusted to him—to testify to the gospel of God's grace. This profound statement challenges us to reconsider what we view as valuable in our own lives. Rather than pursuing personal success, comfort, or even safety, Paul's singular focus is to fulfill his God-given purpose.

This passage invites us to examine our own priorities. Are we driven by temporary achievements, or are we dedicated to the eternal mission of spreading the gospel? Paul's willingness to face hardship and even death in order to share the good news of Christ reminds us that our lives find true meaning when lived for God's purpose. May we embrace this same boldness and commitment, trusting in God's grace as we seek to glorify Him in all we do.

Enjoy the journey!

-Jay Gibson

