

## Weep with Those Who Weep

*Jesus wept. John 11:35*

The story of Lazarus in John 11 shows us a range of emotions people can feel in times of loss. Martha expressed frustration that Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus but chose not to. But we see a strong reaction on His part in verse 33: when Jesus saw everyone crying, “a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled” (NLT). And finally, the most powerful emotion in this story: *Jesus wept*. Even though Jesus knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead and that the story would have a joyful ending, He took time to allow those around Him to mourn what was lost.

People are experiencing loss all around us. As I write this, we are in our second week of quarantine from the coronavirus. Schools, libraries, parks, restaurants are all closed. Seniors in high school have lost the experience of their prom, spring sports, and final performances. There is a loss of paychecks, social outings, and jobs.

We are in this for the long haul. On some days we will need to be real about our discouragement and fears. On others we will be the one to send cheery cards and texts to our loved ones and remind them that Jesus has this. And on others we will need to be like Jesus and simply weep with those who are sad as they process loss and change.

Just like Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He will raise us out of this present bewildering time. Until then, take heart in these words: “Don’t be afraid,” he said, “for you are very precious to God. Peace! Be encouraged! Be strong!” (Daniel 10:19 NLT).

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 18:1-20:20  
 Luke 9:28-50  
 Psalm 73:1-28  
 Proverbs 12:10

Friday, April 3

## A Time to Love One Another – 2

*If my head were a flowing spring, my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night over the slain of my dear people. Jeremiah 9:1 CSB*

I know from numerous Bible passages that I’m supposed to care for those around me. My problem is that I don’t always want to. But I’m learning to cultivate a heart for people so that I *really do care about others*.

Besides knowing the heart of God in His Word, I also work on this attitude by praying about it. I ask God to melt my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh so that I can feel. I ask God for *His* attitude to His lost sheep. I pray for emotional endurance to feel for people for longer than I have in the past. I stretch my heart in prayer. I also pray for individuals and have an app on my phone that reminds me each morning to pray for people.

Finally, I make myself be with people and listen to them. People are messy, and it takes patience in order to connect with them. But when I know what’s going on in their lives I can feel empathy and put myself in their place. Doing this loops me back into the heart of God in His word and prayer.

I have had to do this for a long, long time, and I can tell you that it works.

I love people. Maybe not as much as I should, but I discipline myself to work towards it. This is God’s heart for me as He makes me more like Himself. And it’s God’s heart towards others as I get to be His hands, feet, and heart towards those that I run into every day.

God wants you to love people. Do it little by little, and you’ll love more and more. On certain holidays God’s love is especially on display. But let’s work on it the rest of the days too. Let it be on display through you.

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Deuteronomy 23:1-25:19  
 Luke 10:13-37  
 Psalm 75:1-10  
 Proverbs 12:12-14

## A Time to Love One Another

*The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:39 CSB*

I don’t really love people very much. I’m an introvert with a critical attitude who can be sarcastic. I am not the life of the party.

But I know from numerous Bible passages that I’m supposed to care for those around me: from the homeless guy on the corner to the neighbor living next to me, from those in prison to the fatherless and the widow. Then you get into all the “one another” verses for the church, and you get piled on by direct commands to look out for, guard, sacrifice for, be patient with, and put their interests ahead of your own!

But what if I don’t want to?

If I don’t want to, then I don’t want the things of God. It’s as simple as that.

OK, so I *do* want the things of God. What now?

I need to cultivate a heart for people so that I *really do care* about those around me.

I cultivate this attitude through knowing the heart of God in His word. I read the verses. I memorize the verses. I meditate on the verses—rolling them around in my mind. I share the verses with other people. I return to the verses. I know God’s heart for people because I have made myself pre-occupied with it: “*The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9 CSB).

This is God’s heart towards people—He wants all to come to repentance. Is this your heart towards people?

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Deuteronomy 21:1-22:30  
 Luke 9:51-10:12  
 Psalm 74:1-23  
 Proverbs 12:11

Saturday, April 4

## What a Waste!

*A woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table. But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, “Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.” Matthew 26:7-9*

If you’re going to waste your life, time, or money on something, what better place to “waste” it than on Jesus? Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper. Bethany was also the town of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, and his sisters, Mary and Martha. During dinner Mary poured a vial of very costly perfume over the head and feet of Jesus. This perfume, valued at about a year’s wages, was undoubtedly a special treasure for Mary. Unmarried women in her day had little, if any, way of earning an honest income. It may have been the only security she had should her brother, Lazarus, pass away again. But she took this treasure and poured it out on Jesus as an act of extravagant love and gratitude. The disciples didn’t understand this. They had a more practical, utilitarian view of how Mary should spend her money. Perhaps they had recently attended a Christian financial seminar in which they were warned against impulse spending. Or perhaps it was just Judas raising a stink because he was secretly greedy. Whatever the reason, they judged how Mary “wasted” her treasure on Jesus. Of course, Jesus saw things differently. Mary didn’t even realize what she was doing, but Jesus knew she was anointing His body for burial. And rather than judge her extravagant, reckless expenditure, He praised her for it. He even prophesied that her simple act of love and gratitude performed quietly in the small village of Bethany would be proclaimed throughout history wherever the gospel went forth. And although He didn’t say so, it will be remembered throughout eternity as well, for of all the things you can waste your life on, it’s never a “waste” if it’s given to Jesus!

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Deuteronomy 26:1-27:26  
 Luke 10:38-11:13  
 Psalm 76:1-12  
 Proverbs 12:15-17

## Extravagant

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son . . . John 3:16 NIV*

When I was growing up, my favorite TV show was *The Monkees*. In case that doesn't ring a bell, it was a comedy about a young rock band. They would act crazy, help people, and sing catchy songs. They played electric guitars, and, because of the Monkees, I fell in love with electric guitars. I had to have one.

I started strategically bugging my parents for a guitar. Kind of like what Ralphie did in the movie *The Christmas Story* when he wanted a Red Ryder air rifle.

Finally, at twelve, I received the most valuable gift I had ever seen. My dad gave me an electric guitar from the Sears catalog. The guitar was red with black edges and came with a small amplifier. It cost about \$60 which in 1971 was serious money (close to \$400 today). When I first held that guitar in my hands, I saw two things. I saw the instrument I dreamed about, and I saw my dad loved me. His extravagance proved it.

To this day nothing can take the place of that first guitar in my heart. It was the best. I learned how to play on it. I used it in my sixth grade talent show. When I was older, I gave it to a neighborhood friend who wanted it just as badly as I had. Part of me wishes I still had it, but the memory is enough.

The Bible says that God loves us, but how do we know? Sometimes when facing pain in our lives, we wonder if God loves us. When you need a reminder, look away from your troubles and pain, and lift your eyes to the cross. His gift to us.

His extravagant gift to us.

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Deuteronomy 28:1-68  
 Luke 11:14-36  
 Psalm 77:1-20  
 Proverbs 12:18

Tuesday, April 7

## I'll Not Be a Judas

*Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus. Matthew 26:14-16*

**Betrayal. It's such an ugly word.** I can't think of many things worse to be accused of than to be a betrayer. I can think of nothing worse than to betray Jesus Christ. *This is the word by which Judas Iscariot will be remembered throughout time and eternity.*

We're told that the night Jesus was betrayed, Satan entered Judas. There could be legitimate debate on whether or not Judas was evil from the "get go," but by the end of his three years with Jesus, *he was definitely on the devil's side. What happened to Judas? It's worth considering in order to guard against a similar betrayal of our Lord on our part.*

*Was it greed?* We're told that Judas used to pilfer from the moneybox (John 12:6). Perhaps this shows he was insincere and willfully sinning all along. *Was it unfulfilled expectations?* We know some of the disciples were hoping for places of honor in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:35-38). Perhaps Judas flipped on Jesus when he realized he wasn't going to get what he hoped for. *Was it simply that he was spiritually vulnerable,* and Satan was able to overcome him at an opportune time? He certainly wouldn't be the first to succumb to overwhelming spiritual pressure.

Whatever the cause, *Judas serves as a warning to each of us to carefully guard our own hearts lest we, too, do the unthinkable.* But also, we must ask God to give us a discerning eye to properly evaluate those to whom we entrust ourselves. Great teams talk of how they have a brotherhood of trust of one another. I pray I'll be loyal to God, my family, my church, and my fellow-workers in the gospel. I ask God to unite me with similarly loyal servants of God. I trust you will be one as well!

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Deuteronomy 31:1-32:27  
 Luke 12:8-34  
 Psalm 78:32-55  
 Proverbs 12:21-23

## An Easter Thought: Judas versus Mary

*"She has done what she could; she has anointed my body in advance for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. Mark 14:8-10 CSB*

My family and I have developed an Easter tradition where we open a little box each day of Holy Week with an item in it that represents part of the story, and we read the corresponding scripture.

Yesterday the box held a miniature glass flask, and we read a section of Mark. The Gospel of Mark puts Mary's anointing of Jesus right in the middle of Judas's betrayal and the plot to kill Jesus. Mark communicates the narrative in this way in order to make a point.

The world is a faithless place where frustrated people will do anything they can to get ahead and salvage a bad situation. Jesus didn't fit into the framework of what the Messiah would be like held by Judas or the religious leaders. He was messing up their plans, and they weren't going to stand for it. They took matters into their own hands. In their minds it probably made sense to step up, take advantage of the situation, make the hard decision, and do what needed to be done. They even may have felt led by God to choose what they did and told each other, "I feel a peace about following this course of action, it makes sense."

But Mary did what did not make sense. She poured out perfume worth the wages of a year of a workman's life in a minute. Then it was gone. It could not be gathered again. Why does Jesus make a point to tell her that this will be told throughout the world? Because she seems, in faith, to understand that the Gospel is about suffering and sacrifice.

The Gospel is not about our agenda. I am challenged to live a life of faith even if from the outside it doesn't make sense.

How will you live today?

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Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20  
 Luke 11:37-12:7  
 Psalm 78:1-31  
 Proverbs 12:19-20

Wednesday, April 8

## What did Jesus Dread Most about the Cross?

*And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." Matthew 26:39*

The agonizing prayer of our Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is one of the most heart-breaking, gut-wrenching scenes in Scripture. Pouring our His heart to His Father, alone while His closest friends nodded off to sleep, Jesus prayed that "this cup" might pass from Him. What was "this cup" of which He spoke? Was it the loneliness of being abandoned by His disciples? Was it the emotional pain of being falsely accused at His trial? Was it the mockery and ridicule of the Roman soldiers? Was it the physical pain of scourging and having nails driven through His hands and feet? I think "the cup" was something more painful, more dreadful, than all of these horrors. Other Scripture may help us to understand: "For thus the Lord, the God of Israel, says to me, 'Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand'" (Jeremiah 25:15; see also Psalm 75:8 and Revelation 14:10.)

Yes, "the cup" that Jesus was to drink was to personally bear the wrath of God mixed in the full strength of His anger. When our Savior took our sins upon Himself, He would then bear the anger of God in full measure. For Jesus didn't just die for a few sins; He died for the sins of the world. Jesus knew it would be a heavy load to bear; His struggle to avoid it was real. Still He prayed, "Not My will, but Thine be done." The good news is the great exchange that took place when Jesus drank this cup. On the cross, Jesus took our sin and gave us His righteousness! And because our debt has been paid in full, we are no longer under the wrath of God. We are free, forgiven, justified! How awesome that while others slept in the Garden, Jesus found the strength to submit to His Father.

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Deuteronomy 32:28-52  
 Luke 12:35-59  
 Psalm 78:56-64  
 Proverbs 12:24

## The Last Became the First

*But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. Luke 22:26*

Jesus' time on earth was nearing its end. He coincided His final days with the Passover celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, the Jewish month falling between March and April of the Gregorian calendar. Jesus prepared to celebrate the sacred Passover with His disciples. It had been celebrated for nearly 1500 years at the time of Christ and dated back to Moses and the time he led Israel out of Egypt. The night before the Israelites' exodus, God instructed that a lamb be slain and its blood painted above the door of each believer's home. With that faithful act the angel of death "passed over" the homes of the faithful and saved them from the last of ten plagues inflicted upon Pharaoh, the death of the first-born son. Jesus became the ultimate Passover lamb that fateful week. His death became His disciples' death payment. For believers, it was to be the last Jewish Passover and the first Lord's Supper.

Because of that act of selfless love, in obedience to the Father, even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:8), Christ was exalted by the Father who has bestowed upon Him the name which is above every name "so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

Whereas people esteem titles and pedigree, *in God's economy selfless love is most valued*. It took His disciples (and us) some time to understand that. Even as Jesus was preparing for His imminent death, they were arguing about who would be considered the greatest among them. Among His final words, Jesus taught His disciples that the greatest among them would be the greatest servant of all.

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 Deuteronomy 33:1-29  
 Luke 13:1-21  
 Psalm 78:65-72  
 Proverbs 12:25

Saturday, April 11

## He Prayed for You

*The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. Luke 22:61*

Hours earlier Peter had professed his willingness to die for Jesus. Jesus, knowing the future, knew that Peter would deny Him; He told Peter that before the cock crowed, he would deny Him three times. We know Peter denied Jesus more than three times: to a servant girl (Matthew 26:69-70), to a different servant girl (Matthew 26:71), to bystanders in general (Matthew 26:73-74), to a man (Luke 22:58), to another man (Luke 22:59-60), to a slave of the high priest (John 18:26). At what point the cock crowed, we're not sure. But it was after the second man in Luke 22:59-60 that Jesus looked at Peter after his denial, causing Peter to weep bitterly.

Turning in fear from the Lord was a decision that immediately crushed Peter. Satan's request to "sift" Peter was granted. His regret for disloyalty, backsliding, and cowardice undoubtedly plagued Peter for days, even with the Lord's promise given him during the Last Supper, "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Jesus must have reminded Peter of this promise when meeting with Peter after His resurrection (John 21:15-17).

We too have regrets, some of which lead to serious consequences. It's good to know that, as He did for Peter, just hours before Peter denied Him, *Jesus prayed for us*. His prayer is sometimes called "The High Priestly Prayer," and we read in John 17:20 who Jesus was praying for: "I do not ask on behalf of these alone [the twelve during the Last Supper], but for those also who believe in Me through their word" [you and me!]. When you are tempted to despair over regrets, never forget: He prayed for you.

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One-Year Bible Reading  
 Joshua 3:1-4:24  
 Luke 14:7-35  
 Psalm 80:1-19  
 Proverbs 12:27-28

## One Gave All

*And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Luke 22:41-42*

The Fourth of July veterans' float proudly displayed their motto, "All gave some. Some gave all." Christians could say, "All gave nothing. One gave all." In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus knew the torture which lay ahead. He prayed fervently that the "cup" would pass Him by but resolved He only wanted God's will to be done.

Under the intense stress, Jesus' sweat gland capillaries began to burst, a condition known as *hematidrosis*. Only Luke, the physician, reported this. *Hematidrosis* by itself causes weakness, shock, and possible death. Jesus was taken from the Garden to the Sanhedrin, where He was struck across the face. He was then blindfolded, spat upon, and taunted by the soldiers. By morning Jesus was battered, bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night. He then appeared before Pontius Pilate and Herod. Herod returned Jesus to Pilate who then released *Bar-Abbas* ("Son of the Father") and condemned Jesus (the true Son of the Father). Jesus was stripped of His clothing and scourged. Scourging involved a short whip consisting of heavy, leather straps with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. Blood oozed and then spurting, as the balls penetrated into arteries. A thorny crown was pressed into His head as soldiers taunted Him. He then carried the horizontal portion of His cross to Golgotha. One nail was driven through each foot's arch and one through each wrist. On top of the physical torture was the emotional and spiritual pain of dying for the sins of mankind. His separation from His Father brought forth His cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" This was the "cup" Christ endured for us.

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Deuteronomy 34:1-Joshua 2:24  
 Luke 13:22-14:6  
 Psalm 79:1-13  
 Proverbs 12:26

Sunday, April 12

## Paid in Full!

*... having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:14*

It is through the Cross—the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ—that our moral and spiritual debt has been paid in full. In our sin we were in debt to God, under condemnation, and headed for eternal judgment.

But through the Cross of Christ, our certificate of debt has been cancelled, or literally "wiped out." The "certificate of debt" is the charge against us that we had every time we broke God's Law. This is no small thing—imagine how many times you and I have broken and actually continue to break God's Law. One infraction was heinous enough to put us under God's judgment for all eternity, let alone the many times that we have failed to obey the Law of God.

However, Jesus' death cancels out our debt. The word "cancels" actually means to "wipe out" or "wipe away." Because of the Cross my debt is paid in full and forever wiped away! I now have complete and total forgiveness from God Himself. Now I can live in fellowship with Him forever!

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Joshua 5:1-7:15  
 Luke 15:1-32  
 Psalm 81:1-16  
 Proverbs 13:1

## Find a Peter and Get Behind Him!

... you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. Luke 22:32

**I love Peter! He was a man of action!** He wasn't going to get stuck doing nothing in life. Sure he failed, and he failed spectacularly. But *Jesus must have seen something in him* because He entrusted him with incredible responsibility. And, *ultimately, Peter succeeded—spectacularly!*

Just hours before Peter had boldly proclaimed that he would never deny Jesus, even if everyone else did and even if it cost him his life. Jesus curbed his enthusiasm and delivered the sad prophecy that before the cock crowed he would deny Him three times. As we all know, Jesus' word came to pass. Shockingly, *Peter cowered in fear* before a lowly slave girl.

*Have you ever wondered how Peter went from being a bold supporter of Jesus to such a coward in a matter of hours? Peter was in good company when he made the first pledge.* Surrounded by disciples and Jesus Himself, Peter could be confident and bold. But when he denied Jesus, notice how he was vastly outnumbered by unbelievers. He was **alone**, and *being alone can make a coward of even the strongest person.*

I encourage you, like Peter, to make great commitments to God and then figure out how to keep them. *One way to keep big commitments is to get around others making big commitments as well.* Be encouraged by other people's faith and encourage them by yours. Run with winners!

But may I also offer another practical suggestion? Peter was a leader. *Leadership can be lonely.* People are quick to criticize leaders. Many leaders have no one with whom they can share their personal struggles. So find yourself a "Peter" and encourage him in the Lord. Let him know you're standing with him. Tell him you support him and believe in him. Discover the big commitments he's made and help pray him on to victory. If you're a "Peter," rise up! We need you to lead us and we will follow!

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Joshua 7:16-9:2  
 Luke 16:1-18  
 Psalm 82:1-8  
 Proverbs 13:2-3

Wednesday, April 15

## Crucified the Flesh

*And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:24 ESV*

There are essentially two ways to live: to live according to the flesh or to live according to the Spirit. (Read Galatians 5:13-23 and Romans 8:1-17). For those in Christ, there is no other way to really live other than to choose to live according to the Spirit. This means to first choose to live no longer according to the passions and desires of our sinful, self-centered tendencies and proclivities.

We choose the way of the Cross: to put to death "the deeds of the body" and to choose to live under the influence and leadership of the Holy Spirit. (Also read Colossians 3:1-17).

As those in Christ, we must no longer set our minds on things on earth, that is, the world's values, the temporal pursuits of life, getting our own way, or looking for meaning and significance in the "stuff" of this world. We find our meaning and significance now when we look at Christ and the things above, which will not perish, rust, or be stolen. Our identity, our significance, and our purpose are no longer defined by the here and now, but by the Lord God Almighty Himself.

Crucifixion is not comfortable nor easy, but it is essential in following Christ and growing up in Him. Notice that this is a deliberate and ongoing choice that the follower of Jesus Christ has made. Just as Jesus chose the Cross, so must we, if we want to follow Him. If we choose not to, then we cannot be followers of His.

The reason why we would chose to do this is because we belong to Him; no longer do we belong to the course of this world.

So, this day, I say no to the flesh and yes to Christ.

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Joshua 11:1-12:24  
 Luke 17:11-37  
 Psalm 84:1-12  
 Proverbs 13:5-6

## Pontius Pilate

*You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him. Luke 23:14-16 NIV*

1995 is riveted in the minds of many Americans as the year OJ Simpson stood trial for murdering his ex-wife and her friend. His trial drew national attention. Jesus' trial under Pilate has drawn worldwide attention for two millennium.

Who was Pilate? He was the one who condemned Jesus. As the Apostles' Creed teaches, "I believe in Jesus Christ . . . He suffered under Pontius Pilate." Tacitus, Josephus, Philo, and Eusebius wrote about some of the cruel atrocities Pilate committed. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, however, reveal a different side of Pilate during Jesus' trial. The gospels depict a Pilate who repeatedly tried to release Jesus, knowing Him to be an innocent man and having been warned by his wife, Procla, to have nothing to do with the "righteous man," Jesus. In the end, Pilate reluctantly consented to follow the demands of Jewish elders and washed his hands in front of them to symbolize he was free of Jesus' blood. The Jewish leaders said that Jesus' blood would be upon them and their children.

Though there is uncertainty in knowing Pilate's end, we can say that October 27 is Procla's Day in the Orthodox church, the day they honor their canonized saint, Procla, Pilate's wife. The Ethiopian church recognized June 25 as Saint Pilate and Saint Procla's Day, for one of the earliest church fathers claimed that Pilate had become a Christian.

We can deny Him—Peter did; condemn Him—Pilate did; disobey Him—who hasn't?—but there is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared (Psalm 130). May His blood be upon us for our forgiveness!

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Joshua 9:3-10:43  
 Luke 16:19-17:10  
 Psalm 83:1-18  
 Proverbs 13:4

Thursday, April 16

## The Thief on the Cross

*Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." Luke 23:42-43 NKJV*

He may be the most famous, nameless person in the Bible, the Thief on the Cross. In Luke's account the thief begs Jesus for forgiveness. In Matthew and Mark's accounts, however, we read that, initially, both thieves reviled Jesus. Most suggest that, as they hung on the crosses, one thief repented and came to faith in Christ. The other thief remained unrepentant until his death. The one thief came to a remarkable faith in a short time! He turned and asked Jesus to remember him when He entered His kingdom. He believed the sign above Jesus' head—*King of the Jews*—and believed Jesus was returning to His kingdom (which presupposes that he believed Jesus would rise from the dead and had the power to raise him as well). Jesus' response was immediate. What joy it must have brought Jesus to say, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." Paradise is the dwelling place of God! That thief was en route to enter God's presence within a few hours.

Salvation has nothing to do with being baptized or receiving sacraments. The thief never partook of the Lord's Supper, nor was he baptized. He never went to a meeting. This thief had not done many good works. (He even admitted to the other thief that they both deserved the death penalty.) This thief did, however, confess his faith in the presence of a hostile crowd and amidst taunts and jeers of rulers and soldiers. The story of the thief on the cross is a story showing us that salvation is conditioned solely upon repentance and faith in Jesus.

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Joshua 13:1-14:15  
 Luke 18:1-17  
 Psalm 85:1-13  
 Proverbs 13:7-8

## The Gospel and Obedience

*What matters is keeping the commandments of God. 1 Corinthians 7:19*

It has always been God's desire that man would obey God. Throughout the Bible, God puts a great emphasis on obedience. This is not just an Old Testament message. It is also a New Testament message as the above verse demonstrates. Consider the following New Testament verses that speak of obedience.

First we hear from the gospel writer, John: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but *he who does not obey the Son will not see life*, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36; italics added).

Paul carries this theme in Romans: "Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (1:5). "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of *obedience resulting in righteousness?*" (6:16). "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in *the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed*" (15:18). "But [the mystery] now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to *obedience of faith*" (16:26; all italics added).

In other epistles Paul and Peter are equally clear: "For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are *obedient in all things*" (2 Corinthians 2:9). "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, *to be obedient*, to be ready for every good deed" (Titus 3:1). "As *obedient children*, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance" (1 Peter 1:14; italics added in verses).

Bottom line, God wants us to believe Him and to obey Him.

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Joshua 15:1-63  
Luke 18:18-43  
Psalm 86:1-17  
Proverbs 13:9-10

Sunday, April 19

## The Gospel and Obedience – 3

*She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. Matthew 1:21*

God's desire has been that man would worship and obey God. In the Old Testament God promised to bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3), and that all the earth would worship God (Psalm 22:27-29). He also promised a Messiah who would fulfill God's purposes.

The gospel message is this: Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's plan to bless all men. Jesus is the last Adam who came to take away the sin of the world and to restore what the first Adam lost. Consider these verses: "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost" (Luke 19:10). "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Jesus came to forgive us of our sins. We are justified, not by our works but by His grace, through faith. God will judge every man according to his deeds (Romans 2:6), and no one will be with God who does not voluntarily choose to believe Him. But the good news is that Christ came to take away our sins, to bring everything under God's authority. Jesus came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29) so that men will obey God. To those who believe Him He gives the Holy Spirit who empowers us to do what is pleasing to Him (Philippians 2:13).

Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" Jesus came to restore what was lost through Adam so that man would worship and obey God. This is the gospel story.

If this is Jesus' mission, what then is our mission? We will look at this tomorrow.

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Joshua 19:1-20:9  
Luke 19:28-48  
Psalm 88:1-18  
Proverbs 13:12-14

## The Gospel and Obedience – 2

*In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Genesis 12:3*

How does this "keeping the commandments of God," our obedience which we talked about yesterday, relate to the gospel? It has always been God's desire that man obey Him. But Adam sinned and all of his descendants have disobeyed God.

However, God gave us some good news—that He would bless all the families of the earth. This is the good news promise He made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. It is a promise that He states five times in the book of Genesis (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).

Later God explains how this blessing would be manifested. Consider these verses from Psalms: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and *all the families of the nations shall worship before You*. For the kingdom is the Lord's and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship, and all those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, even he who cannot keep his soul alive" (Psalm 22:27-29). "*All the nations You have made shall come and worship before You*, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name" (Psalm 86:9). "*All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You*, O Lord, when they have heard the words of Your mouth" (Psalm 138:4). "*All flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever*" (Psalm 145:21; italics added in verses above).

The point is this: The good news promise is that God, who loves obedience, would bless the world with His grace. This blessing of God would result in a world that worships and obeys God.

But how would this come about? Tomorrow we learn the answer.

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Joshua 16:1-18:28  
Luke 19:1-27  
Psalm 87:1-7  
Proverbs 13:11

Monday, April 20

## The Gospel and Obedience – 4

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20*

It has always been God's desire that men obey God. God promised that He would bring men into obedience through a Messiah. Jesus is that Messiah, the One who came to take away the sin of the world. Now we have a mission—to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ so that men will obey God.

This is what Jesus taught in the Great Commission. We are to proclaim the good news to all (Mark 16:15), making disciples who obey God (Matthew 28:19-20). Paul says the same in Romans 1:5: "Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake."

Our mission is not simply to give people a "ticket to heaven." Our mission is to proclaim Christ to all mankind so that they would be forgiven of their sins by His grace, receive His Spirit, come under God's authority, and obey Him.

By God's grace we who have believed the gospel are the firstfruits of a greater harvest—that harvest being all mankind worshipping God as promised in the Old Testament. Our mission is to bring about the obedience of faith among all (Romans 1:5). Our task is not finished until every person walks in faith and love towards God and man, obeying God in all things as Jesus Christ restores all that was lost through Adam.

What a wonderful gospel! What a wonderful mission! What a wonderful God we serve!

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Joshua 21:1-22:20  
Luke 20:1-26  
Psalm 89:1-13  
Proverbs 13:15-16

## Staying Tight with One Another

*Now you are Christ's body and individually members of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27*

Most of my readers live in a Western culture where we have a big emphasis on individualism. Sometimes this individualism conflicts with Biblical values. Today's topic may be one of those times.

The Bible teaches that we who have trusted Christ as our Lord and Savior are part of "the body of Christ." This term draws upon the metaphor of the human body. There's a head (Christ) and many members. The "members" of the body refers to you and me. A significant aspect of my identity in Christ is that I am vitally linked to my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ—as vitally linked as my arm is to the rest of my body!

Do you think this way? Most of us don't. We emphasize our "personal relationship" with Christ. But the reality of our love for God is often tested by whether or not we love His children, our fellow Christians.

Colossians 2:19 talks about the necessity of "holding fast to the head" (Christ) so that we might "grow with a growth that is from God." How do we "hold fast to the head"? I used to think it was by spending time reading my Bible and praying. But the context here teaches that we stay connected to the head by staying connected to the rest of the body! My hand stays connected to my head by being connected to my arm, which is connected to my torso, which is connected to my neck, which is connected to my head. The metaphor holds true in our Christian lives as well. We stay tight with Jesus as we stay tight with one another.

How do we stay tight with one another? We love one another. Love is the perfect bond of unity (Colossians 3:14). Love forgives. Love believes the best. Love serves. Love is humble. Love apologizes. Love your brothers and sisters in Christ and accept their love for you. By doing so, you will hold onto Christ and grow with a growth that is from God!

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Joshua 22:21-23:16  
 Luke 20:27-47  
 Psalm 89:14-37  
 Proverbs 13:17-19

Thursday, April 23

## The Amazing Love of the King

*I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:17-19 CSB*

In our church one Sunday we talked about proclaiming Jesus as the king each and every day with the choices that we make. We also talked about how God helps us do that. We're not supposed to fight that fight alone.

That should all be set against a backdrop that we *didn't* get to talk about much: "See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children—and we are!" (1 John 3:1 CSB).

The truth is that our king loves us and even more so because we are His children! To be a son or daughter of the king puts us into such a different position than merely subjects proclaiming their faith.

Following a loving king means that there is connection between us. He is not distant and impersonal, but instead He is warm and concerned. He knows and cares about every detail of our lives.

Following a king who is your father means that He passes on His attributes to us. His very Spirit is with us, bringing conviction when we sin, comfort when we hurt, and strength when we fight.

The love of our Father God is . . . mind-boggling!

I pray for you, along with the apostle Paul the prayer above from Ephesians 3. I pray that you, rooted and established in love, may be able to understand the enormity of God's love "so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

Be filled with all the fullness of God!

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Judges 1:1-2:9  
 Luke 21:29-22:13  
 Psalm 90:1-91:16  
 Proverbs 13:24-25

## My Inheritance

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12-13 ESV*

As remarkable as it seems, through belief in Jesus, we become children of God. We are not some kind of second-class, unwanted, and unloved children. We are not children in name only. Rather we are born of God.

One way to gauge the depth of this relationship is to look at our inheritance. Typically, an inheritance goes only to the children of a parent. It is possible for it to go to other extremely close relations, but it certainly doesn't go to contrived relationships. One might think that Jesus would be the sole inheritor of the kingdom of God, but not so! We are coheirs with Christ!

This inheritance is based on our sonship that begins when we first believe in His name. This inheritance is not based upon our performance, but our relationship. I've received two inheritances in my life—one as a grandson and another as a nephew—but I've never gotten one for being a nice guy.

The same is true in my relationship with God. My inheritance is not based upon being the best child or even being a good child. Rather it is just for being *His* child: "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14 ESV).

Praise God! My inheritance is based on being a child of God. It is sealed. It is secure. It is guaranteed!

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Joshua 24:1-33  
 Luke 21:1-28  
 Psalm 89:38-52  
 Proverbs 13:20-23

Friday, April 24

## Tattooed

*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:13-14*

People get tattoos for a number of reasons, one of which is to signify a group or a person they belong to. For the Christian, there's no need to do so, for God Himself has put a mark upon us that identifies that we are His and His forever.

How does this happen?

Upon hearing the gospel message, having also believed it, you and I were sealed with the Holy Spirit. To be "sealed" means God has put His mark upon us. It's the same idea as when a Roman official would press his signet ring into soft wax. The ring would leave an impression, and the wax would harden. This was his seal. Likewise, God has set His seal upon us that marks us as His own. That seal is the indwelling Holy Spirit.

When is the Holy Spirit given to us? According to this verse, it's when we hear the gospel and believe it. This is similar to the promise in John 7:37-39 where we're told that all who believe in Jesus will receive the Holy Spirit. That's all that's required. We don't need to do all sorts of other things to receive the Holy Spirit. He's given to us—we are sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit—when we have faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

But He's also called the "Holy Spirit of promise." What promise is ours as a result of being sealed with the Spirit? The Spirit is given as a pledge of our inheritance with a view to the redemption of God's own possession. God's possession is us! The "pledge" is a down payment by God, given to us, assuring us of a future promise to be completely fulfilled. Our inheritance will be eternal life in glory reigning with our Lord!

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Judges 2:10-3:31  
 Luke 22:14-34  
 Psalm 92:1-93:5  
 Proverbs 14:1-2

## The Loser of New Hope

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Philippians 4:6 NLT*

Every month I teach at our New Hope location. I was there one Sunday, and after the worship finished they introduced the three-minute break. It's a time to greet others and for parents to take their kids to class. When the break began, I looked around the room to see if anyone was alone and needed someone to say hi to.

No one was alone. This is a very social church.

So I stood there, by myself. I could wait out three minutes. I'm a pastor, after all. The time ticked by. One . . . Mis . . . sis . . . si . . . pp . . . i.

I could feel the death grip of social anxiety squeeze me. I've battled this my whole life. One of the worst fears of introverts is social situations where we have no one to talk to. Two . . . Mis . . . sis . . . si . . . pp . . . i.

"Oh great," I think to myself. Everyone's staring at me. Everyone's noticing I'm standing here alone. People are talking. Pointing. The mean ones are laughing . . .

I'm the loser of New Hope.

Of course, none of that was happening, but it felt like it was. Looking back, I wish I would have prayed. I should have told God what I needed and let Him come through: "Lord, I need a friend."

God could have brought me someone. Or He could have answered the prayer a different way. We find this in the next verse: "Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7 NLT). God could have answered my prayer by bringing me a buddy, or bringing me peace as I stood alone.

Should have prayed...

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Judges 4:1-5:31  
 Luke 22:35-53  
 Psalm 94:1-23  
 Proverbs 14:3-4

Monday, April 27

## A Treasured Possession

*The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments. Deuteronomy 26:18*

Yesterday the barista at our local coffee shop told me how she is getting her master's degree. She went on to explain that she now values her education more since she is the one paying for it. When her parents were footing the bill for her undergraduate school, she was not as appreciative. But now that she is working to pay her own way, the education is more valuable to her and she is more grateful. Funny how that works.

The more time and effort we put into something, the greater the possession's value becomes to us. We will guard and protect those treasured possessions more than the free things, or that which did not cost as much to obtain. A family, a car, a boat, a house, money, piece of jewelry, horse, cat, or dog are some common possessions we treasure.

God has declared today that you are His treasured possession! How much did it cost God to make you His possession, His child, His bride? Everything! He could not have paid a higher price than what He did when He gave Jesus to die for you. Our redemption was costly. It was also free for us. But don't let the fact that it was free cause you to esteem lightly the Gift—Jesus.

Thank God that you are His treasured possession! Praise Him for purchasing your life with His blood. Your fellow Christians are also His treasured possession, so ask God to help you view them that way as well.

Remember, you will always be His: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38).

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Judges 7:1-8:17  
 Luke 23:13-43  
 Psalm 97:1-98:9  
 Proverbs 14:7-8

## Hidden in Plain Sight

*Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law. Psalm 119:18*

We have a metal Easter bucket in a cupboard in our dining room with seven brightly painted, wooden eggs, most from Mexico. I used to put those eggs away every year after Easter in the garage. But our granddaughter Kiera loved hiding them in the living room so much that I gave in to her pleasure. (So much for preserving the paint perfectly intact—life is short, and these eggs are not high art!) I have witnessed so much joy between children in the interaction of one hiding the eggs and another finding them. Sometimes they are so excited—like Gwen at four years—they have to go with you and find the eggs alongside of you! Now that bucket has become a point of interest to Amos, just turned two. Last summer I even hid the eggs in plain view in the backyard rock garden. What a triumph for Amos to find them and bang them into the bucket!

Just so, God hides things in plain sight for us in the Bible. I remember finding gems in the Old Testament for the first time: "They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession [My jewels, KJV] and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him" (Malachi 3:17 ESV). Or: "your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left" (prophecy of Christ, Isaiah 30:20-21). Isaiah 32:17-18 prophesies of a future we Christians can start living now, God willing: "And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever. Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation, and in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places." God is so good to hide His precious truths for us in plain view. Look for them!

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Judges 6:1-8:4  
 Luke 22:54-23:12  
 Psalm 95:1-96:13  
 Proverbs 14:5-6

Tuesday, April 28

## In Sync

*You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Psalm 139:3 NIV*

An amazing switch took place in our home recently. For the past several years my husband, who proves to be a bit more "techy" than I am, has used his phone and computer to keep track of his calendar. On date nights he would whip out his phone, and I would dutifully pull out my purse-sized paper calendar to look over our upcoming week and synchronize our schedules.

I loved my paper Dayspring calendar. It was a familiar way to keep track of both present and past events and had the added bonus of being quickly flipped open to the current week and month. But as much as I loved the convenience that my paper calendar offered, there were some inconveniences as well. I didn't know my husband's calendar events, and he didn't know mine, unless we marked them down. On top of that, I didn't have ready access to church calendar events on my paper calendar. I often wasn't in sync with Dave or with my Stonebrook church family!

So, with some trepidation, I took the plunge, removed my paper calendar from my purse (gasp!), and started using my phone calendar. With a little practice and a few gaffs, I learned how to enter calendar events and quickly check my week with my husband, getting more easily in sync with him.

But here's something even more amazing than my switch. God knows my calendar down to the exact moment I leave my house to when I return and lie down at night. More than the most devoted spouse, He knows and cares deeply about my every thought and activity, no calendar required! He's always in sync with me!

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Judges 8:18-9:21  
 Luke 23:44-24:12  
 Psalm 99:1-9  
 Proverbs 14:9-10

## Eyes Locked

*I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Psalm 16:8 NIV*

Last year a group of us went to Zion National Park; we'd decided to hike to Angels Landing. The hike is five miles long with 1,500 feet of elevation gain. That doesn't sound too bad, but the challenging part of Angels Landing is the extreme exposure and huge cliffs. Sadly, people have died there.

As we started the steep, exposed part of the hike, I got rattled. I held onto the chain (a good idea), but I literally leaned into the mountain, away from the cliff. My fear caused me to walk slanted. My co-pastor Billy said, "Don't overthink it. You are psyching yourself out."

I realized Billy was right. I was overthinking it. I straightened back up, held onto the chain, and **locked** my eyes on the trail in front of me. No more peering over the edge into the abyss. We had a great time, hiked to the top, and then headed back to the car.

When we got back home, I showed a few people some random YouTube videos of the hike. And I kept thinking, "I don't remember that part. Or that part. Or that part." I realized my focus was so locked on the trail, I hadn't noticed some of the really scary parts of the hike.

Which brings us to Psalm 16:8. Christian, when you are worried, anxious, or fearful (or even encouraged), do you keep your eyes locked on the Lord? This verse speaks of a confidence, an assurance, that keeping our eyes locked on Jesus will bring us.

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Judges 9:22-10:18  
 Luke 24:13-53  
 Psalm 100:1-5  
 Proverbs 14:11-12

## Contemplating God's Goodness

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits! Psalm 103:2 ESV*  
*You must not turn aside, for then you would go after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile. For the Lord will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way. Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. 1 Samuel 12:21-24*

How many marriages have failed because a couple failed to appreciate each other? Yet an even greater tragedy comes when we fail to appreciate all the good that God has done for us!

The prophet Samuel, in calling the Israelites to repentance for worldliness and idolatry, said to them, "Only fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you!" (1 Samuel 12:24 ESV).

If we will prioritize reading God's Word and contemplating all the good God has done for us (and especially the good He has done for us through Jesus Christ, His death in our place and His resurrection), then a right response to God will be developed in our hearts. An intimacy will be formed between us and Him! When we trust God and are intimate with Him, great joy in Him will result and ever grow greater.

Is that not even what we see in married couples who truly appreciate one another?

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### One-Year Bible Reading

Judges 11:1-12:15  
 John 1:1-28  
 Psalm 101:1-8  
 Proverbs 14:13-14