

Press On

Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring. — Hosea 6:3

There are so many things we can devote our time to—so many things we can give our lives for. Many people around us have decided to give their full allegiance to work, or money, or family, or success. Many more have bought into the foolish idea—“You only live once so, live it up!”

As you reflect upon the year past, ask yourself, “What have I given my time to last year? What have I given my life for this year? How would those around me answer that question about me?”

This verse reminds us that we are to “press on,” to be devoted to, and to fight for, our relationship with Jesus! Sure, it is good to be devoted to our families, to be hard workers, and to be successful in our efforts. But how much more should we “press on” to know the Lord?!

I have often prayed that God would make me a man who knows Him more than any other man on earth. I know it may seem selfish to ask that, but it’s my genuine, spirit-filled desire. I want to **know** God.

To be honest, the reason I pray this way is because of the second half of this verse in Hosea — “He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn, or the coming of rains in early spring.” When you think of refreshment, when you think of renewal, when you think of new beginnings, it is nearly impossible not to think of the breaking morning light and the life-giving waters of spring rain!

For the Christian, God asks us to press on to know Him. In return, He promises to refresh, to renew, and to bring life.

This year, press on to know the Lord, because spring rain is coming!

Submitted by:
Steele Croswhite
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading
Deuteronomy 18:1-20:20
Luke 9:28-50
Psalm 73:1-28
Proverbs 12:10

Knowing Him Personally

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. — John 17:3

There is a world of difference between Christianity and every other religion. One profound difference is that every real Christian has a personal relationship with God. They talk with Him, laugh with Him, and cry with Him. He listens to their every concern and delights in their prayers of thanksgiving. God speaks to them by His Spirit through the Bible. He answers their cries for help, wisdom, and strength.

On the other hand, you will never hear a Muslim say, “I know Muhammad. I came to know him when I was 17 years old.” A Buddhist will never tell you, “Buddha and I are friends. We have a close personal relationship.”

In contrast, those of us who have been saved from all our sins by the Lord Jesus Christ can confidently say, “I have Jesus Christ living inside me! I have a vital, close relationship with Him. I know Him personally!”

A follower of Islam is a person who follows or practices the religion of Islam. A follower of any religion is the same, “One who practices the religion of...” Nowhere will you find that the present-day followers actually know their leader. Whereas we who have been saved by God’s grace can truthfully say, “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.” That is personal! That is knowing God, knowing Him experientially. There is a radical difference.

Be bold, my fellow Christian. Speak to your lost friends with courage. You *know* the living God! You also know how they can *know* Him.

Submitted by:
Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

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

Scattering Gospel Seeds

Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. — Ecclesiastes 11:1 ESV

I noticed her as I finished filling my plate from the breakfast buffet. My husband Dave and I were out of state at a meeting, and I was eating solo this morning due to his early morning appointment. Although it was a little awkward, I sensed God nudging me to sit by this woman. Within seconds of introductions, we had struck a common chord. Her grandmother had grown up in my hometown of Ames, Iowa! Our conversation flowed, ending with me giving her my personal testimony tract. She cordially received it.

Later that day, at a restaurant, Dave and I enjoyed getting to know our server. We asked him about himself, got his advice on food to order, gave him lots of smiles, and loved him like Jesus. As we were leaving, we handed him a gospel tract, which he too cordially received with a comment about our friendliness.

On our ride to the airport, our taxi driver warmed up to us and talked non-stop about his family, his job, and his outlook on life. After he unloaded our bags, we handed him a tract, encouraging him to think about eternity. With a warm handshake from us both, and an “It was great to meet you, Antonio,” we headed inside. Another opportunity to represent our Lord and sow some gospel seeds!

Sowing the gospel really isn’t that hard. It boils down to taking interest in and a little initiative with others and letting the love and light of Christ shine through. We have handed out countless tracts over the years with this simple practice and I wonder

On that day when we stand before our Lord in heaven, might there be some there due to a tract given in love?

Submitted by:
Dawn Bovenmeyer
Stonycreek Community Church
Ames, Iowa

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

A Two-Way Street

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another. — Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV

Anyone who thinks that the Christian life is to be lived solo has an intensely difficult time explaining the meaning of this verse. Furthermore, it is a timely reminder for any of us who tend to participate in church out of obligation, habit, or trying to “earn” righteousness by good works: our motivation for gathering as a church should be encouragement, both giving and receiving “love and good deeds.”

Now, upon whom does the author of Hebrews place the responsibility for this “two-way street” of encouragement? Clearly, it rests squarely on the shoulders of us individually. He doesn’t write, “let the other people of the church encourage you,” nor does he state, “encourage others while plugging your ears.” We must each claim the responsibility for fellowship by our own conscious, deliberate participation in it, even (and maybe even especially) when we don’t feel like it!

And why does the author say, “not giving up meeting together” instead of “keep meeting together?” I think there’s a clear principle at work: starting something is easy, but keeping it up when challenges arise is exceedingly difficult. (Exercise regimens lend credence to this concept with painful clarity!) Christian fellowship is no different, as the process of encouragement starts simply but is tough to continue once the circumstances of life break against us.

Today, let’s make our fellowship a light to an ever-darkening culture. Look for ways to own your responsibility in the cycle of encouragement, and share in the life-on-life journey of being in church together, through good times and bad!

Submitted by:
Greg Miller
The Firehouse Church
Denver, Colorado

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

Independence Card

Hear my prayer, Lord; let my cry for help come to You. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn Your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. - Psalm 102:1-2 NIV

As I am looking through a drawer, I come across our Independence card. Seeing this card reminds me of the hardest, yet most blessed time in our marriage. Dave had left his job to start a business with his boss. It didn't take. We were nine months without a salary and with our savings about gone. This is when the Independence card entered our life. The Independence card is food stamps, welfare. It was a humbling time.

But, as always, God is gracious. First, He allowed us to have food stamps so that the little money we had could go to other things (like mortgage) and not food. Second, because we have a large family, our allotment was huge. They gave us more money for one month than we typically spent in two. So we actually were able to use the card for several months after Dave found a job. Third, it was at this time that God provided a food angel. The food angel got second-hand food that she shared with many. We received all kinds of bread, meat, and fruit every week that we didn't have to buy. God's blessings during this time of need were so abundant it still makes my head spin.

Are you in a time of need? He is waiting with open arms.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oak Ridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

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

He Was Despised and Rejected

And He could hardly accept the fact that they wouldn't believe in Him. - Mark 6:6 TLB

Rejection. Everyone has felt it at times. The high school girl that doesn't get asked to prom. The middle schooler who sits alone at the school lunch table. Having someone else get selected for the new job that you so wanted. The hurt of not being included with a group of friends.

I was struck by the emotion Jesus felt in the above verse. Another translation is "He was amazed at their lack of faith" (NIV). When He was rejected by family and friends in His home town, it truly hurt Him. What this means to me is that when I feel left out or let down by others, He understands. He is the one I can pour my heart out to.

I am also inspired by how he responded to being hurt by others. My response would be to want to hurt them back or and to not want to get close to anyone. Instead, Jesus kept engaging with people and modeled faithful love and friendship. The rest of verse 6 is "Then he went out among the villages, teaching." He promises in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (ESV). In John 21 He moved toward Peter instead of away from him and offered Peter forgiveness.

My choice becomes that I can hold on to my hurt and withdraw, or I can look to Jesus for the grace to love and forgive like He did. I have heard the analogy that if you put an egg in boiling water it becomes hardened, but a carrot becomes soft. I want to respond like a carrot in my hurtful situations and not allow them to harden me. I don't have to look farther than the gospels to show me how to do it.

Submitted by:

Kelly Lewis
Grace Point Community Church
Lewis Center, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Calm Your Soul

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. -Psalm 131:1-3 ESV

Is your life stressing you out right now? Is it the political situation? Maybe it's the anxiety of paying your bills and preparing for a vacation or birthdays? Maybe you worry about your work or the economy? Life has a way of causing us stress all of the time. Sickness, finances, holidays, family, and work can all add to our anxiety. When I read this psalm the other day, however, I was encouraged.

You see, there are many things outside of our control. There are things we don't understand and questions we don't have good answers for. Sometimes it feels like we are carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders.

Verse one in today's passage commands us to not occupy ourselves with these things. The second verse commands us to calm and quiet our soul: calm and quiet like a child with its mother. Imagine a mom (or dad) holding their sleeping infant. The child is relaxed and sleeping soundly, knowing that his parent will take care of him. That is exactly how we are to put our hope in God.

We need to be trained to trust in God to supply our needs and not worry about the future. Church, don't stress out about all of the things that are too great for you. Calm your soul. Put your hope forever in God!

Submitted by:

Josh Whitney
The Rock Church
Taylorsville, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

God's Really Bad Day

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:2 NIV

It was Easter season, and I was reviewing the events leading up to Christ's resurrection with my three and four-year-old Sunday school class. As the kids were gathered around the table, I asked them if they remembered what we had been talking about in the previous weeks. Several looked clueless; others were totally distracted, looking around the room. I prompted with a few more clues. Then Hazel, one of the more precocious girls, raised her hand and answered, "God had a really bad day!"

The other helpers and I had to suppress our immediate desire to chuckle loudly—often the case in the preschool class! And then I realized with great joy that she got it! Our little Hazel understood the plot line perfectly.

For indeed, God had done an amazing thing many years ago, invading our world not as a conquering king but as a human baby. Once a man, Jesus continued to live a life that expressed humility and love.

Although He had every right to claim ownership as the rightful king, Jesus chose instead to go the way of the cross. He had a bigger mission in mind—that of winning a lost world to Himself by paying the ultimate price for its sin debt. That price was His life.

And so yes, Hazel, God had a really bad day on Golgotha's hill. But because of it, we who are the recipients of His sacrificial gift there will in the future, experience a really, **really** good day that extends forever and ever.

Submitted by:

Dawn Bovenmeyer
Stonecreek Community Church
Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading

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

The King in Control

Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. – Luke 19:30 NIV

As the end of His life on earth neared, Jesus came to Jerusalem. He knew that this was where He would be crucified and so bring to completion God’s plan for our redemption. In just a few days, He would be condemned and executed as a criminal, but as He entered the city, He came as the king that He is. Luke 19:28-44 gives us a clear account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as its king. From this account we can see what kind of king Jesus is.

As Jesus neared town, He sent His disciples to get a colt that had never been ridden. It is significant that Jesus made sure that He and His disciples knew that this animal was not ‘broken,’ that is, it was not trained to be ridden. When I was a boy, my friends and I would try to ride our neighbor’s Shetland ponies. They didn’t get ridden often, and they didn’t much like us jumping up on their backs. They tried to bite us as we climbed up, and as soon as we were on they bucked us off. Yet this is the kind of animal Jesus chose to come into town on.

He did it to show that He is a King in control. The colt gave Him no problem as it carried an unfamiliar weight through a screaming crowd. Jesus was able to control the animal in a way that you and I could not. He showed us that He can control the seemingly “out-of-control” situations we find ourselves in.

Jesus is the King who is in control. He loves you, He can help you, and He really wants to.

Submitted by:

Rob Gerber
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Eau Claire, Wisconsin

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Suffering

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. – John 12:27 ESV

These were Jesus’ words before He was betrayed and crucified. If anyone knows about suffering, it’s Jesus. His suffering was foretold back to the book of Genesis. Isaiah 53 calls Him the “Man of Sorrows.”

What did Jesus do when He knew He was about to be betrayed, falsely accused, beaten to a bloody mess, mocked, and hung to die on public display? He entrusted His life to the will of His Father. He was completely aware of the torture He was going to go through. He didn’t complain. He did something amazing. He prayed, “Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (John 12: 28 ESV).

Jesus understands that there is no suffering we go through that is meaningless. I think about the struggles and sorrows some of you are working through right now. At times, I look around and I’m overwhelmed with sorrows and burdens that aren’t even my own. For those of you who are suffering, please know that you are not alone. God loves you so much. I pray that the “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds” in these times of trouble. I pray that you wouldn’t waste your suffering. I pray you would choose to use it for God’s glory, to be able to look back and say, “God helped me suffer well.”

God uses those who have suffered to help those who are suffering. If you are hurting, please reach out to someone. You’re not alone—you are surrounded by brothers and sisters who love you and a God who listens when you pray to Him!

Submitted by:

Billy Johnson
The Rock Church
Taylorsville, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Passover Lamb

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. – 1 Corinthians 5:7 NIV

One of my favorite holidays is Passover. Our family has been celebrating Passover for about the last 15 years. The *Haggadah* or text we use is a Messianic Jewish version found in a book called *Celebrate the Feasts* by Martha Zimmerman. Jesus’ death and resurrection are symbolized so much in the Passover. The text brings the symbolism to light.

One of the items on the Seder, or Passover dinner, plate is a shank bone. The shank bone symbolizes the lamb the Israelites sacrificed on the night of Passover. They killed a lamb and put its blood on their lintel and doorposts. It also symbolizes Jesus and His death on the cross, the shedding of His blood for our sins.

Why blood? Throughout Scripture we are shown that blood is the sacrifice that God requires to cover our sins. During the first Passover, the Israelites put blood of a lamb on their lintel and doorposts to escape the angel of death. “Every human being who fails to live up to the moral law of God is guilty and has to pay with his life. The blood of an innocent lamb becomes the symbol of an innocent life covering a guilty life from the eyes of a holy and just God” (*Celebrate the Feasts* by Martha Zimmerman, page 77). The Lord told Moses and Aaron to tell the people, “When I see the blood I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). John the Baptist, seeing Jesus, said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Prophecy and history met. “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7 NIV). It was His hands, His feet, His head that put the blood on our lintel and doorposts. He is our Passover Lamb. Praise God!

Submitted by:

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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

Unleavened Bread

And they baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they made prepared any provisions for themselves. – Exodus 12:39

Matzo is a staple during Passover. It is an unleavened flatbread. Unleavened bread is eaten because the Israelites had to hurry and leave Egypt at night; they didn’t have time for their bread to rise so they had to cook it unleavened.

Our Haggadah, a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Jewish Passover dinner, the Seder (found in *Celebrate the Feasts* by Martha Zimmerman, page 78) tells us that the matzo is a picture of Christ: “After the dough is flattened, before it is baked, it is pierced and striped with a pointed tool to keep it from bubbling under the flame.” Jesus was pierced also; His back received “stripes” (Psalm 22:16, John 19:33-34).

We find this symbolic bread and these Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus. Zechariah prophecies in 12:10: “They will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.” Isaiah tells us in 53:5 that “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”

One of the reasons the Jewish people have Passover is to remember. May we also remember that it was for you and me that Jesus died on the cross. Praise be to God.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Escape from Slavery

And they [the Egyptian slavemasters] made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them [the Israelites]. – Exodus 1:14

Slavery stinks. Life in Egypt was hard. It was bitter. To remember, the Seder, or Jewish Passover, dinner plate has the *maror*, or bitter herbs. Several times during the Seder meal we partake of bitter herbs—horseradish. Each time we eat we are to remember the bitterness and tears that were shed by the Israelites as slaves in Egypt. As Christians, the *maror* or bitterness can remind us of what our life was like before Christ, when we were slaves to sin. But praise God, there is deliverance.

During Passover there is the sober reminder of the slavery we all endured, but there is also celebration. God did not leave His people in Egypt, nor us in sin. He sent the Passover lamb, brought deliverance, and parted the Red Sea, bringing freedom to the Israelites. So too with us Christians, God sent His Son Jesus to be our Passover Lamb; He brought us forth out of sin and into a brand-new life.

As part of the Haggadah, the written text for the Seder, all the participants read the following as they feast and celebrate: "We are, therefore, duty bound to praise, thank, glorify, and exalt, honor, bless, and adore Him, Who performed all these wonders for our fathers and for us. He brought us out of slavery into freedom, out of misery into happiness, out of mourning into rejoicing, out of darkness into His light, and out of bondage into redemption. Let us praise Him!" (from *Celebrate the Feasts* by Martha Zimmerman page 80).

Our God is certainly worthy of praise! Can I hear an "Amen!"?

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Always a Friend

And Jesus said to him, "Friend . . ." – Matthew 26:50

He was coming! He was approaching with a bunch of soldiers ready to grab and capture. Seeing him coming, Jesus said to Judas, "Friend, do what you have come for."

Did you catch that? Jesus called Judas His friend! Right then! Right at that moment of the deepest possible betrayal—betrayal leading to death—Jesus called Judas His *friend*. It was like saying, "Judas, for years you have been my close companion, travel mate, and partner, and you are still a friend in my book. *No matter what!*" Jesus spoke to Judas kindly and honorably, with affection. Of course, Jesus already knew what Judas was up to, that Judas was coming to deliver Him to the religious authorities. Christ's foreknowledge had been on display at the last supper (John 13:21-30). He already knew that Judas' betrayal would lead to torture and death. But still He called Judas His friend.

I only start to grasp this kind of love by remembering the love I had for my children in the midst of their occasional outbursts against me. Because they were children, I didn't take it personally. They were not enemies; each was a special friend in my heart. Always. And that's how Jesus felt toward Judas, only more so!

Jesus thinks of you kindly every single moment. He'll always have friendly thoughts about you, no matter what you've done or are doing. Your own resistance can keep you from knowing and experiencing the loving heart of Jesus, which is what happened to Judas. But Jesus is, and always will be, right beside you calling you friend. "Friend!"

Submitted by:

Rita Bergen
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Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Himself He Cannot Save

He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. – Matthew 27:42

Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. – Luke 23:34

"He saved others; Himself He cannot save." Repeat that a couple of times. These religious people had no idea what they were saying. Is it true? Yes. And no! Yes, He could have saved Himself! After Peter sliced off the ear of a Roman guard's servant, Jesus told Peter: "Put your sword back into its place . . . do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:52-53).

Yes, He could have saved Himself. Why didn't He? Because then He could not save *them*! They said, "Let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." They didn't know what they were saying! They didn't realize the condition of their belief system would leave them condemned and without hope. If Jesus would have come down from the cross or skipped it completely and gone straight back to heaven, they would have been doubly condemned!

The Law required complete perfection to satisfy God's holiness. The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The only One who ever lived the perfect sinless life was Jesus.

Only Jesus satisfied the demands of God's righteous Law. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God *in Him*."

So, what would have been the outcome of Jesus saving His own life? We would be condemned not only by the standard of the Law, but also by His perfect sinless life. Praise Him today for His willingness in grace and truth to lay down His life for us so that we might truly live!

Submitted by:

Terry Putthoff
Open Range Fellowship
Lone Jack, Missouri

One-Year Bible Reading

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

No Greater Love!

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. – John 15:13 NKJV

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8 NKJV

On November 15, 2005 Marine Sergeant Rafael Peralta was wounded by gunfire and fell to the floor of a house in Fallujah, Iraq. Also inside the house were two of his Marine comrades. Then an enemy grenade was tossed through an open window and landed within arm's reach of the fallen Peralta. Pinned down by fire and unable to flee with the grenade blocking the exit, his buddies watched as Peralta grabbed the grenade with his right hand and pulled it under his chest. He died and his friends lived. Sergeant Peralta's sacrifice is a reflection of Jesus' sacrifice—laying down His life for His friends.

But now imagine this scenario: What if, instead of being in that house with his friends, Sergeant Peralta had been captured by the enemy and was being watched by two of them? Then imagine the grenade being thrown in their midst. What would he do? He could let the grenade blow up and kill them all, thereby taking out some of the enemy. But what if he performed the same act: reaching out and pulling the grenade under himself, thereby saving his enemies while losing his own life? That would be like Romans 5:8—Christ dying for us while we were still sinners and "enemies."

When Jesus went to the cross, He died for the whole world: for His disciples . . . for the Pharisees who condemned Him . . . for the Romans who carried out His execution . . . for you and me. All that remains is this: if you haven't yet, now is the time for you to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. There is no greater love!

Submitted by:

Tom Dunham
Cottonwood Community Church
Grand Forks, North Dakota

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Context Matters

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 commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. – Matthew 28:19-20

We are called Great Commission churches. But what is the Great Commission? It's given in some verses out of Matthew 28. You can read them above.

But what is the context for the Great Commission, these famous words spoken by Jesus? Look at verse 18 of Matthew 28: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" So the context is very important—this is Jesus the Risen Savior speaking, Jesus who has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Let's think about the importance of context for a minute. There's an example from Will Ferrell, actor and comedian. He quotes the line, "A baby's laughter is the most beautiful sound you will ever hear." Then he comments on this seemingly unquestionable truth: "Unless it's 3 am. And you're home alone. And you don't have a baby." He's right—context matters. Rather than beauty, we may have insanity here!

So the context for the Great Commission matters. Jesus is alive from the dead, having gone through the cross and the tomb. At this point He could have established His kingdom, a new political order in Israel. But He didn't. Instead He gave these directions to His disciples. Jesus is talking from a position of strength and great power. And He says that the Great Commission is the overarching task for every Christian and in every church.

Submitted by:

Dan Rude
The Great Commission
Faithwalkers Midwest 2016

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Extreme Dog Grooming?

*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. – Psalm 19:1-2 NIV*

What do you live for? I discovered a new sport called "extreme dog grooming." People make thousands of dollars on a single weekend from winning prizes in this art form. You might google it to see the crazy things you can do with dog fur sculpture! Other people live for fame, money, sex, pleasure or work.

But Jesus commanded His disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations. This was His choice of the top task He wants all His people to be pursuing—individually, corporately, and globally.

Why? Why did Jesus choose this as His last command before He left the earth? I can think of two reasons. First, the Great Commission fills the world with the glory of God. We honor God in doing this. Secondly, the Great Commission seeks the highest good of mankind. We show love to our fellow humans in obeying this command.

How does the Great Commission fill the world with the glory of God? We start, as I said yesterday, with the authority of Jesus over everything (Matthew 28:18). With His authority He tells His disciples to go preach the gospel. When we look at the voice of creation in glorifying God, we see that it reflects His power and wisdom: In October of 2016 a report from NASA mentioned 200 billion galaxies in the universe. But it added that new research shows that this is at least ten times too low an estimate! So creation mirrors God's glory.

But creation does not declare the glory of the gospel. And the gospel is the greatest revelation of the glory of God!

Submitted by:

Dan Rude
The Great Commission
Faithwalkers Midwest 2016

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Jesus Is Better . . .

I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins. . . . – Acts 26:17-18 ESV

While the creation of God shows His work, only through the gospel do we learn of God's character and nature: His holiness, His justice, His wrath against sin, His righteousness, His grace, and His love for us. If you want to see who God is, you look at Christ. If you want to see what He is like, look at the cross. The gospel reveals the glory of God.

How do we live then to the glory of God? By being a disciple. How does that play out? *A disciple looks at all the world has to offer, and says on the inside, "I think Jesus is better. . . ."*

I'm not talking about what a disciple does. I'm talking about what defines him. Look at Moses: "It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. . . . He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward" (11:24-26 NLT). Moses thought God was better.

Besides filling the world with God's glory, the Great Commission seeks the highest good of mankind. The gospel reveals to us the nature of sin and God's remedy for it. The nature of sin is to break relationships. The eternal effect of sin is everlasting brokenness, a broken relationship with God that lands people in hell. The greatest good we can do is to set people free from the effects of sin.

Paul in Acts 26 above is explaining to the Jewish King Agrippa the vision he had on the road to Damascus. Jesus spoke to him directly and commissioned him to open the eyes of the lost. To set others free from sin, to restore families, is the highest task in the universe.

Submitted by:

Dan Rude
The Great Commission
Faithwalkers Midwest 2016

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Snappy Ate Jumpy

. . . delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. – Acts 26:17-18 ESV

To set others free from sin and to restore families is the highest task in the universe. That's what Jesus commanded us to do when He directed His disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). We all have different roles to play in this task, but we are all called to be involved in it. And know this: everything God asks me to do is for my good, and He never makes mistakes.

I am not like God in this: I do make mistakes. I'm a dad, and every intention of my heart is for the good of my kids. But I am not in control of everything. This past summer I was with my family at a pond. What we like to do at ponds is to catch critters. So we had some success: we caught a bullfrog. And we appropriately named him "Jumpy." We played with him, and we really bonded with Jumpy. But the time came to go home; we had to let him go. But Jed, my three-year-old, did not want to. I tried to be patient with him—I told him Jumpy would have the best life if he stayed in the pond. Finally Jed threw Jumpy back into the water. Just as Jumpy landed, we saw a snapping turtle come up and grab him! We were all shocked. One of my sons said, "Dad, Snappy ate Jumpy!" My promise about Jumpy was not fulfilled.

As I said, I'm not omniscient. But God is. And His promise—"I am with you always, to the end of the age"—is as good as His power and omniscience. Jesus will get in the trenches with you. People will leave you—guaranteed. But *He* will never leave you. If you say, "I want to give my life to your mission," He will take that desire. He will use it for His glory.

Submitted by:

Dan Rude
The Great Commission
Faithwalkers Midwest 2016

One-Year Bible Reading

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

The Dash

Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow. – Psalm 144:4

Death is interesting. It is the only thing we are guaranteed after we are born. We are not guaranteed a good life, a lot of money, success, or happiness. The only thing we know is that at some point in our lives, we'll die. It's good to talk about death and take time to process it.

Death can come at unexpected times. It's not something we put on our to-do list when we wake up. It comes like a thief in the night.

When we write out a date, we typically have a starting date and an ending date. There is a separation between those two dates—it's typically a dash of some sort. That dash is where our life is lived. It is where our story is written. It is where the depth of our lives happens.

During the time of that little dash, we learn how to walk, to talk, to ride a bike, experience love, heartache, joy, fear, regret, and so much more. We experience all of the life that shapes us as a person. That dash represents so much more than a divider of dates.

A dash is short. Even when we are speaking about a race, we use the word *dash* as a quick race. That is like our lives—fast and fleeting!

How would you like to be remembered when you are gone? As one who was kind? As one who took care of others? As one who loved Jesus? David wrote, "Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow." How we live our lives will impact those around us (for both good and bad) for all eternity.

Today, as you are going through your day, take a second to ponder what your life looks like. Take a minute and tell people that you love them. Tell people who don't know about Jesus that He loves them and longs for a relationship with them! Make your dash count.

Submitted by:

Tony D'Amico
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Death is a Game-Changer

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones. – Psalm 116:15

I was in a line of cars driving to a graveyard. As our police escort blocked for us at red lights, I thought, "Death is a game-changer. I'm driving through red lights with police protection!" And death is a game-changer in other ways also.

I had just been to a very inspiring memorial service for a woman I had never known. She was the grandmother of my daughter-in-law who has followed her into the nursing profession. I'd sat with my son and daughter-in-law in the front row and not missed a thing. This woman's nephews, sons and daughter, daughter's childhood girlfriends, and nursing colleagues all wrote or spoke eloquently about how a single life lived with love and great energy had affected them. The slideshow revealed a joyful wife, mother, grandmother. The surprise for me was that she had grown up without a father, having only seen him two times in her childhood. She was raised by her mother and grandmother; her mother had been an alcoholic, taking her daughter through many bars. But when my daughter-in-law's grandmother heard and believed the message of Christ as a high school student at a Youth for Christ meeting, her life changed radically. Then her faith and love changed those around her. (Her mother came to Christ, and her drinking stopped.) A happy marriage and loving family followed.

When a person dies, we see what really matters. Everything temporal falls away—looks, clothes, career, vacations, house, cars—and all that's left is judged in light of eternity. "Only one life, 'Twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last" was a plaque I painted at a Bible camp as a child. And it's true. Let's live now for eternity.

Submitted by:

Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Sunday, April 23

The Blood of Jesus

And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground." – Genesis 4:10 NKJV

To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. – Hebrews 12:24 NKJV

In 1959 two ex-convicts who had recently been paroled from the Kansas State Penitentiary robbed and murdered four people in western Kansas. Herbert Clutter, a successful farmer, his wife, and two of his children were murdered in cold blood. The felons thought they were going to find thousands of dollars in the family safe. They were mistaken, and left the house with a portable radio, binoculars, and less than fifty dollars cash. Six weeks later they were apprehended in Las Vegas. After being tried and convicted, they were executed six years later. The blood of the Clutter family cried out for justice and justice was rendered. The crime and aftermath was the subject of Truman Capote's book *In Cold Blood*.

Abel's blood was like that. His brother, Cain, killed him in a fit of jealousy and rage (Genesis 4). Abel's blood cried out to God from the ground for vengeance and judgment.

Jesus' blood cries out, too—but not for judgment. When He died on the cross, His shed blood cried out—and still does—for mercy and forgiveness. His blood speaks 'better' things than that of Abel's.

Friend, if you haven't yet come to God through Jesus, the offer is open. It says in the Bible that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). God offers forgiveness to you through Jesus' blood. By accepting Him as your Lord and Savior, you receive forgiveness of sins and assurance of heaven. Today can be the day of your salvation if you pray and accept Jesus!

Submitted by:

Tom Dunham
Cottonwood Community Church
Grand Forks, North Dakota

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Monday, April 24

Pollution is a Real Problem!

Watch over your heart [mind] with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. – Proverbs 4:23

We hear much today about air and atmospheric pollution, the pollution of water, rivers, and lakes, even garbage pollution of huge cities. The Bible warns us of another pollution that is seldom mentioned in our newspapers, and not even that often in our churches. Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile [pollute] the man" (Mark 7:21-23).

Why is heart and mind pollution so hard to deal with? Probably because it is hidden, and others can't immediately see it. The writer of the Proverbs indicates that these inward things do really affect us, though. He says that the issues of life are greatly affected by these inner thoughts and meditations. Our joy and peace, our relationships, our jobs, our families and friends really are affected by the things that we allow in our minds and hearts.

We choose what fills our minds. We cannot fully control what comes into our minds, but we decide what stays in our minds. The apostle Paul challenged the Philippians to take control of their minds and to fill their minds with the right things. "Let your mind dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8). Jesus said, "The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34). Mind and heart pollution affects us and others much more than we can imagine. God will give us grace and help if we trust and obey Him in this vital area.

Submitted by:

Herschel Martindale
Oakridge Community Church
Highland, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Nothing but God Himself

I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. – Exodus 33:2

God told Moses that He would send an angel who would drive out all the enemies in the land. Not many people get an offer like that—to have an angel help them accomplish a big goal in their life! With the offer, God also explained that it wouldn't be good for God Himself to go with them because He would have to use discipline for their stubborn hearts.

But Moses' answer was, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (Exodus 33:15). Moses only wanted God Himself and not successful accomplishments without Him. Yes, it would be amazing for an angel to defeat all their enemies, but Moses knew that success itself would not satisfy. God Himself was the only one who would satisfy.

It's very easy for our hearts to desire something so much that we would be glad if an angel would give it to us. Maybe the desire is, "If I could just get married—I need an angel's help." Or, "If I could just get an angel to help me graduate, I'd be so glad." Or, "If an angel would give me that job, I'd take it immediately." For me as a Christian leader, I am tempted to think, "If I could just be leading a church growing in larger numbers, I would be happy."

What's your strongest desire? Are you convinced of what the Bible says, that only God Himself will satisfy the deepest desires of your soul? Can you say with the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25 NIV)?

Submitted by:	One-Year Bible Reading
Mike Bergen	Judges 4:1-5:31
Cornerstone Community Church	Luke 22:35-53
Lenexa, Kansas	Psalm 94:1-23
	Proverbs 14:3-4

When I Feel . . . God Says . . .

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. – Hebrews 4:12 NIV

There are many times in my life when how I feel does not match what the Bible says is true. My feelings overtake what my mind or heart believes, or both. The circumstances become overwhelming to me. At those times, one thing I've found to be really helpful is to take one bit of Scripture and apply it to that part of my life where I'm struggling.

Often I will study and memorize these Scriptures that apply to my area of struggle. And it more than helps me; it brings peace, the peace of God: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7 NIV).

I pray through the Scripture on my way to and from work, and it helps the commute go so much faster. Additionally, I don't cut anyone off as I am doing it.

And as I do this, I find that God is faithful to help, calm, encourage, and understand me in my struggle. I feel like He personally put whatever verse I encounter there, just for me.

That is the power of God and His Word. It gets in there and cuts through, not just to reveal truth *to* us, but truth *about* us. It is not just information, it is *living* truth. There is a connection we have with other living things; we are all created, we feel peace around other things created by God, like forests and animals. In a different way the Word of God is also alive and ready to meet our emotional and spiritual needs. Let's apply this truth in practical ways over the next few days.

Submitted by:	One-Year Bible Reading
Greg Standinger	Judges 6:1-40
Glen Arbor Community Church	Luke 22:54-23:12
West Chicago, Illinois	Psalm 95:1-96:13
	Proverbs 14:5-6

When I Feel Doomed by the Curse

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. – Hebrews 4:15-16 NIV

Sometimes we feel doomed or cursed or pushed away by God because we feel we have sin that separates us from Him. Even though in our heart we know Jesus paid that penalty, we still feel guilt and shame. Sometimes these issues can be big time events where we really messed up, or they are repeating events perpetuated by ourselves or by others or some combination of both.

Maybe this is hitting you right now as you read it. As we talked about yesterday, try matching God's Word to your feelings, issues, or troubles. If you feel like what I have described above sometimes, or all the time, feel that now. Now read the verse above.

The verse is talking about Jesus who is also God. Was He tempted? Yes. Can he sympathize? Yes. He has been there. Does He say, "You are too horrible, you cannot approach the throne of God, you pathetic loser?" If that were true, we would all be lost. Romans 3:23 (NLT) tells us: "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."

What then does God say? You are reconciled. You are holy. You are blameless. You are above reproach. The rejection you fear is not reality—it is no more, it is a phantom, an illusion, a vapor. What is done cannot be undone. You are His.

Let that sink in. Now how do you feel? Doomed, destined for destruction? I don't—how can that be true? I feel welcomed by Him. It is a throne of grace after all.

Submitted by:	One-Year Bible Reading
Greg Standinger	Judges 7:1-8:17
Glen Arbor Community Church	Luke 23:13-43
West Chicago, Illinois	Psalm 97:1-98:9
	Proverbs 14:7-8

When I Feel Doomed by Slavery to Sin

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. – Romans 6:12-14

What does God say when I feel like sin has power over me? You might say, "Yes, I know I am forgiven, but I am trapped by this area or that area." Addictions abound in this world, and we know what they are: secret areas that cannot ever be broken and we feel will never change.

Let's try this again with God's word meeting with your feelings. Feel like you are trapped, destined to continually repeat the same story? What do I do? What does God say? Read the verse above.

What I like about this verse is that it is not just encouraging but gives you a positive solution. So often we hear that the Bible is just about rules. But it isn't saying "Are you sinning? Well, stop!"

Here is the truth.

You are not trapped—sin has **no** dominion over you even though it feels like it. The members of your body **are** instruments of righteousness. **Be what you are.** You are a creature of grace, not the law. Are you trapped? No. Are you an instrument of sin and slavery destined to mechanically do it over and over again? No.

Are you doomed by it? No.

Act and **be** as free as you already **are**. The Word of Truth trumps our fears by revealing reality.

Let's look at one more situation where we match up our feelings with His truth.

Submitted by:	One-Year Bible Reading
Greg Standinger	Judges 8:18-9:21
Glen Arbor Community Church	Luke 23:44-24:12
West Chicago, Illinois	Psalm 99:1-9
	Proverbs 14:9-10

When I Feel Doomed Because God's Love is Gone

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:38-39 ESV

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. – Luke 12:6-7 NIV

For whatever reason, you might feel like God's love is gone. He just isn't there, or His favor is removed from you. The old flame you used to share in your youth when you praised Him and followed Him and we all were going to do great things for God seems extinguished. You might feel, "Maybe I let Him down," or "He just doesn't care about me anymore. I feel separated from His love, and if that is so, I am doomed." If you feel that sometimes, feel it now. Then read the verses above.

These are great verses to memorize! As you read these, I suggest you do memorize them to help in time of need. Getting God's Word in our hearts heals so many wrong, emotional ideas we have. These verses are foundational to getting this idea right. If you are bought with His blood, you cannot be separated from His love.

You might say "But I am so worthless and not worthy of His love." He says, "You cannot earn My love; it is only received as freely given."

I think that as creatures caught in time it wears us down, and we assume time wears Him down too. That is not so. He cares about the sparrows. He cares about every hair on your head. Let that sink in.

What kind of love is that? It is eternal love. He is love incarnate—and He never fails to love us because love never fails. I am not doomed; I am embraced, protected, and loved eternally. And so are you.

Submitted by:

Greg Standinger
Glen Arbor Community Church
West Chicago, Illinois

One-Year Bible Reading

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

The Disobedient Son

Father, I have never disobeyed a command of yours. – Luke 15:29

The "prodigal son" story is more accurately the story of a father with two sons. It is about one son who was irresponsible and immoral. It is also about the older son who was responsible and moral. This older son was no doubt the "mature one." The younger son, the prodigal, wasted his father's inheritance. But then he came to his senses and returned home. His father saw him from a distance and ran to him. Then the party began!

The older son, coming back from a day where he had fulfilled his leadership duties in the field, heard the commotion and met his father. "We are having a party for your lost brother," the father announced. The older son, incensed, stormed out of the house. His father followed him and urged him to join in the celebration. The older brother reacted, "Father I have never disobeyed a command of yours and yet you never had a party for me. Yet you are having a party for this, this rebel who has disgraced you."

Wait right there. Did you notice what the older brother said? He said, "I have never disobeyed a command of yours, Father." Do you think that is true? Do you think that he always obeyed his father? I am sure he did not. You see, he had just disobeyed his father. His father had asked him to come to the party, and he refused!

Maturity is more than "following the rules" of our Father. Maturity is following the heart of our Father. As a believer in Christ who desires to grow into maturity, you need to make sure that you obey God today by going to the party He is throwing for the prodigals of this world.

Submitted by:

John Hopler
Great Commission Association of
Churches
Columbus, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

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