

Resolution

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. – Psalm 119:9

Christians, we have just started a new year—2017. Many people make resolutions at the start of a new year, to eat healthier or exercise more. A resolution is defined as “a firm decision to do something.” Christians, could I challenge all of you to make the resolution that 2017 is the year you read God’s Word every day? The Scripture promises us many benefits from studying God’s Word.

Do you want to be pure in our evil world? Psalm 119:9 above tells you how. Do you want to have an answer for people who criticize you? Psalm 119:42 tells you: “Then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word.” Do you want to increase in knowledge and good judgment? Note Psalm 119:66—“Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.” Do you want to have strength in the midst of trials? Psalm 119:92 explains how: “If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.”

Do you want to study something perfect? Psalm 119:96 says “I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad.” Do you want to be wiser than your elders? Go to Psalm 119:99: “I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.” Do you want to be able to see where you are going in life? Check out Psalm 119:105—“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Psalm 119 continues to list the endless benefits of reading God’s Word. Many godly believers have read through the Bible over the course of a year. You can, too!

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 1:1-2:25
Matthew 1:1-2:12
Psalm 1:1-6
Proverbs 1:1-6

Our God of “The New”

Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. – Lamentations 3:22-23 NIV

It’s a new year and for many of us there is something exciting when we think about “new.” Whether it’s replacing an older vehicle or adding a new coat of paint to the walls, new can be fun and fresh.

Maybe not quite so exciting this time of year is “turning over a new leaf”...taking off some pounds or fleeing a sinful habit. Granted: not fun, but definitely good!

Have you ever noticed how much the Bible talks about new things? Starting in the Old Testament, we see God creating a new earth, later flooding it because of mankind’s rebellion, and then starting fresh all over again.

After years of dealing with the stubborn and rebellious nation of Israel, God did another new thing. He became flesh in Jesus and lived and died as a perfect Savior, not just for the Jewish nation, but for the entire world—Jew and Gentile alike.

With Jesus’ ascent to Heaven, more new things followed. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon all believers, making them “new creatures in Christ,” and a new church was born. Now we are expectantly awaiting the final new thing—the coming return of our King Jesus to establish a new heaven and earth under His reign.

One constant that has not changed, decayed, or grown old is our God whose name is Redeemer. No matter what your failings, weaknesses, or sin, He is there, ready each new day with fresh lovingkindness and compassion to help you start “new” yet once again!

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 3:1-4:26
Matthew 2:13-3:6
Psalm 2:1-12
Proverbs 1:7-9

Who Built Your House?

For every house is built by someone, but He Who built all things is God. – Hebrews 3:4 NKJV

The house we live in had a designer and a contractor. It was built according to exact specifications. We are the second owners—we have no desire to plan and oversee a house built from scratch. Let someone else deal with those headaches. Who built your house?

The first part of our verse today testifies to the obvious: “every house is built by someone.” Of course. We don’t look at a house and think, “That house got there on its own, by chance.” No, we admire the design, the architecture, the fine work of the contractor.

The second half should be just as obvious: “He Who built all things is God.” Sadly, to some it is not obvious. Academes and atheists tell us that our universe, and life itself, were “built” by chance, with no involvement from God.

The simplest single cell organism—indeed, every cell in our bodies—is magnitudes more complicated than any house man ever built. Cells, tissues, organ systems, organisms, grass, trees, plants, insects, fish, birds, mammals, animals, and mankind—all are stamped with the seal of divine blueprint and construction.

So-called scientists undergo incredible mental gymnastics and contortions of the laws of nature in efforts to explain how life so complex could build itself. They might want to start by explaining how a house could arise without outside design and energy. It would be an affront to the builder. It is no different with creation and God.

Today’s verse is simple. Memorize it and dwell on it. To embrace it means God gets the glory due to Him alone!

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 5:1-7:24
Matthew 3:7-4:11
Psalm 3:1-8
Proverbs 1:10-19

Revealed

For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. – Luke 8:16-17

I’d like to tell you a story. Although it took place a few years ago, it really encouraged my family’s faith and I believe that glorifies the Lord.

We had just bought a new camera (I had broken our old one after excitedly jumping up in the air at my son’s football game. That play cost me \$200!) A month later, unexplainably (except that I had four boys in my home), our new camera suddenly disappeared. That was pretty discouraging—the Christmas season was upon us and we had no good way to record the special moments.

We scoured our home from top to bottom. Many mornings I woke up thinking about where the camera could be. We’d almost given up hope when God reminded me, “You know, you can trust Me by asking Me to help you.”

I gathered our family together after dinner one night. We circled up, and I shared some verses which said, “Daniel replied, ‘No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries’” (Daniel 2:27-28). We prayed—I specifically asked God to help us find the camera “within the next 15 minutes.”

We all spread out to designated areas, and exactly 15 minutes later, as I pulled one of many boxes out of our cold storage and lifted out some papers—there it was! My son Jonathan yelled “We found it!” We all gathered again and thanked God for His kindness. He is indeed the revealer of mysteries. Thank you, Lord. Lesson learned? Prayer works.

Submitted By:

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Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 8:1-10:32
Matthew 4:12-25
Psalm 4:1-8
Proverbs 1:20-23

Exchange Students

We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of eternal life at the right time if we do not give up. – Galatians 6:9 New Century Version (NCV)
That is the way we should live, because God's grace that can save everyone has come. It teaches us . . . to live in the present age in a wise and right way and in a way that shows we serve God. – Titus 2: 11,12 NCV

God has given our family the privilege and opportunity to host exchange students in our home. They live with us for ten months, experiencing life and, because they are living with us, experiencing God. Overall, it is a wonderful experience. We will probably do it until God closes the door. But like all things God has given us to do, there are times when it is—less than wonderful. For me, it is usually when I am needed to do one more thing than I had planned. That one more thing, of course, upsets all my other plans. It is at these times I need to remember that God lent us this student. He lent us this student with the sole purpose of us being Jesus to him.

Having an exchange student doesn't only affect my life; it also affects my kid's lives. In many ways the effect is good. But I know at times it is hard for the kids to have a stranger suddenly be a huge part of our life. When my kids fuss because once again they need to include the student, I remind them that the student is our family's ministry. In this way we share God with someone without Him.

Look around your life. Who has God placed in your life to display Jesus to? When God shows you that person, pray and be that light in the darkness. Show Jesus' love and compassion—even at your own inconvenience.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 11:1-13:4
Matthew 5:1-26
Psalm 5:1-12
Proverbs 1:24-28

The Privacy Principle

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. – Matthew 6:24

Many of us have had situations of conflicting allegiances. One boss says one thing, and another boss says another. It is stressful, to say the least.

One of the benefits of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the peace that comes from consolidating all of life's concerns under one good Master. I'd like to focus on two components of life which must be cultivated in order to experience the peace of living life under one Master.

The first component to living under one Master is the need for privacy with Him. It's awfully hard to hear His voice when it is mixed with many other voices, and without hearing His voice clearly, we will experience the frustration of having many masters.

Jesus practiced the privacy principle. Luke 5:16 says He often would slip away to the wilderness and pray. (See also John 6:15, Mark 6:45). We see Him in the gospels being very busy, and He certainly was, but His time with His Father was a priority. He somehow found enough time to be alone with His Father so that He could say, "The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works" (John 14:10).

We see Jesus practicing this with His disciples. In Mark 6:31—"He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.' (For there were many people coming and going and they did not even have time to eat.)" Tomorrow, we'll look at how this can work for you and me.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 13:5-15:21
Matthew 5:27-48
Psalm 6:1-10
Proverbs 1:29-33

The "First" Principle – 2

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. . . . – Matthew 6:33

We need to pursue the privacy principle with God in order to experience Him being our Master. But there is a second little component to letting Jesus be Master, nestled within the privacy principle. It is the little word, "first."

When the busy lives of young moms or dads or college students scream at us, "When?", Jesus answers, "First." "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33).

A major component of having and keeping Jesus as Lord of our lives is giving Him first place. Many give the first minutes of their day to Him for listening, reflection, and prayer. But many of us have stormy schedules and interruptions seem to abound, and we might miss our morning time. Is there hope for us? Yes! It's called the "first" principle.

When our days are broken down, there are actually many "firsts" in a day, not just the first minutes of a day. For example, there are the first few minutes when you get home from work, or the first few minutes when you return to your dorm room, or the first few minutes after a shower or the first few minutes before supper or, if you're dining with others, perhaps the first few minutes of your time at the table. (This isn't private, but it's the same idea of giving Him first place.)

God is a God of covenantal relationships. He loves to have us make commitments to seek Him. He loves to have us manage our hearts. Two components to doing so are to seek private times with Him, and to give Him our "firsts."

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 16:1-18:15
Matthew 6:1-24
Psalm 7:1-17
Proverbs 2:1-5

Career – 3

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. – Colossians 3:23-24

Many of us feel like we must give our all to our careers because our survival depends upon it. Personally, I serve people as a house inspector for their newly chosen homes. But no one can be devoted to a career and a Savior. Either Jesus is Lord of our career, or our career is acting as lord over our Savior. This can seem confusing.

The dilemma is solved by understanding that "Every good thing bestowed is from above" (James 1:17). God is your provider, not your career. He may want you in a career to display Himself through you, and you must give 110% in order to do so, but only under His Lordship. He is your Master; from Him will come the lasting rewards.

Are you applying these verses? "Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:31-33).

Are you believing this promise? "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

God is your Provider. He has your provision all planned out; you just need to diligently go out and find it. Jesus is your one Master, and He has kingdom work for you to do in your home, church, and community, as well your career.

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 18:16-19:38
Matthew 6:25-7:14
Psalm 8:1-9
Proverbs 2:6-15

Red Light

How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day?
– Psalm 13:1-2

It was the end of a happy day with our grandchildren here while their parents celebrated their fifteenth wedding anniversary. But just before leaving with his relaxed parents, one of our grandsons completely lost his cool playing “Red Light, Green Light” in the driveway. A brother kept repeating “red light” when he expected him to say “green light,” and he became totally exasperated. He threw himself under a parked car and had a tantrum. “Red light, red light, red light—all he says is ‘red light!’”

The next morning I threw my own tantrum before God. I told Him I couldn’t take it any more. Unresolved conflict in a close relationship was too much for me. “Why do I go around grieving in my heart all day long?” I asked with the psalmist. My spirit was exasperated. (When God is doing His deep work in our lives, we can be like a patient telling the surgeon, “I can’t take this. I’m getting off the table!”) I said to John, my husband, “I feel like I’m always bleeding. I just feel so broken.” But instantly after I said those words, a line came to mind: “Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice.” John readily found the verse in Psalm 51. I read David’s thoughts: “Make me to hear joy and gladness . . . Create in me a clean heart . . . restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then . . . sinners will be converted to You” (Psalm 51:8-13).

Lord, I believe You have more in mind than “red light, red light, red light.” You are working in me for joy. May the outcome be “green light” for Your kingdom’s purposes.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 20:1-22:24
Matthew 7:15-29
Psalm 9:1-12
Proverbs 2:16-22

A Master in Loving – 2

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged. – 2 Timothy 2:24

When you want to win stubborn people to Christ, follow the four winning ways taught by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:23-26. Yesterday we looked at Winning Way #1. Today we will look at Winning Way #2: Love.

My friend Jim was a master in loving this Hindu unbeliever. Jim made a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the unbeliever then got on his soapbox. “Jesus did not rise from the dead,” he said. “That is just a myth. It never happened!” He talked this way for a good ten minutes. While he shared, I found myself getting quite upset. I wanted to interrupt the Hindu and tell him to keep quiet. I wanted to tell him that he was wrong about Jesus and the resurrection.

But then I noticed Jim. He continued to listen. Jim’s eye contact showed that he was truly engaged in what the unbeliever was saying. He was respectful, kind and patient. He did not interrupt, but continued to allow him to speak.

Looking back, I realize now that Jim was sharing the gospel with this man—not by speaking but by listening. His careful listening communicated volumes to this unbeliever. He was proclaiming the message that God really cares for us, He loves us, and He respects us. We are important to God and He really wants to know what we are thinking. This unbeliever was having this gospel preached to him, even while he was on his soapbox! Jim in his silence was speaking more loudly than this unbeliever.

Jim was exercising Winning Way #2: Love. And it was very powerful.

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 24:52-26:16
Matthew 8:18-34
Psalm 10:1-15
Proverbs 3:7-8

Winning Ways

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. – 2 Timothy 2:23

Do you have hard-headed people in your life that you would like to win to Christ? Do you know opinionated individuals who are set in their ways and will not change their views about God?

Many years ago, a friend of mine, Jim, and I were sharing the gospel with just such an individual. This unbeliever was a Hindu who was very opinionated and loved to talk. He did not respect God or the Bible. Yet he became a believer in Jesus Christ shortly after our conversation. How did this happen? Looking back, I realize that my friend Jim followed the four “winning ways” that Paul taught Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:23-26.

Winning Way #1: Jim refused “foolish and ignorant” speculations but focused on the truth found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the unbeliever talked (and talked and talked!) about his religious upbringing, and this or that spiritual issue, Jim patiently listened, and kept the focus on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It would have been natural for Jim to get into a quarrel about this or that religious tenet. The unbeliever tried to draw Jim into peripheral religious issues that would have sidetracked the overall conversation. Instead Jim maintained his focus on the one thing we know to be true: Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

God will give His answer in due time to our and others’ unresolved religious questions. In the meantime, as I seek to love the people in my life, the simpler I get, the more effective I become. Keep it simple. Avoid speculation. Keep Christ the focus. This is Winning Way #1.

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 23:1-24:51
Matthew 8:1-17
Psalm 9:13-20
Proverbs 3:1-6

Gentle Correction – 3

With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. – 2 Timothy 2:25

We have looked at two winning ways when dealing with hard-headed people. Today we will look at Winning Way #3: Gentle correction. We are called to love people. But we are also called to share the truth. Love without truth is not really love. And truth without love is not really truth.

I have been telling the story of my friend Jim and I sharing the gospel with a Hindu unbeliever. Jim patiently listened to the unbeliever as he went on and on about his belief that Jesus did not rise from the dead. I could hardly sit still while this unbeliever went on his rant.

But Jim waited for the right moment. He did not “butt in” to the unbeliever’s (seemingly) endless speech. But then the unbeliever stopped talking. There was a brief moment when no one was speaking. Then Jim said some very powerful words. With gentleness, Jim said, “No, Jesus did rise from the dead.” And then there was silence.

No arguing. No criticisms. No harsh rebukes. Just a simple confession of faith. Jim gently corrected the Hindu about a fact. Facts are stubborn things. “The earth revolves around the sun” is a sure fact. And “Jesus rose from the dead” is also a sure fact.

Jim masterfully practiced Winning Way #3: He gently corrected this Hindu unbeliever by testifying to the fact that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead. And by correcting this man in such a gentle and powerful way, Jim opened the door for God to lead the man to repentance and to the knowledge of the truth.

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 26:17-27:46
Matthew 9:1-17
Psalm 10:16-18
Proverbs 3:9-10

Expect God to Win – 4

And they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. – 2 Timothy 2:26

The last three days, we have been looking at Paul's instruction to Timothy on how win opinionated people to Christ. Today, we will look at Winning Way #4: Expect God to win the spiritual battle.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul writes: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." Paul recognized that being "winsome" will not be enough to "win some." God has to open the eyes of the blind.

I have been telling how my friend Jim applied these winning ways in reaching a Hindu unbeliever for Christ. Jim shared with the unbeliever the truth that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He shared this truth with quiet confidence—and it had an effect on the unbeliever. God was beginning to open the eyes of this man. We continued to talk about the gospel, and then we prayed that God would reveal to this man the truth about Jesus Christ.

God continued to work in this Hindu's heart. A little while later he confessed to us that he had put his faith in Jesus Christ. He then got baptized and became an active member in the church. God delivered this man from Satan who had held him captive to do his will. And how did God deliver him? Through a Christian who practiced the winning ways described in God's Word: focus on the truth; love; gently correct, and expect God to win the spiritual battle. As you practice these four winning ways, who does God want to win through your life?

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 28:1-29:35
Matthew 9:18-38
Psalm 11:1-7
Proverbs 3:11-12

All One Thing

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" – Job 2:9 ESV

"Of all our kitchen utensils, this bread knife makes my favorite sound," John said. I stared at him blankly. But he immediately tapped the all-metal knife on the marble counter, and it gave off a clear, ringing tone. "That's really nice," I agreed. "Do you think all knives have a tone?" John selected a steel Chinese chef's knife from the knife drawer. "Tong!" Another clear note. He tried four more knives with wooden or rubber handles. "Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud." I discovered that only all-metal knives have musical tones!

Interestingly, this experiment followed upon my pondering the quality of integrity in the story of Job. The response of Job's wife to their calamities was understandable, though her advice—"Curse God and die!"—was wrong.

But Job's wife hit the nail on the head about her husband. She said, "Do you still hold fast your integrity?" **Yes**—Job did. God delighted in Job because he was a man of integrity, a man of just one thing, whole and complete in his identity. His identity was in God—he was a godly man. That's why God set up the contest between Satan and Job. He wanted to showcase Job's integrity, his dependence on and intimacy with God. Ever since, Job has been a model of integrity in suffering (James 5:11).

More profound than the knife analogy is one from Amy Carmichael's book *If*: "If a sudden jar can cause me to speak an impatient, unloving word, then I know nothing of Calvary love. (For a cup brimful of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water however suddenly jolted.)" May God make us sweet water like Job.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 31:17-32:12
Matthew 10:24-11:6
Psalm 13:1-6
Proverbs 3:16-18

Reprove A Wise Man

Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you. – Proverbs 9:8

Have you ever lovingly corrected someone, only to be attacked in return? That's exactly what happened to the seer who reproved King Asa. The king had feared God for 35 years, so the seer must have been shocked when the king responded in anger and threw him in prison. Here's the story.

"At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, 'Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.' Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him for this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time" (2 Chronicles 16:7-10).

Loving others will require correction at times. We don't know if they will respond with wisdom or foolishness as King Asa surprisingly did. We must not let the fear of rejection keep us from correcting others for their good. Of course, we are not to be constantly looking for issues in their lives either. Faultfinding is not a virtue. Ask God to give you grace to speak the truth in love and pray for a good response.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 30:1-31:16
Matthew 10:1-23
Psalm 12:1-8
Proverbs 3:13-15

Are You Listening to God?

"Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and because you humbled yourself before Me, tore your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the Lord. – 2 Chronicles 34:27

Listening to God makes all the difference in our lives. It can even save your life, as with King Josiah. Listening to God can save your marriage, your friendships, and your health! It is serious business! How well do you listen to God? Do you make the effort to read His Word daily?

King Josiah was a very godly king who brought all Israel back to God and celebrated the Passover again. As we read above, the king heard God's Word and acted on it. But later in life King Josiah died in battle because he didn't listen to the word of the Lord through the Egyptian king: "But Josiah did not turn back from him; he disguised himself for battle. He did not take seriously the words of Necho which he had received from God; he went to fight him in the Plain of Megiddo" (2 Chronicles 35:22 NET).

You probably will not die in battle if you don't take God's Word seriously. But you will suffer in other ways. We must take God and His Word seriously—it impacts everything we do. Do you see your need to read His word and apply it to your life? Then you too will please God like King Josiah.

Nobody makes me read the Bible every day. I want to hear from God! He loves me and has made me holy in Christ; therefore I cherish my time with Him! I take His Word seriously. Do you?

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 32:13-34:31
Matthew 11:7-30
Psalm 14:1-7
Proverbs 3:19-20

Trivial Pursuit

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. – Jeremiah 29:13 ESV

There is something about the word “seek” that gets my blood pumping. Maybe it’s because it reminds me of striving and pursuing a goal that I so desperately desired, for which I had to work hard and make sacrifices to accomplish. Growing up, I spent countless hours training and conditioning my body, seeking to win a wrestling championship. Later, I relentlessly sought a godly woman, Hannah, who is now my amazing wife. We all have goals and dreams in our lives that we seek—high grades, a good career, accolades, and hobbies.

The world proclaims seeking self, indulging physical pleasures, materiality, temporary highs, and false gods. It’s very easy for us to get lost in our seeking. Like a man being held under water, drowning, gasps for air, our sole concern is that which we seek. God has wired us to seek, and it’s a great drive when we focus it correctly.

God wants us to seek Him with all of our hearts, not with a piece, a portion, or even a majority. Imagine the spiritual growth you’d experience if you would seek God as desperately as you seek your greatest personal passion. Imagine what your life, family, marriage, small group, and church would look like if you sought God with the intensity that you give to so many other material pursuits.

I guarantee you that the things we so desperately seek in this world will never ultimately satisfy us. We may never fully achieve our goals and dreams, but God tells us that if we seek Him, we will find Him, and He alone satisfies.

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| Submitted By: | One-Year Bible Reading: |
| Shane Unger | Genesis 35:1-36:43 |
| Candlewood Church | Matthew 12:1-21 |
| Lincoln, Nebraska | Psalms 15:1-5 |
| | Proverbs 3:21-26 |

Hoping for a Political Savior?

So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?” He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know.” – Acts 1:6-7 NLT

While studying this passage recently it stood out to me how the disciples seemed to be distracted from the mission Jesus was trying to give them and instead were focused on the political freedom and restoration of their nation. Jesus had just been crucified on the cross for their sins (and ours), He was miraculously raised from the grave, and He appeared to them many times over 40 days, talking to them about the eternal “kingdom of God.” He also had given them their marching orders of reaching the world with the gospel through making disciples (See Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 24:46-47, and John 20:21). But still, “they kept asking him, ‘Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?’” It seems like they were still hoping for a political savior.

Then Jesus spoke His final words before ascending into heaven. He yet again reminded them of a greater cause, something bigger than just their nation. He commissioned them to not only go to Jerusalem and Judea (i.e. their nation), but also to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. His interest was and is beyond just one nation because He is “the hope of all the ends of the earth” (Psalm 65:5 ESV). His interests were not just about the condition of their important nation, but about eternal rescue of the souls of men and women from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9 ESV).

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| Submitted By: | One-Year Bible Reading: |
| Rich Thatcher | Genesis 39:1-41:16 |
| The Firehouse Church | Matthew 12:46-13:23 |
| Denver, Colorado | Psalms 17:1-15 |
| | Proverbs 3:33-35 |

The Glorious King

*Open up, you gates.
Open wide, you aged doors
and the glorious King will come in.
Who is this glorious King?
The Lord, strong and mighty.
The Lord, the powerful warrior.
Open up, you gates.
Open wide, you aged doors
and the glorious King will come in.
Who is this glorious King?
The Lord All-Powerful—he is the glorious King. Selah
– Psalm 24: 7-10 New Century Version*

I love these verses. “Open wide, you aged doors, and the glorious King will come in.” Can you picture the magnificent gates opening for the glorious King? (Think *Lord of the Rings*, huge ornate gates, and triumphant conquering king). He will come in. Not *might*, but *will*. “Who is this King of glory?” you ask? “The Lord, strong and mighty. The Lord, the powerful warrior.” He isn’t a puny King. Oh, no, He is the Lord, strong and mighty.³

I picture it like this: “Gates, open all the way. Open wide, you aged doors, so the glorious King will come in.” They are creaking open. Is it the gates of your heart, your mind opening to the Lord God Almighty? He will come in. Victorious. King of all.

“Who is this glorious King? The Lord All-Powerful—he is the glorious King”.

Can I hear an **Amen**?! Glory, hallelujah, He is the King of glory. Don’t anyone doubt it. He is victorious over all.

Amen and Amen.

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| Submitted By: | One-Year Bible Reading: |
| Shirley Ferguson | Genesis 37:1-38:30 |
| Oak Ridge Community Church | Matthew 12:22-45 |
| Clarksville, Maryland | Psalms 16:1-11 |
| | Proverbs 3:27-32 |

Prayer for our President

God, give the king your good judgment and the king’s son your goodness. Help him judge your people fairly and decide what is right for the poor. Let there be peace on the mountains and goodness on the hills for the people. Help him be fair to the poor and save the needy and punish those who hurt them. May they respect you as long as the sun shines and as long as the moon glows. Let him be like rain on the grass, like showers that water the earth. Let goodness be plentiful while he lives. Let peace continue as long as there is a moon. – Psalm 72: 1-7 New Century Version

I have labeled these verses as my prayer for our President. It starts with “God, give the king (President) Your good judgment.” Oh, do we need this in our country today. Not the Republicans’ or the Democrats’ good judgment. Not my good judgment. Not your good judgment. But God’s good judgment. We can’t go wrong with God’s judgment. It’s always good.

The prayer goes on to pray for treating people fairly, rights for the poor, and peace.

“Let him be like rain on the grass, like showers that water the earth.” Pray that the nation is nourished and fruitful under this President. “Let goodness be plentiful while he lives [is in office]. Let peace continue as long as there is a moon.” May we experience God’s goodness and God’s peace on our nation. May God’s blessings be on the President. I say “God’s blessings,” not mine, because God knows what the President needs, and I don’t.

So take a moment today and pray for our nation. Pray for our President. Pray God’s blessing on them both.

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| Submitted By: | One-Year Bible Reading: |
| Shirley Ferguson | Genesis 41:17-42:17 |
| Oak Ridge Community Church | Matthew 13:24-46 |
| Clarksville, Maryland | Psalms 18:1-15 |
| | Proverbs 4:1-6 |

Bumps & Bruises

For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. – Psalm 139:13-14 ESV

Like all parents, my wife and I are routinely confronted with an ever-changing parade of cuts, scrapes, stitches, loosened teeth, and other injuries experienced by our kids. Sometimes it feels like we are caught in a never-ending episode of a medical drama, with each dawning day bringing questions such as: "Who will get hurt today?" "How long until I have to get out the bandages?" "How far over our insurance deductible are we now?"

But in the midst of tears and antibacterial creams, I can forget the amazing creation that is the human body, and that so many things going on inside **are** actually working properly at any given moment: respiration, circulation, immunity, digestion, vision, hearing, motion, and so on! As the psalmist said, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made"! As I see the intricate processes within the body, as I watch cuts heal and bones set and teeth form and hair grow and babies be born and all of it work together in harmony, I want to be reminded that God has made us both generally (with rules and processes) and individually (each person like a work of art). Each one of us is absolutely unique, yet He has given us all a common framework of being human, which means being blessed with an amazingly intricate body replete with utterly complex and interdependent systems.

Today, let's praise Him for blessing us each with our humanity, one His most wonderful of creations (even if it means enduring some bumps and bruises along the way)!

Submitted By:

Greg Miller
The Firehouse Church
Denver, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 42:18-43:34
Matthew 13:47-14:12
Psalm 18:16-36
Proverbs 4:7-10

Forgiveness

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. – Colossians 3:13 NIV

Forgiveness is an act of the will. I recently talked to a person at church who told me, "I don't feel like forgiving my friend." She was obviously hurting, and her pain was very real. After listening to her story and empathizing with her situation, I reminded her that forgiveness was not an option. In the verse above we are *commanded* to forgive.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch woman who was sent to a concentration camp in 1944 (for helping Jews escape from Holland). In exercising forgiveness toward a German who had been a former prison guard over her, Corrie shared these profound words: "But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and it can function regardless of the temperature of the heart."

God has paid for our sins with the precious blood of His Son. This means He alone is Judge . . . and He has not granted us the power of attorney! "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody," Paul taught the Romans (12:17 NIV). Vengeance is to inflict injury in return for an insult. How many vigilante movies (like *Rambo*) show just that? But vengeance is the Lord's. We don't have the right to retaliate.

Finally, remember that God will act to right all wrongs. He doesn't say, "Just let it go." All of Creation will rejoice when He comes to judge the earth. "He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity" (Psalm 98:9 NIV). Let's commit ourselves to forgive those who have sinned against us. You will be so glad you did.

Submitted By:

Bill Young
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 46:1-47:31
Matthew 15:1-28
Psalm 19:1-14
Proverbs 4:14-19

A Raspberry Parable

Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" – Matthew 13:10 ESV

Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? – Proverbs 24:11-12

John and Steve had been roommates in college. After graduation they had stayed in touch, mainly through Facebook, but they hadn't seen each other in years. Finally Steve had a chance to visit John on a business trip. They enjoyed catching up over dinner and, after the meal, John showed Steve around his new home, including his yard where John had planted a number of trees and plants.

When they walked past a small raspberry patch, John started to explain to Steve how the raspberries had struggled after being transplanted from out-of-state but now they were starting to thrive in their new location. While John was talking, Steve absentmindedly bent down and started to pull some of the young raspberry canes out of the ground (the ones that were sprouting up between the fully-grown, mature canes).

When John noticed what Steve was doing, he cried out, "What are you doing, Steve?! Please stop that, my friend!" Steve looked up with surprise. "Why are you so upset, John? It is just a blob of plant matter, not a real raspberry."

"What are you talking about, Steve? That is a young raspberry plant you just pulled out of the ground!"

"Don't be ridiculous, John. Look how tiny these leaves are. This blob of plant matter isn't even an inch tall yet."

"Please stop, my friend." May we remember the unborn.

Submitted By:

Josh Whitney
The Rock Church
Taylorsville, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 44:1-45:28
Matthew 14:13-36
Psalm 18:37-50
Proverbs 4:11-13

Offended

Dear brothers and sisters, if I were still preaching that you must be circumcised—as some say I do—why am I still being persecuted? If I were no longer preaching salvation through the cross of Christ, no one would be offended. – Galatians 5:11 NLT

The problem with wanting others to like us is that the gospel of Christ is offensive to the human ego. Please don't misunderstand me. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be liked, to have friends, or with being popular, until we cross the line and compromise the gospel.

The only way to never offend anyone is to take the cross out of the gospel. Paul knew that the cross of Christ was offensive to the prideful human desire to justify oneself before God. He was convinced that it was human nature to keep the law and boast in one's accomplishments. That self-righteousness made the cross of Christ unnecessary.

Today we must be careful not to compromise the gospel by removing the cross of Christ. We always need to call people to turn in repentance and godly sorrow from their selfish lives, self-effort, and self-righteousness. The cross is the place where helpless sinners turn from their pride and trust in the grace of God for cleansing and new life. It is offensive to our ego, but it is essential for salvation. It is beautiful when someone sincerely comes to grips with their selfishness before a holy God. It is the only way to freedom and to experience the love of God.

Take a moment and think and pray over how you present the gospel. Is the cross a vital part of your message? Have you compromised in any way? Has your fear of rejection or fear of losing a friend kept you from preaching salvation through the cross?

Submitted By:

Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Churches
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 48:1-49:33
Matthew 15:29-16:12
Psalm 20:1-9
Proverbs 4:20-27

Courage in the Face of Persecution and Death

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. – 2 Timothy 3:12

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10

A reality of life is death. Particularly now if you are a Christian, persecution and death are realities every day. We in the United States are shielded and oblivious to much of this, but it is coming. Persecution may take on different forms, but it is coming and already here.

According to Open Doors the following occurs every month worldwide: 332 Christians are killed for their faith; 214 Christian churches or associated properties are destroyed; 772 forms of violence are committed against Christians (<http://www.opendoorsusa.org>).

Christians are, by far, the most persecuted people group in the world. But we should not be surprised. This is clearly promised by our Lord. If we wish to follow Him, we will be persecuted in some way. This is par for the course. We should expect it.

Courage is going forward even when we are afraid. My Lord is my courage because He has overcome death and is always with me. He promised I will be with Him in paradise, and that He will never leave me nor forsake me.

When the persecution comes, I know He will be with me. And when I get on my knees in fear and trembling is when Satan is defeated.

Submitted By:

Greg Standinger
Glen Arbor Community Church
West Chicago, Illinois

One-Year Bible Reading:

Genesis 50:1 - Exodus 2:10
Matthew 16:13-17:9
Psalm 21:1-13
Proverbs 5:1-6

Courage – 2

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." – Psalm 46: 10

Our Lord Jesus faced persecution and death and gave us some practical examples of what to do when our turn comes. *First, be still and know He is God* (Psalm 46:9, Mark 14:60). When interrogated by the Sanhedrin and by Pilate, Jesus did not respond nor defend Himself. Was this to show how tough He was? No, it was to show in whom He trusted. Even His few responses showed His faith in God.

Second, give thanks (Luke 22:14-19, Acts 5:41). Jesus gave thanks to God at the Passover meal with the disciples right before the death He knew was coming. We too need to give thanks for the opportunity and honor of suffering for Him. *Third, offer up your fear and loneliness* (Luke 22:41-42, Matt 27:46). Right before His arrest, Jesus seemed afraid and alone. He prayed and laid out His heart before the Lord. We need to do the same in tough times. It is normal to feel alone and afraid—offer these to the Lord and receive His peace and courage. *Fourth, avoid self-pity* (Luke 23:27,34). When the women were weeping for Jesus as He carried His cross, He could have said, "Look at how difficult this is! Woe is me!" Instead He concerned Himself with them. Self-pity and courage are not compatible.

Finally, do something for someone else (Luke 23:42-43, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Jesus healed the ear of the slave of those who arrested Him, made sure His mother was taken care of, and asked for the forgiveness of those killing Him. God gets the greatest glory when, through us, love for others is seen in the midst of hatred. That is the courage of God in you.

Submitted By:

Greg Standinger
Glen Arbor Community Church
West Chicago, Illinois

One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 2:11-3:22
Matthew 17:10-27
Psalm 22:1-18
Proverbs 5:7-14

Killing People for Sport?

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. – 1 Timothy 2:1-2 NLT

While driving home from church recently, I saw a banner hanging on a pedestrian bridge near our church that said something like, "Cops are killing people for sport!" That accusation about law enforcement is obviously ridiculous! I know there are two sides to the story, but this "anti-police" sentiment overlooks the overwhelming amount of good that law enforcement authorities do on a daily basis.

Many of the men and women who work in law enforcement on federal, state, county, and local levels willingly put themselves "in harm's way" for the sake of protecting our neighborhoods and cities just by clocking in to their jobs. Not many of us have jobs with the potential to cause our families great loss just by doing our "daily grind"!

I understand that some of these officers can make mistakes while facing potentially life-threatening dangers or even respond in error when someone pretends to be gunning for them. But out of the thousands of men and women who serve, and the countless dangerous situations they are placed in regularly, these unfortunate incidents are the uncommon exception.

One thing that you and I can do (besides thank them) is to pray for our law enforcement authorities! We can thank God for those who serve faithfully and sacrificially; we can pray for their wisdom and protection. While we're at it, we can ask God to "deliver us from evil" as a nation as well.

Submitted By:

Rich Thatcher
The Firehouse Church
Denver, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 4:1-5:21
Matthew 18:1-20
Psalm 22:19-31
Proverbs 5:15-21

The Value of People

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. – Luke 16:9 ESV

Jesus told a story recorded in Luke that was somewhat confusing. It is hard to understand what point He was trying to make. He tells of a guy who was a financial manager. This manager was mismanaging the owner's wealth and so was fired. Before he was thrown out on the street, he dishonestly "cooked the books" in order to reduce the loans of people who had borrowed money. He did this to win favor with the debtors so they might hire or return the favor to him in his unemployment.

The puzzling thing was that the owner praised this dishonest manager. Why? Why would the owner praise someone who ripped him off? Jesus' point was not to comment on the morality of theft in this story so we shouldn't get hung up on that detail. His point was that the unrighteous manager was thinking ahead by making friends for himself through money.

In the grand scheme of things, people and friends are far more valuable than money. Jesus always prioritized people over money. From this story He is saying, "Use money to gain influence with people; use money to reach people." If you think money is more valuable, you will sacrifice people and relationships for it. We should value people over money and lavishly spend money now to influence people for eternity. One small way that I practice this principle is by giving generous tips to all sorts of people, many of whom are immigrants in the service industry.

Submitted By:

Dave Lennander
Coulee Rock Community Church
La Crosse, Wisconsin

One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 5:22-7:25
Matthew 18:21-19:12
Psalm 23:1-6
Proverbs 5:22-23

Rich Toward God

But God said to him, "You fool!"...This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God. – Luke 12:20-21 NIV

God called the rich farmer "a fool", because he laid up treasure for himself and was not rich toward God.

What does it mean to be "rich toward God"? First of all, it means that we watch out for fool's gold. "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil...but flee from these things you man of God" (1 Timothy 6:9-12). Being greedy for anything will eventually lead to our destruction. Temptations may look good, taste good and feel good, but in the end they are deadly. We must watch over our heart with all diligence "for from it flows the springs of life."

Secondly, we must become rich in faith. God says that He has chosen the poor to be rich in faith (James 2:5). The people who are truly rich are those who recognize their poverty and call upon the name of the Lord. They see God in ways that the "rich" will never see.

Thirdly, we must become rich in God's Word. We are commanded to let the word of Christ richly dwell in our heart (Colossians 3:16). It is our responsibility to get into the Word in order that the Word gets into us.

Lastly, we become rich toward God by being rich in good works. The apostle Paul instructed the rich Christians in this present world to be rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:17-19). Wealthy Christians are taught to fix their hope on God, to be generous and ready to share and do good works.

Being rich toward God means we stop living for ourselves and we start living for God.

Submitted By:

Doug Brown
Lee's Summit Community Church
Lee's Summit, Missouri

One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 8:1-9:35
Matthew 19:13-30
Psalm 24:1-10
Proverbs 6:1-5

Daddy Tax

I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing. – 2 Samuel 24:24 ESV

One day in an attempt to help my two young sons grasp the concept of tithing, I jokingly started what I called a "Daddy Tax." They lived in a very simple tax bracket: I would make a sandwich and take a bite of it before I handed it to them. This tax was placed on all candy, chips, and carrots that they ate. As the month went on, my son's hearts started to resent this "Daddy Tax." The parallel between tithing to a heavenly father and a hungry, earthly father began to break down. So I scrapped the tax.

Recently in phase one of our church building campaign, God grew my understanding from an overly simplistic view of giving to God that I've had for almost two decades. God struck me with one main thought: My sacrifice defines my walk. Chip Ingram wrote in his book *The Genius of Generosity*, "God measures generosity not by the size of the gift but by the size of the sacrifice." David showed that he grasped this concept when he stated his conviction above. God commanded him to build an altar to stop a plague, but David understood that our sacrifice to God is extremely important. 1 Chronicles 21:25 says David paid 600 shekels or 12 pounds of gold for this piece of property. Currently 12 pounds of gold is running at \$234,372. In obeying God, David named his own price; he decided to pay just under a quarter million for it. David understood sacrifice.

Sacrifice is an essential part of worship and service to God—so are our motives. Yes, God wants us to be cheerful givers, but I believe God also wants us to be on a journey of sacrificial giving.

Submitted By:

Mike Whitney
Candlewood Church
Lincoln, Nebraska

One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 10:1-12:13
Matthew 20:1-28
Psalm 25:1-15
Proverbs 6:6-11

Paid in Full

In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. –Ephesians 1:7 NIV

It happened many years earlier, yet here I was, painfully reminded of a shameful incident that occurred in my freshman year of college. Though a very young Christian at the time, I had surrounded myself with friends who weren't following God and his ways, and I engaged in all sorts of escapades with them.

One such escapade included shoplifting a pair of sunglasses. I was not caught (there were no store video cameras back then) so I went on my way, without penalty. But wearing those glasses bothered me. Later as a recommitted Christian, I thought of returning to the store to pay for the stolen goods, but it had since closed.

So here I was, now years later, freshly reminded, and yes, still feeling some guilt about my unresolved "crime." What to do? I realized that there was one witness to my offense who was still readily available to justly judge my case, and that was the Lord Jesus. As I turned to him in prayer, an interesting image popped into my mind.

I saw two hands hovering over what appeared to be the counter of that store. One hand held a thick stack of dollar bills; the other hand was taking one bill after another and placing it on the counter. It was as if Jesus was saying, "I paid for that when I died on the cross for your sins."

Tears of relief flowed as I thought of not only this particular incident, but others as well that needing "paying for." This image of the hands simply continued, one bill after another being laid on the counter, the stack of bills never dwindling. Jesus' payment was more than enough.

Submitted By:

Dawn Bovenmyer
Stonycreek Community Church
Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 12:14-13:16
Matthew 20:29-21:22
Psalm 25:16-22
Proverbs 6:12-15