

God Doesn't Slam Dunk

Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire... – Matthew 25:41

"You can't expect me to believe that God would just hurl someone into hell 'just like that.' I mean, how could God ever do such a thing? How cruel!" Honestly, the idea that God nonchalantly consigns "average, decent" people to eternal misery would bother me too, if it were true. But it isn't. Understand what heaven and hell really are.

True Christians are God's worshipers, praising God with their lips and lives. They only wish they could do a better job of it. Their heart just seems too small, their language too limited. Their spirit feels imprisoned in their body, and their heart can't explode into the kind of praise they long to offer. Once they reach heaven, they will be "freed up" to worship God in a way they could only dream about on earth. So heaven is simply an expanded capacity for Christians to do in eternity what they longed to do on earth.

What about hell? The unbeliever works to keep God at a distance. He distances himself from church, from the Bible, and from the tug of the Holy Spirit, even though He has been saying to him, "C'mon. This is true. Respond." When his life is over, God says to him, "I can see that distance from Me is what you want. You've demonstrated that your whole life. I will fulfill your lifelong dream. Total separation and independence from Me is yours forever."

The truth of the matter is that God simply gives an expanded capacity in eternity for people to experience what they long for on earth. God will not be "slam dunking" on judgment day. He doesn't have to.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 13:17-15:18
Matthew 21:23-46
Psalm 26:1-12
Proverbs 6:16-19

Not Ashamed

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. – Romans 1:16.

Years ago, my wife and I were watching Steele Croswhite's band play at the Freedom Festival in Provo. Towards the end of the set, we noticed a group of college kids making fun of some of our friends in the audience. Our friends were lifting their hands, closing their eyes, and worshipping God.

I saw two things happen that night that still bring tears to my eyes. The first thing I noticed was that the college students weren't discrete in their mocking. A lot of people in the audience noticed them. Shortly after the mocking started, I saw my friends lift their hands and sing along with the ones who were being mocked in worship and solidarity. I will never forget that.

The second thing I noticed was a little girl standing close to us. She was crying and very upset. She was embarrassed because people were making fun of her friends and family. After the last song, I saw her point out the group of mockers to her dad. He knelt down on one knee, gave her a big hug and gently moved her back far enough for her to read what was on his t-shirt. He pointed to a cross with the words "Not Ashamed" written across the front. He said something to his daughter and then gave her another hug.

I'll never know what this dad said to his daughter. But, his quick, caring embrace and the obvious Biblical counsel will always stick with me. Men and women, the Gospel we believe is the very power of God! Let's have the heart of this father when we're made fun of for our faith.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 17:8-19:15
Matthew 22:34-23:12
Psalm 27:7-14
Proverbs 6:27-35

My Eye Upon You

I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go, I will counsel you with my eye upon you. – Psalm 32:8

I recently drew much comfort from this verse.

First of all, simply knowing that God instructs us and teaches us is astounding. Much of my instruction has come from the sometimes excruciatingly painful school of hard knocks. The thought of being taught by my Perfect Father resonates with me deeply.

I've had quite a few instructors over the years and for that I am very grateful. But God clearly has His best in mind for me. His eye of protection is nothing like the eye of Saruman (from The Lord of the Rings), which seeks to destroy. The Lord's eye is all-knowing, all-caring, all in all. His uses the highest highs and lowest lows of my life to teach me.

The eye of detail the Lord put into creating our senses, emotional make-ups, bodies, minds, speech, and so much more, reflect His goodness and love for us. Here is the real kicker. When we fall short (and we all do), He completes us. Our triune God thought of everything, including our very great salvation, to care for us and give us life. Eternal life. Thank you, Lord, for keeping your eye upon us.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 15:19-17:7
Matthew 22:1-33
Psalm 27:1-6
Proverbs 6:20-26

David and Goliath?

"For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" – 1 Samuel 17:26

The familiar story of David and Goliath would be better entitled "David and the Living God." Goliath was just a participant in revealing God's divine power and strength.

How similar the war tactics of Goliath and Satan are! Goliath's presence alone instilled fear in the Israelites. He was huge, standing 9 feet tall and carrying 125 pounds in armor. With a thunderous voice he challenged the Israelite army to "choose a man" from among them to fight him! His tactic was "giant-to-man" combat, a game that he had championed among his own.

Goliath was intimidating not only in size and skill but also with insults. He reduced the Israelites to weak, puny men with no hope against him. He was large and in charge. His ground rules would undoubtedly give him the victory. He wanted them to fear him. And they did because they thought that he was just taunting them!

But when David hears Goliath's words, he can hardly contain himself! "Who is this uncircumcised heathen taunting the armies of the living God?" David knew the Israelites were God's people, something they had for-gotten. He knew that God trumped Goliath on any turf. So he changed the game plan and ran out to meet him, not "man to man" but in the "name of the LORD of the armies of heaven and the army of the Israelites." He did not attack with sword and spear (the very thing that Goliath was most trained in), but rather with a mere stone and sling shot.

So all Israel took courage and won the battle. Goliath became bird-feed! Now—who is your Goliath?

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 19:16-21:21
Matthew 23:13-39
Psalm 28:1-9
Proverbs 7:1-5

The Battle is the Lord's

All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's and he will give all of you into our hands. — 1 Samuel 17:47 NIV

Yesterday we saw how a young shepherd boy took on the mammoth Goliath, not in his own strength, but in the name of Jehovah. He recognized that the battle was the Lord's, and that the Lord would give him the victory.

An application of this story is that God does not want us to fight our battles on the terms of our enemy, Satan. We are not to fight him alone in our own strength, but rather totally relying on His Holy Spirit within us. "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Even Jesus said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing," and "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (John 15:5; Matt. 19:26).

Never forget that you are a child of God Most High and no longer a slave to fear. He is greater than any force that can come up against us and absolutely nothing can separate us from His love. His Holy Spirit empowers us to take on the battle of faith. And the battle is not about how much faith we can muster up, but in trusting God for the outcome and joining Him in the fight.

We have the Holy Spirit within us! And He has not given us a "spirit of fear but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). With His empowerment, "We are destroying speculations and . . . taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Let's fight on God's turf today.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 21:22-23:13
Matthew 24:1-28
Psalm 29:1-11
Proverbs 7:6-23

How Do You Receive Correction?

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me but always evil. He is Micaiah, son of Imla." — 2 Chronicles 18:7

I work with young, single men to help them grow up and mature, to learn how to make wise decisions and break free from generational family problems. The irresponsible behavior due to faulty thinking must be exposed and replaced. These men need loving correction, guidance, encouragement, and hope. I do my best to be their friend and be open about my own failures. My desire is to win their trust, as well as strengthening their faith in God and His Word.

There are various responses to this mentoring. Some are eager to learn and change. They all have their fears that they must face. Some will argue or have excuses why they can't take steps of faith in the Lord to change and break free. Their family dysfunction can make it hard for them to gain freedom.

Ahab, the king of Israel, was such a man who rejected correction. He resisted the counsel of the prophet Micaiah because he never told him what he wanted to hear. Ahab simply wanted a "yes man" to go along with his schemes. He did not want to hear the truth.

Are you like Ahab, or is your heart tender and open to loving correction and wise counsel? Do you reject the truth and disavow the messenger because he or she doesn't tell you what you want to hear? Are you open to the Spirit of God in others who care enough to challenge your thinking?

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 23:14-25:40
Matthew 24:29-51
Psalm 30:1-12
Proverbs 7:24-27

Lord of All?

If you love me you will obey me. — John 14:14 NIV

"I'm sorry, I can no longer meet with you." I sipped my coffee and watched as the words I had spoken sank deeply into the heart of my dear friend across the table. "But why?" came his incredulous reply. "Because you're not doing what I've told you to do."

Now don't get the wrong idea. I am not some over-bearing, dictatorial drill sergeant. I can actually be pretty patient and understanding with people. In this particular case, my friend had asked me to help him grow into a more spiritual Christian. After finding out more about his desires to grow, I suggested that he start reading the Bible and praying every day. He agreed and asked me to keep him accountable.

Week after week my young friend reported that he hadn't been able to read or pray during the preceding days. "Too busy" was the reason. No matter how much I gently urged him, he just didn't get it done. I decided that until my friend could prove to me he was serious, I needed to spend my time more wisely.

God tells us that if we love Him we will obey Him (John 14:21). In my experience we always do what we really want to do. We make time for that which seems most important to us. Spending time in God's Word and prayer are priorities that cannot be compromised.

In the New Testament the Greek word for "Lord," kurios, is used 617 times. It comes from the root word kuros which means "supreme in authority." Is Jesus the CEO of your life? Does He have a say in your schedule? Pencil in an appointment for the "Lord of All" today.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 26:1-27:21
Matthew 25:1-30
Psalm 31:1-8
Proverbs 8:1-11

Mistaken Emotions

"Daughter, take courage..." — Matthew 9:22

"...Your faith has made you well. Go in peace." — Luke 8:48

In 2006 the family of Whitney Cerak was devastated by the news that Whitney had been killed in a car wreck. They buried her, grieving deeply. In the same accident, Laura Van Ryn's family learned that Laura had been critically injured. The Van Ryns rushed to the hospital and stayed by Laura's bedside night and day, holding on to hope.

But surprise! When the surviving girl woke from her five-week coma, the Van Ryns discovered she was Whitney, not Laura! These look-alikes had been misidentified at the scene of the accident. Now emotions switched! The hope of the Van Ryns changed to grief, but Whitney's family rejoiced. For five weeks each family had experienced emotions appropriate to their beliefs, but their emotions were mistaken. Beliefs determine emotions, and when the truth came to light, emotions changed immediately!

Truth is an emotion changer. Jesus turned to a fearful woman who was afraid to show her face to Him and said, "Take courage!" Before she'd only been willing to touch his coat hem from behind, but now Jesus told her she could go in peace. Why did He think her fears could instantly change to courage and peace? It was because she'd received a new focus! Jesus had healed her, called her "Daughter," and praised her faith! The events of that day—His works and His words—gave peace, replacing her fears.

If you want courage and peace instead of fear, thank the Lord for what He has accomplished for you and what He's promised you. Believing truth makes a difference!

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 28:1-43
Matthew 25:31-26:13
Psalm 31:9-18
Proverbs 8:12-13

Good Works

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10

I was cleaning out the basement a few weeks ago and found an old journal of mine. It would seem, in reading a few pages, that all I ever did back in 2007 was think about Jesus, talk about Jesus, read about Jesus, and write about Jesus. A lot was going on in my life back then for sure: I had just married Ashley, I was a first-year apprentice electrician, I was cranking through the Bible and deciding where I stood on heavy theological positions. I was also writing down prayers, leading people to Christ, and playing in one of the worship bands at The Rock.

It took me by surprise to see how full of faith I was back then! It made me feel ashamed that I'm not doing as many things for the Lord as I used to.

Have you ever been in that place? Have you ever felt like God was done using you? Christian, I just want to encourage with what God's Word really says about our labor for Him and His church. Ephesians 2:10 above tells us that God has prepared good works for us to walk in. Do you believe this? Do you walk like you're the pencil line on a big page of "dot to dots," looking for the next good thing that God has prepared for you to do for Him? You should!

We shouldn't do it thinking we'll earn favor with God so that He'll accept us (that's not what that verse says). Jesus already took care of that. We should do it because we are His workmanship and we were created in Christ for the good works He has prepared for us to do.

Let's look for the next good thing!

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 29:1-30:10
Matthew 26:14-46
Psalm 31:19-24
Proverbs 8:14-26

Wings Like a Dove

I said, "I wish I had wings like a dove. Then I would fly away and rest." – Psalm 55:6 New Century Version (NCV)

How many times my heart cries these verses out: "I wish I had wings like a dove. Then I would fly away and rest!" This echoes in my thoughts many mornings. I look at what life is bringing that day, and I just want to bury my head in the sand, fly away, stay in the desert, escape the storm, roll over and sleep.

Wouldn't it be lovely to escape life's problems? David is letting us know in this psalm that we can. Verse 16 gives us the answer: "But I will call to God for help [we call this prayer], and the Lord will save me" (NCV). Hallelujah, the Lord will save you. Not might, but will. Just a warning though, the Lord's saving might not look like what you expect. Those problems facing you won't just disappear. But turn them over to God. Let Him worry about them, and suddenly, we have escaped our problems—because we know that problems in God's hands are no longer problems, but God's solution.

"Give your worries to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will never let good [righteous in NIV] people down" (55:22 NCV). That's a guarantee. You can take it to the grave. Or at least hold onto it for today.

So, go ahead, what are you waiting for? Hand over those problems to God. Go fly with doves.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 30:11-31:18
Matthew 26:47-68
Psalm 32:1-11
Proverbs 8:27-32

Run With God

The Lord helps those who have been defeated and takes care of those who are in trouble. – Psalm 145:14 New Century Version

You prayed, trusted God, and everything still exploded. A loved one died or turned away from God. The job was lost. A friend betrayed you. Your finances are shot. You believed God, trusted Him. He let you down. You were supposed to escape your troubles, fly away on the wings of a dove. What happened to God?

Obviously, God is here to make life easy, to wipe away our problems (or was it tears?). Just ask Job, Elijah, Daniel, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, John Huss, Amy Carmichael, Eric Little, Corrie ten Boom, or Mike Keator. God's will was accomplished in all these men's (and women's) lives. But their lives were not smooth sailing.

"Everything the Lord does is right. He is loyal to all he has made" (Psalm 145:17 NCV). What can I say? God's Word says it all right there.

You are trusting God, so if things turned out lousy, God is still in control. (It didn't take Him by surprise). He is using "lousy" for His glory, and your life will shine (if you allow God to do His work) because of it.

It doesn't mean you can't sit down and have a good cry. "He listens when they cry, and He saves them" (Psalm 145: 19 NCV). So cry, and let God save you. Then hold out your hand, let God pull you to your feet, hold onto His hand tightly, and run. Run with God.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 32:1-33:23
Matthew 26:69-27:14
Psalm 33:1-11
Proverbs 8:33-36

Don't Tarnish the Joy

Michal . . . looked out of the window and saw King David dancing and celebrating, and she despised him in her heart. – 1 Chronicles 15:29 ESV

This verse comes from the story of King David returning with the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. It describes how his wife, Michal, exhibited disdain for the king's expressions of joy. We can certainly see this as a moment in the grander story that is the political tapestry of the era of kings in Judah, but we should also consider that this is a common human experiential response: meeting the joy and celebration of another with jealousy.

Anyone who spends time around kids see this at work with regularity when they utter complaints about supposed "unfairness," such as "How come he got to _____ while I only _____?!" As adults, we know that this sort of naked jealousy is (at least somewhat) culturally unacceptable, so we instead mask our feeling behind cheap shots, personal criticisms, and passive-aggressive speech. Yet the principle is just the same: "Someone else is rejoicing . . . and I wish it was me!"

Jealousy leads to division, bitterness, selfishness, greed, and whole hosts of rotten fruit. We should "be on the look-out" for jealousy in our responses to others. Fortunately, God gives us a remedy for this kind of attitude, telling us to "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Romans 12:15). This is the exact opposite of the natural human response!

Today, let us look for those around us who are rejoicing (coworkers, parents, siblings, friends, fellow believers) and make efforts to share that joy and not tarnish it with our jealousy.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 34:1-35:9
Matthew 27:15-31
Psalm 33:12-22
Proverbs 9:1-6

Women In Combat

All these, being men of war who could draw up in battle formation, came to Hebron with a perfect heart to make David king over all Israel. — 1 Chronicles 12:38

A group of young men and one woman ran toward me along the trail. My first thought was how their pace was much faster than mine. Of course, I was probably 40 years older! My second thought was how the young lady must be fast to keep up with the men. I started thinking (you have a lot of time to think while running!) about how runners are separated into men's and women's groups at the Olympics and other races. They don't compete with the opposite sex. Generally, men are faster than women.

How does this difference in physical ability play out in the military? Should women serve in combat? Of course, there will be women who are stronger than some men and physically more qualified. But is there more? What about their emotional makeup? Why didn't God require Jewish women to fight, as the passage above affirms?

God created men to protect women. Adam was created to protect Eve. He failed, and the rest is our sad history. Men are uniquely gifted to protect women physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Men and women are equally valuable before God, but they are very different—uniquely special. Until men and women understand this design, there will be confusion, endangerment, and discord. When we understand, we will complement one another. Men, let's man up and lead and protect women with sacrificial love and servants' hearts!

Submitted By:

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Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 35:10-36:38
Matthew 27:32-66
Psalm 34:1-10
Proverbs 9:7-8

"They Cannot Die Anymore"

...for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. — Luke 20:36 ESV

I lost my mother-in-law suddenly and unexpectedly last August. It is hard to imagine not seeing her anymore. No more visits, no more trips together, no more bringing her to family gatherings, no more going to Perkins for breakfast, no more listening to her stories of growing up on a small farm in northern Minnesota. Death is a scourge. Death separates us from loved ones.

There was a group of Sadducees who tried to trip Jesus up with tricky questions. The Sadducees were a class of wealthy influence peddlers and the elite of Jesus' day. Life was good for them, and the spiritual and eternal was of little to no importance in their thinking. The Scripture adds that they did not believe in the resurrection. Yet they posed a question about the resurrection to Jesus, thinking He would not have an answer.

Jesus' answer to them gave us a glimpse into the eternal state of being. He revealed that men and women will not marry in heaven like they do on earth. We will be like angels, being sons of God and of the resurrection. He adds why—"for they cannot die anymore." The way Jesus phrases this is so wonderful. What an amazing truth that in heaven we cannot die ever again! The threat of death will be completely and fully removed as our great enemy. Thank the Lord that one day death will not be hanging over our heads as it does now.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 39:1-40:38
Mark 1:1-28
Psalm 35:1-16
Proverbs 9:11-12

Blue Tassels

You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself. — Deuteronomy 22:12 ESV

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after." — Numbers 15:37-39 ESV

When I came upon the verse above from Deuteronomy, standing by itself, I reacted. "That's crazy, God! Why?" But I followed the thread of cross references to Numbers 15, which gives God's reason: a tassel is to be a visual reminder to obey God! How creative!

However, as I checked out the notes at the bottom of my ESV Study Bible, I discovered something else: "In the ancient world, tassels were worn by nobles and other high-class people. In Israel they are to be worn by everyone as a mark of their status as the chosen people" (p.290). Wow! God is not demanding a weird fashion of His people—instead He is telling them, "You are all holy, all high-class to Me." He is setting them apart from other cultures of the time as His "treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5-6 ESV). Peter repeats this identity in the New Testament: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Peter 2:9 ESV).

Knowing that I am God's treasure makes me want to obey Him, not to follow after my own heart. So I have decided to keep the blue tassel that happens to be on my keychain. It brushes my leg while I drive. Just a reminder.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Exodus 37:1-38:31
Matthew 28:1-20
Psalm 34:11-22
Proverbs 9:9-10

Miracles

And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. — Matthew 14:29

In one of his latest books, Mark Batterson says, "If you seek miracles, you probably won't find them, if you seek God, miracles will find you." So, how does one experience the miracles of God?

We seek after God. When we, as believers, truly seek after God, we become characters in God's story. Cornelius in Acts 10 was a devout, God-fearing man who prayed regularly. He was a seeker after God. Do you find yourself seeking after God, living out the great adventure of one's lifetime?

We pray. To pray means to exercise faith. Some of us who are reading this are very much out of shape, and some of us are marathon runners. Which are you? Obedience to the commands of God produces the miracles of God in one's life, and we are commanded to pray.

We listen to His voice. Why is it so difficult to hear God's voice? In 1 Kings 13, Elijah is surrounded with the mighty and powerful, yet only when he stops and listens does he realize that it is the voice of God. God is often found gently whispering in the quietness of a humble heart. Saints of God, this world is so noisy with Facebook, Instagram, blogs, and tweets. Do we even recognize His voice?

We exercise faith. In Matthew 14, Peter had a choice—to remain in the safety of the boat or obey His Master to climb out and take a step. Stop there! Don't beat Peter up because he began to sink. When he exercised faith, he walked on water. Are you expecting God's miracles?

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 1:1-3:17
Mark 1:29-2:12
Psalm 35:17-28
Proverbs 9:13-18

A Good Gift

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights... – James 1:17 NIV

We had one day to purchase a new vehicle to replace our aging van. A road trip was coming up and our present vehicles were not in a good position to make the longer trip. Getting a newer vehicle had been on our radar for months (since our van's transmission acted up), but we had been busy with life, and the van was working.

My husband noticed a new entry on Craigslist: a particular model that we were interested in, with low mileage and a great asking price. One person was looking at it before us—certainly they would snap it up! This was a good test of our trust. Did we believe that God had our best interests in mind, and that He could and would hold this vehicle if it was the one for us?

Much to our surprise and excitement, the owner called later saying, "Come on down! It's still available!" And come on down we did. Not only did we like the vehicle, but when we asked the owners to come down a little on their price, they did so. Our one available evening to look (and hopefully buy), and one great, available vehicle to purchase lined up perfectly to meet our need.

How about you? Is there something that has been on your radar for awhile? Something that you have been praying about, hoping for, and sometimes maybe getting just a little impatient about?

Remember that our Father is a Father of good gifts. He knows our needs, desires, and hopes like no other. As a perfect Father, he knows best how and when to meet those needs, and He will not disappoint.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 4:1-5:19
Mark 2:13-3:6
Psalm 36:1-12
Proverbs 10:1-2

A Good Gift – 2

Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. – James 1:22 NIV

Not many days after purchasing our new vehicle, my husband and I were heading out of town on a road trip. As we cruised down the highway, we decided to do what every car owner should do—read the owner's manual!

As I read out loud, we were freshly reminded of things we were aware of, as well as educated on things that we had previously no clue about. Safety features, ways to extend the lifetime of the vehicle, tips on running different systems . . . in the end, we were glad we read the manual. We now knew our vehicle much better and were more confident in how to safely operate it.

Although we had acquired a lot of head knowledge, we both realized that applying that knowledge would be the true test of our studies! Sure enough, whether due to our age or information overload, we found ourselves referring back to the manual as we actually drove our car.

Isn't that the way it is in studying the Word of God! God as our Creator best knows how we should operate in life and has, in a sense, given us an owner's manual, the Bible. This book contains insights, truths, and warnings designed to equip us and help us navigate successfully through life.

We can read the Bible just to accumulate knowledge, but God designed it for much more than that. He wants to get into the driver's seat next to us and do life together, richly supplying His grace and help to us as we follow His Word. The choice to let Him is ours. It will make all the difference in our journey and how far we get down the road!

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 6:1-7:27
Mark 3:7-30
Psalm 37:1-11
Proverbs 10:3-4

Regardless, Trust God

Trust the Lord with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding. . – Proverbs 3: 5 New Century Version

"I say this because I know what I am planning for you," says the Lord. "I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future." – Jeremiah 29:11 NCV

So you've given your problems over to God, but they still seem to loom glaringly overhead. You can't lay the worry down. It grips your heart and fills your mind. Keep praying. Keep trusting. Keep handing it to God. There may be no easy solution.

So often my head says, "Trust," but my heart holds onto the worry. I have to take a deep breath, try to calm my heart, and give my worry to God once more. I have to continue trying not to explain to God why things need to go a certain way. I have to continue trying to hold onto the fact that God is good, and His plans for me are good. It is a fact, believe it—try to believe it. Know and accept that what God sees as good and what I see as good are not always the same thing. But what God sees as good is indeed good. It is what I want. I need to put on my big girl pants, stop worrying, and trust God.

Take that big breath again. Again give God my worry. Trust Him. Go on with the day, knowing that He has got it. (Repeat until this is truth.)

Submitted By:

Shirley Ferguson
Oak Ridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 7:28-9:6
Mark 3:31-4:25
Psalm 37:12-29
Proverbs 10:5

Get Up and Go Back In

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

On the surface, this profound truth can seem almost "light and fluffy," like my favorite pillow or eating chocolate. If I'm honest, the thought of "just being delighted" seems so unreal or "nice" at times. C'mon, do people really live that way? The fact remains that life is hard, and things often go horribly wrong for days, or even years, at a time. How can people handle the loss and senseless tragedy many are faced with?

Looking for help in the Scriptures, we can find an incredible example of someone living out the command to "delight yourself in the Lord." In Acts 14:20 Luke says, "But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city."

The Jews had stoned the Apostle Paul for preaching the gospel and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. I can't imagine how awful that must have been for him. He responded by getting up and going back into the city to preach the gospel again. He even went on to strengthen the disciples (Acts 14:22).

How on earth could that man carry on? He got up and served the Lord. Most times, the first action point that leads to being delighted is to get up from whatever is knocking us down and to go back into the fray. God is not unaware of the calamity we may be enduring, and He never leaves us alone. Our only restoring hope is in Him. Don't throw in the towel, or run to the enemy camp. Fight with the help of the Holy Spirit to be delighted in the Lord.

Thank you, Lord. Help us to get back up and go back in!

Submitted By:

Steve McInroy
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Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 9:7-10:20
Mark 4:26-5:20
Psalm 37:30-40
Proverbs 10:6-7

Just Do Something!

We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. — 1 Thessalonians 2:4

Consciously or unconsciously, we often want to look good in the eyes of our Christian leaders or friends, so we feel like we must be busy, or at least look busy. How can we avoid this trap?

I like what Wayne Jacobsen said in *Finding Church*: “The urge to ‘do something’ when we feel insecure is the driving force behind much of our fruitless busyness. We sincerely want to do something for God, but we are frequently motivated by fear or obligation, and believe that being busy is God’s will.”

When I was a college student I worked for IBM one summer at their plant. I often finished all my work ahead of time and felt compelled to excessively clean and organize just to look busy for my boss. Another busy person was Martha. She and her sister invited the Lord into their home. Martha was busy getting a meal ready for Jesus, but she was critical of her sister—and Jesus! “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” She was busy, busy serving in her strength and for her recognition.

A friend reminded me recently that Jesus was pleasing to the Father before His public ministry: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Serving God does not make you any more pleasing to the Father! Serving God should flow from our security in Him and His love. What is your motive? Are you doing some-thing to appear spiritual or important in the eyes of man?

Submitted By:

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Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 11:1-12:8
Mark 5:21-43
Psalm 38:1-22
Proverbs 10:8-9

Walking in the Dark

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. — 1 John 1:5-7 ESV

As Aislyn came up the basement steps toward me, she stated matter-of-factly, “I’m afraid of the dark.” I smiled at our five-year-old granddaughter with curly, red hair. “Then why don’t you walk with the light on? You know where the switch is.” (The light switch at the bottom of the steps is a prime feature of the basement for all the grandchildren. They can turn the lights off for everybody down there, sometimes eliciting quite a reaction from the crowd of little people.) “If you turn the light on, you don’t have to walk in the dark.”

Such a simple truth. It seems so easy and obvious to “make a switch,” turn on the light spiritually. However, it can prove to be one of the hardest battles in the world when it comes down to a particular life. I remember the year that went by while I prayed for a certain John Vanderhorst to “get saved.” The longest year of my life. (He later became my husband, 39 years ago.) Do you have people you are fighting for in prayer? The darkness has a power of its own; his name is Satan and his forces. There’s also the pull of the flesh and the glitz of the world.

But the Light is stronger, and when He comes in, the power and fears of darkness are dealt with. Darkness ceases to exist in the presence of Light. Don’t be afraid of the dark. Instead, determine to pray the light on.

Submitted By:

Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 13:1-59
Mark 6:1-29
Psalm 39:1-13
Proverbs 10:10

No “Amateur Providence” Here

I always thank my God for you because of the grace God has given you in Christ Jesus. — 1 Corinthians 1:4 New Century Version

There are those times when we intercede for someone else, and tragedy still strikes. How do you react? How do you respond to someone going through a hard time?

Where was God? you might ask. He is right there with you. In hard times I like to picture myself curled up on God’s lap, feeling His love and comfort all around me.

For someone else going through hard times, the best thing is for you to be there for them. Listen and hold their hand, sharing God’s love. The important thing is that it’s God’s love you share. Oswald Chambers talks about being careful that you aren’t so loving that you block God.

“Are we playing the spiritual amateur providence in other lives? Are we so noisy in our instruction of others that God cannot get anywhere near them? We have to keep our mouths shut and our spirits alert. God wants to instruct us in regard to His Son, He wants to turn our times of prayer into mounts of transfiguration, and we will not let Him” (My Utmost for His Highest).

“One of our severest lessons comes from the stubborn refusal to see that we must not interfere in other people’s lives. It takes a long time to realize the danger of being an amateur providence, that is, interfering with God’s order for others. You see a certain person suffering . . . You put your hand straight in front of God’s permissive will to prevent it” (My Utmost for His Highest).

When you get in the way, God has no room to minister or draw the other to Himself. Bring your friend God’s comfort, God’s love, God’s peace—not your own.

Submitted By:

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Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 14:1-57
Mark 6:30-56
Psalm 40:1-10
Proverbs 10:11-12

Perseverance in Prayer

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart. — Luke 18:1

“How badly does our child want it?” is a key question my wife and I ask ourselves when considering if we should grant a request by one of our children. We usually don’t ask them this question, but wait and see if they bring up the request again. They still may not get their request, but they certainly won’t if we see it doesn’t really matter to them.

All fruit-bearing in a Christian’s life is tied to God’s work through that person. Prayer is vital in that process. And God wants us to come to Him with the same determination as that of a child set on getting something he really wants. He wants us to know what we want, and then to trust Him to respond. When God answers, then we can thank Him because we’ll know it is from Him. And our faith grows each time we see Him answer. But He won’t answer if we don’t seriously believe Him for it.

The tendency for most of us is to ask God for something maybe once or twice and then forget about it. This reveals a lack of faith. If we really want something that God alone can give to us, we’ll keep asking, seeking, and knocking.

During the Civil War, the future husband of a young woman enlisted in the Union army. As he served through the full years of the war, the local assembly of Christians would meet weekly to pray for their loved ones. This woman never missed a prayer meeting, and her future husband was spared miraculously in the war.

Do you really want God to work on your behalf like that woman? Then keep praying. You will not be disappointed.

Submitted By:

Tim Rude
Walnut Creek Community Church
Des Moines, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 15:1-16:28
Mark 7:1-23
Psalm 40:11-17
Proverbs 10:13-14

Words vs. Heart

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. — Psalm 19:14 ESV

Lately, I have been thinking about the relationship between our words and our actions and the condition of our heart. It is somewhat easy to mask the true condition of our heart with our words. Things are easier said than truly believed. But we can only pay lip service for so long before the true condition of our heart is exposed. I really like what the psalmist is saying here because he is not just talking about his heart, but his words, too.

So the question is, do our mouths line up with our hearts? “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45 ESV).

These verses from Luke 6 and Psalm 19 are ones that we should have on our lips and in our hearts daily. The words we speak and the meditations of our hearts should be pleasing to God. They need to be one and the same. The words we speak are external, and people can judge us by them—but the heart is hidden, internal. Only God can judge that. We need to give our hearts to God and be willing to let Him mold us into the person He wants us to be. Then our hearts will line up with what is coming out of our mouths.

Submitted By:

Tony D'Amico
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 16:29-18:30
Mark 7:24-8:10
Psalm 41:1-13
Proverbs 10:15-16

Would God Ever Bring Failure?

"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. — John 21:3

Imagine that you're a professional fisherman. You've been out fishing for six hours, during the ideal time to catch fish, and have caught absolutely nothing. How would you feel? You'd probably be quite discouraged—not quite ready to lead a worship service in praise of God. But in John 21, it appears that Jesus purposely kept the disciples from catching anything so that He could dramatically show them how well He could provide for them.

I have a friend, let's call him Stan, who started a business partnership years ago. So many problems came up that he had to end the partnership and begin a new one. But the same thing happened, forcing him to start over again. On the third partnership, his partner's misuse of funds brought the company into a debt of almost half a million dollars. People were telling him to declare bankruptcy, but he was convinced that God wanted him to pay back all debts.

If you talk to Stan now, you'll meet an enthusiastic evangelist! God has turned the business around, and now Stan makes it a priority to take time off each week to talk with people about how they can have life with Jesus Christ. What has changed Stan's life? Years of darkness—years when he felt he just couldn't win no matter how hard he worked—taught him deep lessons of humility. Is he bitter about all those years of tortured feelings and fears? No, he thanks God for them. He says he knows no better way that God could have taught him such important lessons!

Submitted By:

Mike Bergen
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Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 19:1-20:21
Mark 8:11-38
Psalm 42:1-11
Proverbs 10:17

Wrought with God

But he who practices truth [who does what is right] comes out into the Light; so that his works may be plainly shown to be what they are—wrought with God [divinely prompted, done with God's help, in dependence upon Him]. — John 3:21 AMPC

Last spring I went with a team of seven people from our church on a short-term mission trip to Stockholm, Sweden (May 26–June 5). Our team was comprised of some very capable people, and I was convinced the Lord was leading us from the start. Yet the enormity of just seven of us flying halfway across the world to share Jesus in a foreign land was somewhat terrifying. I came to realize the only sensible position for us was to be “wrought with God.”

The Stockholm region has over 2.2 million people and routinely offers permanent residency to Syrian refugees (there are over 30,000 refugees there now). Almost eight out of ten Swedes are either “not religious” or “convinced atheists.” They also tend to be introverted and keep to themselves. This poses a very interesting conundrum when thousands of people are looking for help in their city.

We believe this also poses a tremendous Gospel opportunity. We partnered with a young woman and her church who love Jesus and want to make Him known.

When I was looking for encouragement from God's Word to share with the team, I came across the phrase “wrought with God.” Read it above in the Classic Amplified translation. After doing more study on this verse, I really began to appreciate the description provided for what “wrought with God” means. It's this simple — God will help us, and the only sensible thing we can do is walk in faith and be completely dependent upon Him.

Submitted By:

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Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 20:22-22:16
Mark 9:1-29
Psalm 43:1-5
Proverbs 10:18

Does God Toot His Own Horn?

"I am a great King," says the Lord of Hosts. — Malachi 1:14

A time came when God spoke graphically to Israel through His servant Malachi. It was a time when hearts were dull. The people had allowed their hearts to fall in love with the things and toys of this world. God and His truth had become mere form and endless activity. Their awe and sense of devotion had vaporized. Their sacrifice and commitment slipped away. They were satisfied to give God only what was convenient and cost them little. “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then, if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” (verse 6). “When you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you?” (verse 8).

The priests had lost their full awareness of the greatness of God. The people had only a form of worship. There was shadow but no substance. The real issue lay in their hearts. They were far from God. Our love for God is always revealed in what we choose to sacrifice and give to God. God reminded them that He was truly a great God and Master, and deserved all their hearts, lives, and possessions.

Prayer is one of the windows of our hearts and reveals the true value we put upon God. It is so easy to give God only the leftovers. God wants to regularly remind us that He is a great King and the only God, and that His name is truly great among all the nations. He is not “tooting His horn,” but rather seeking to help us set right our priorities and convictions, so that we may truly know Him and experience His full blessing in our lives.

Submitted By:

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One-Year Bible Reading:

Leviticus 22:17-23:44
Mark 9:30-10:12
Psalm 44:1-8
Proverbs 10:19