

A Tweak

And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Luke 5:5 ESV

Jesus found a boat by Lake Gennesaret that was almost empty. The fishermen were out washing their nets from a fruitless night of fishing. The boat owner, Peter, and his companions had caught nothing. Jesus asked Peter to put out a little from the land so He could teach the crowd. Afterwards Jesus told Peter to put out into the deep and let down their nets. The fishermen had fished all night to no avail, and it probably seemed pointless to let down their nets again, but Peter complied with Jesus's command. It was a tweak to his schedule. And we know what happened. They enclosed such a large number of fish that their nets were breaking.

Jesus asked Peter to deviate only a little bit from his normal routine. "Put out your nets one more time." These men were fishermen. They knew how to cast their nets, so being asked to do it one more time wasn't too far out of the ordinary. But what happened? They brought in a catch so large that their boats were overflowing.

I so often make my weekly schedule and ask God to bless it. I'm doing good things. Yet this entire passage challenges me to ask God to tweak my plans, just like He did with Peter. Because Peter obeyed God and did things just a little out of the ordinary, Peter saw God do a miracle in his life. And this miracle compelled Peter, and his companions James and John, to leave their nets and follow Jesus.

I have begun to ask God to tweak my schedule. I don't want to do my own thing, but I want to work where God is working. That is where I will see God do amazing things. I pray this encourages you to ask God to tweak your schedule too.

Submitted by:

Barbara Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Sunday, February 3

Sin-Ripper

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:8-9

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

Last summer our oldest granddaughter, Jane, learned to sew through the kindness of another pastor's wife who took her along to quilting classes at a local church. One purpose of the class was to make small quilts for newborns at hospitals, and Jane was subsequently able to make a quilt to give to her own, new, baby sister, Mariel Hope, born in September. In the meantime Jane's tenth birthday came along in August, and I asked her what she wanted. She was hoping for a sewing box, but she also needed a seam ripper. "I can't sew without a seam ripper!" she told me emphatically.

I found that statement amusing, but very true to my own experience. Without the ability to remove mistaken stitches and re-sew a seam or an armhole, sewing is frustrating and disappointing. Sewing requires patience at all times, but especially when one makes a mistake.

Jane's statement about the seam ripper made me think, "And I can't live without a sin-ripper!" Another name for it might be a "forgiveness-asker." Going through life, I find it essential to be quick to humble myself and ask forgiveness for my own mistakes, blunders, and obtusities. Even to my tiny grandchildren, I need to say, "Oh, did I just bump your head? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that. Are you okay?" And to my grown-ups I need to do the same: "I'm sorry I interrupted you." "I'm sorry I didn't communicate clearly." "I'm sorry I wasn't sensitive to your feelings."

I can't go through life without a sin-ripper!

Submitted by:

Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Need a Mudjacker?

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Romans 3:23 NLT

When we moved into our home, we noticed a small issue in our basement: there were significant gaps under the baseboards along the walls. Due to my experience as an architect, I quickly diagnosed that the problem was a settling floor. The presence of excessive groundwater or poorly compacted soil can cause voids to develop under a slab, which will cause it to drop gradually over time (thus the gaps at the perimeter).

In order to fix this issue, we had to hire a company to "mudjack" the slab (pump grout into the voids and raise the floor back to level). But when we removed the carpet, we discovered a secondary problem. A previous owner had decided to "level" the floor by pouring additional concrete on top of the floor slab, rather than hiring a mudjacker. This added weight caused both extra settling and more work for us (removing concrete), and their "fix" didn't address the actual problem!

Today's verse reminds us that—just like my basement floor—there is an underlying problem in our hearts. Our sin causes us to fall short of God's glorious standard of perfection, leading ultimately to eternal separation from God. This sin is more than just "dos-and-don'ts"; it is a problem of the heart. Many people will seek to correct this condition through "being good," which is just like heaping more concrete on the failing floor slab: it doesn't address the root condition and brings more problems into our lives (like pride, selfishness, and judgmental attitudes).

There's only one true fix: Jesus Christ. Today, let's remember together that His substitutionary death brings reconciliation to God, healing once and for all the underlying problem of God's judgment on the sin in our hearts. What a gift! Thanks be to God!

Submitted by:

Greg Miller
The Firehouse Church
Denver, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Monday, February 4

God in the Workplace

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

Daniel and his friends were among the top of their class in Israel. They are described as youths in whom was no defect; they were good-looking, wise, intelligent, and able to serve in the king's court.

But Israel had worshiped God with words only, not their whole heart. Daniel 1:2 tells how Daniel and the other youths were facing the consequences of others' sin and failures. That doesn't seem quite right. Daniel and his friends were taken out of their comfortable surroundings into a land that detested the God of Israel.

What was God doing? God allowed the takeover of Israel, and the youths were being assimilated into another culture. We would call this quite an unfortunate circumstance. We don't know if Daniel and his friends were upright and God-honoring in Israel, but we do know they made a choice not to defile themselves in Babylon. And God went before them and moved in mighty ways. He had everything planned out for His glory.

In the workplace, have you had to face the consequences of someone else's failure? Have you been troubled by another company takeover? Have things been going along smoothly, and suddenly there is a buyout or a shakeup of management? The boss you had is out, and another boss, who you don't quite get along with, takes over? Just like Daniel, choose not to defile yourself—trust God that the Lord gave your company into the hands of another by His divine order and look for ways to honor Him.

Submitted by:

Berk Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Defilement in the Workplace – 2

Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. Daniel 5:19

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are in a predicament. Nebuchadnezzar has literally kidnapped them to serve in his court and has “appointed for them a daily ration from the king’s choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king’s personal service.” According to Daniel 5:19, Nebuchadnezzar could execute or keep alive whomever he wished. It’s no doubt that few went against the king without losing their lives. The predicament for Daniel and his friends is the order by the king to feast on his wine and delicacies for three years.

This is a problem for these young men: they don’t want to partake in the dietary order of the king. They don’t want to defile themselves by yielding to the king’s diet. So God does a unique thing for them. He gains Daniel the goodwill and favor of the chief of the eunuchs so that he and his friends are able to eat their preferred diet rather than the treats of the king. And we know the outcome. God blesses the four men by making them look much better and more fit than their counterparts.

In the workplace we are given many opportunities to imbibe with our counterparts, whether it be in after-work food and drink, in off-color office jokes, or in spouse bashing. Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself, and God went before him to bring him favor before his “manager” and his peers. May you trust God and stand on those same convictions in the workplace.

Submitted by:

Berk Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

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

God Shows Up in the Workplace – 4

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

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are living and working in a foreign land. Nebuchadnezzar asks them to do something at work that would violate their conscience and go against their godly convictions. In his pride the king has built a gold statue that he commands all the provincial officials and everyone else to bow down to when his music plays. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not ashamed of their conviction to not bow to another god. In fact, because the order is to *bow down* and worship the statue, these three men literally stand out in the crowd. The consequence? Death by fire.

When confronted by the king, the three men answer respectfully, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Daniel 3:16-18 NIV84). Their loyalty to God was more important than their job or even life itself.

The furnace is heated ten times hotter for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then two interesting things happen: The men who worship the statue and throw these men into the furnace lose their lives. Instead of three men in the furnace, the king sees four men! Yes, God has shown up in the workplace to honor the men who walk by faith and not by sight. He will do the same for you.

Submitted by:

Berk Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Glory in the Workplace – 3

Daniel answered before the king and said, “As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days.” Daniel 2:27-28

What if your boss came to you and said, “I have a project for you to do. But first, I want you to tell me what that project is and why I want you to do it. If you can’t do this, you’re fired.” No doubt, you would probably meet his request with a blank stare, while thinking, “Who is this guy? I can’t read his mind! He’s crazy!!”

This is what King Nebuchadnezzar was asking of his magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and Chaldeans. He had a very troubling dream, but he forgot it. So he wanted these men to tell him the dream and its interpretation. If they couldn’t tell him the dream, the king said, “You shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap.” What a serious outcome of an extremely difficult demand from the most powerful man on earth! Of course, these “wise men” could not tell the king his dream. So angrily he gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

Thankfully, God gave Daniel revelation, understanding, and wisdom in the matter so that he was able to give the king what he wanted, thus saving many people from a tragic end. Daniel approached the king very respectfully yet gave glory to the one true God.

Your boss may be a demanding and seemingly unfair man or woman who asks unreasonable tasks from you. But God can give wisdom and understanding so that He may get the glory in your workplace as you look to Him and tell of His greatness. Don’t complain; seek the Lord and His wisdom.

Submitted by:

Berk Wilson
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Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

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

God Can Humble a Boss – 5

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar [fill in your boss’s name here], praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. Daniel 4:37

Nebuchadnezzar has another dream about his kingdom which stretches throughout the known world. Because he is the most powerful man (or boss) on earth, going against him can mean immediate firing, or under Nebuchadnezzar’s administration, death. Because the king now recognizes Daniel as one who has consistently walked with integrity while on the job, he asks Daniel to interpret another dream.

This dream predicts Nebuchadnezzar’s loss of power for seven years (Get this!) for the sole purpose of the king knowing the one true God. At the height of King Nebuchadnezzar’s display of pride (marveling at all he has accomplished), God suddenly causes Nebuchadnezzar to lose his mind and live like an animal for seven years. At the end of this time God returns to the king his sanity and the kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar praises the Most High God and honors and glorifies Him. He says, “I praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Daniel 4:37).

You may look at your powerful, ungodly boss and think, “He’ll never leave or be replaced.” Yet God’s desire is for His own name to be honored at your work. As you are filled with the Holy Spirit, walk with integrity, and speak His truths, God will use you to bring Him glory in the workplace. And in an instant God can do anything to humble your boss or others so that that person will acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

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

Jealousy in the Workplace – 6

Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. *Daniel 6:3-4 NIV*

Satan is the most shrewd, crafty, clever, and cunning character. The Bible says he is always prowling around, trying to derail us from walking with the Lord. Daniel is no exception. God has given him great favor in the eyes of King Darius—favor to the point of promoting him over the entire kingdom. This makes the other officials so jealous that they devise a plan to get rid of Daniel for good. The men convince King Darius to sign a decree that punishes anyone who petitions a “god” other than Darius. These men say, “All the high officials of the kingdom agree to this.” (Daniel is a high official, but he doesn’t agree to this.) Satan puts just enough truth into a lie to make it seem acceptable.

We know the rest of the story. Daniel trusts God to save him from the lions, and God does. Darius spends a sleepless, worry-filled night in his room waiting for dawn. When he finds Daniel alive and safe, he praises God and sends out a decree that everyone in all the dominion of his kingdom must worship the one true God. What happens to the deceivers? The lions crush the bones of them and their families before they even reach the bottom of the pit.

As you work to bring God glory in the workplace, and He works favorably for you, others may become quite jealous. But just as God protected Daniel as he stood up for Him, God will protect you. Give Him the glory in all that you do.

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

Monday, February 11

Destroyed

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. Proverbs 17:14 NIV

Have you ever thought about how easy it is to destroy something compared to creating it? I was reminded of this during a recent house project. We decided to replace our old, wooden patio stairs as part of a backyard project. The stairs were about ten years old and the bottom boards were starting to rot. One evening I decided to demo them. I took a circular saw, pry bar, and hammer; I destroyed and removed the old stairs in about one hour! After I finished my demolition work, I was struck by how quickly I was able to do that.

Fast forward a month. I started the rebuild of the stairs. Between watching instructional videos, talking to people who had built stairs, designing them, and buying supplies, I easily put in five hours before I even started. Then during the actual construction, between the multiple trips to the hardware store, measuring and cutting boards, and building and finishing, it took me approximately twelve more hours!

All told, what I had destroyed in one hour took me about 17 hours to rebuild. That’s what Proverbs 17:14 above is about! Watch some videos on breaching a dam—it is incredibly destructive! This verse warns us that starting a quarrel can be that damaging. A friendship that takes a long time to build can be quickly damaged during a fight.

But this is bigger than quarrels. A godly, healthy marriage takes years to build. Yet it can be destroyed quickly with sinful choices. Or take our reputation. Again, years to create a solid one, but it can be destroyed with just a few poor choices. Your dignity, your job—the list goes on and on. These are things that take years to build and can quickly be demolished through a few sinful actions. Be sober about sin—it matters.

Submitted by:

Josh Whitney
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Oops! (Or Not?)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Mike and I chatted as we drove, so grateful to be past the blinding downpour. Radar showed scattered strong storms ahead on this new-to-us route, but for now the weather was clear. I glanced at a highway signpost for the town we were passing. “Maquoketa...hmm,” I mused, wondering where that was. Grabbing my atlas (yes, paper map), I searched—and discovered we were thirty miles down the wrong highway. Oh no! Missed exit. Our bad.

Yet amazingly “our bad” turned to “our good.” While navigating a different, roundabout route, we watched storms brewing beside us, on the original route, and storms spinning ahead of and behind us. But we never went through another downpour the final six hours of our trip.

You can imagine my gratitude! The God of the Big Picture had transformed our mistake into our good. Who can understand His ways? Not me! “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.” In this case, we could see the benefit right away, but most times we *can’t* see the good immediately. Yet the truth remains.

God is at work for our good, and He’ll even use our mistakes to bless us in the end as we turn to Him in trust: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Did you catch that? He **will**. It’s a promise. In the end, your paths will be straightened, and your journey will be blessed. By your God of the Big Picture.

Submitted by:

Rita Bergen
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Tuesday, February 12

Rattlesnake Warnings

A prudent person foresees the danger ahead and takes precautions; the simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences. Proverbs 22:3 NLT

My brother Kris and sister-in-law Kitty visited us from their home in Montana. Being an avid gardener, Kitty eagerly volunteered to help weed in my flowerbeds one morning. As we worked through the bed, I noticed my Indigo plant with a mature seedpod ready to be plucked. I broke off the stem, gave it several shakes, and produced a lively, rattling sound.

Hearing the rattle, Kitty jumped back with a start and a “Whoa! Don’t do that! I thought it was a rattlesnake!” You see, Kitty has had lots of up front, personal experiences encountering rattlesnakes in her flower beds! When she hears a rattle, she responds and retracts **immediately!**

Ignoring a rattler’s warning is simply foolish, for the rattle warning will be followed by a strike and poisonous bite that, if not tended to, will lead to extreme discomfort and even death. Here’s sage advice: “Be aware of the rattle, and beware when you hear it!” This is simply sound wisdom.

Because of His love for us and His desire for our good, God in similar fashion gives us warnings. These warnings, like the rattlesnake’s rattle, tell us to stay away from things that He knows will harm us.

Things like “Do not lie, do not steal, do not covet, do not be wise in your own eyes, do not conform to the pattern of this world . . .”—so many “Do not’s.” Instead of being restrictive and oppressive, however, they are actually liberating safeguards!

So as you go through life, give heed to God’s “rattles.” There are good reasons He gives His warnings, and we are wise to “be aware and beware!”

Submitted by:

Dawn Bovenmyer
Stonebrook Community Church
Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Surprise!

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12 NIV

Our children and grandchildren threw us a surprise 45th anniversary party. They totally caught us off guard! We were in shock. Rick had not shaved for several days, and I was wearing an old pair of shorts and a T-shirt! I was ready to play with grandchildren when we arrived at a Memorial Day barbeque in Tom and Mandy's backyard two hours north. We thought a few of our children and grandchildren would be there.

Instead we found lots of family and friends, a lovely decorated lawn with a big party, tons of food—and six of my siblings and their spouses! Mandy had recreated our wedding cake, and Joy had snuck into my memory chest sometime earlier and pulled out our wedding cake topper.

After we were shown much love and honor, the party broke up. Before he left, my brother said, "Neva, I don't know if you knew this, but when you two got married, the folks were not too excited. Because you hadn't finished college yet. But I guess you did okay. Things turned out okay."

I don't remember my folks ever saying anything negative. They were always very supportive. Over the years, with all the babies, all the moves—they were always loving. But maybe they did have some concerns. However, things really did turn out; God truly blessed my life.

We finished college and now 45 years of shared life together, with assorted church plants, seven children, 23 (and counting) grandchildren . . . with God's help, we did okay.

What did I learn from my parents' example? To respond in kindness. I learned to be loving and supportive and generous and kind with those around me, with those who might not make the same decisions that I would. Let God work in their lives.

Submitted by:
Neva Whitney
Vintage Faith Church
Stillwater, Oklahoma

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

"I Just Want to be Kinder"

But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . kindness . . . Galatians 5:22

While sharing with a visiting scholar who had no knowledge of the Bible, I was asked if it was possible to learn about Biblical principles without becoming a Christian.

After we went through the verses in 1 Corinthians about Biblical truths being only spiritually discerned, he proceeded to read his Bible every week. At our first meeting he agreed that there must be a Creator, so that was a great start.

At our second meeting, the scholar again stated that he didn't want to become a Christian because his life was fine, and his government would not like it. But he wanted to be a "kinder, more loving person," and he "wanted to have more peace in his life." And, finally, he "needed strength to be more patient." I smiled as I showed him the fruit of the Spirit verses in Galatians 5 and shared with him how having God's Spirit living in him as described in 2 Timothy 1:6-7 satisfies the very specific desires of his heart.

We often think that salvation from hell or guilt is why people choose Jesus. Or some come to Christ because they don't feel loved. But some people come to Christ when they are longing to express more love, kindness, or patience, the very things that having the Holy Spirit produces in you. Maybe some people are just looking for a sense of peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

So the next time you are sharing the gospel, try figuring out which of the fruits the person is longing for, and explain how God's Spirit fills that void.

Submitted by:
Tony Pierson
Blacksburg Ablaze
Blacksburg, Virginia

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

"Lay Down What for Whom?"

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Ephesians 5:25

I was recently sharing with an Asian visiting scholar who wanted to know how to improve his marriage. Since he was exploring Christianity, we were studying the Bible together. We turned to Ephesians 5:25, and he read about loving his wife the way Christ loved the church—one more great opportunity to share the Gospel clearly—then back to what it meant to practically lay his life down for his wife.

The common misperception about this verse is that Paul is talking about taking a bullet for your wife to protect her, but that would be laying your death down for your wife. This is really referring to laying down your own selfish desires to serve your wife and family.

To illustrate that further, we went through the story of Jesus washing the disciples' grimy, dust and dung-covered feet as an example of what servant leadership looks like for Christians. Contrast this with the misperception often communicated that biblical Christianity is oppressive to women (Ugh!).

After an hour or so, my friend came back to this story and said, "This model of leadership really touched my heart." This is not at all what he experiences in his country, nor is it really what is experienced in many other countries from our leaders. But it is a powerful way to show love to the woman that God has specifically designed to complete you.

And from my personal experience, when you love your wife like Christ loves the church, she returns that love, pressed down and overflowing.

Tomorrow I'll pass on some more insights from my time with this Asian scholar.

Submitted by:
Tony Pierson
Blacksburg Ablaze
Blacksburg, Virginia

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

Be a Homemaker

. . . to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Titus 2:5

In today's culture when a woman says she's a homemaker, she can be automatically looked down upon by her female peers who "go to work" each week and find much more fulfillment. So we are led to believe.

A homemaker is thought to be the same as a housewife, you know, an exact copy of the 50s TV wife who wore an apron around the house all day, cooked and cleaned, and had a hot, home-cooked meal on the table as soon as her husband came in the front door. What a demeaning job for a woman who would obviously be much happier if she were out of the home being much more productive! Right?

The Amplified Bible says of homemakers: "makers of a home [where God is honored]." That description takes on an entirely different connotation. Being a maker of a home where God is honored takes hard work, character development, and a heart to die to oneself; it requires seeking to make those in the home successful by supporting them, praying for them, and continually helping them to fix their eyes on Jesus. This kind of woman has a heart forged through perseverance and dedication to obeying the Scriptures. She understands how much God loves her and fulfills her spiritual and emotional needs so she can freely give to others.

Along with being "workers at home," Christian wives must also be "sensible, pure . . . kind, being subject to their own husbands," Titus instructs us. All of this depicts a woman who is making the home a place where God is honored. The result is that the word of God will also be honored, and Christ will be Lord of that home. That's worth all the hard work!

Submitted by:
Barbara Wilson
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Raleigh, North Carolina

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

Bud and Ralph's

My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. Proverbs 1:10 NKJV
Cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse. Proverbs 1:14 NKJV

In 1986 Bud Olson and Ralph Tack joined together to form Bud and Ralph's Appliance Service in Grand Forks, North Dakota. As of this writing, the business is still going strong (though Bud passed away in 2001 and Ralph retired in 2017) and has been voted "The People's Choice for Best Appliance Repair" for many years running. Jean and I have benefited from their services. Bud and Ralph formed a great partnership and business.

Here's a partnership you will NEVER see: Jesus and Satan's Appliance Repair. Or: Jesus and Satan's Home Mortgages. Or any other such partnership. Crazy even to illustrate the absurdity, isn't it? But the Bible is clear that just as Jesus has no part with the devil, we are not to partner up with the lost—in business or marriage or any other "joining of funds and forces." In Proverbs 1, at its most basic level, Solomon warns against business partnerships ("let us all have one purse") with others who don't share our worldview. The injunction is repeated in the New Testament: *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).*

I have had "opportunities" to partner up in business ventures with others who didn't share my worldview or convictions. I turned them all down. My best and most successful partnership has been with Jean—38+ years and counting! Christian, settle yourself into this conviction: that just as Jesus would never partner up with the devil, you'll steer clear of similar unequal yokes.

Submitted by:
Tom Dunham
Cottonwood Community Church
Grand Forks, North Dakota

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

Tuesday, February 19

"I Will Carry You"

Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.

"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." Isaiah 46:1-4 ESV

In Isaiah 40-46, God chastises the people of Israel for worshipping idols. As a discipline to His people, the Babylonians conquered Israel and led them captive into a foreign land. The Israelites were so steeped in idolatry that they took their false gods into captivity with them. What did they do but pack up their idols and tie them on a beast of burden! They went to the hassle of carrying their "gods" with them. Their "god" was a burden and a weight to them as they traveled. Did they or their children have to walk because they gave priority to the idol?

Idolatry is always a burden on our life. When we replace God with a false god, bad things happen. Idolatry can come in many forms: addictions, bad habits, materialism, sports, eating, drinking, extreme exercise, gambling, smoking, or even TV watching.

The Lord said to His people, "Listen to me, my people! I am the One who has carried you from before you were born! I also will carry you through your old age!" He said, "I have made you, I will bear you, I will carry you, I will save you!"

We carry many burdens in life, from enslavement to various idols to heavy responsibilities and anxieties. God's promise to save and carry us is all encompassing—when leave our idols and come to Him, He carries both us and the weights of life we carry. Will you let Him?

Submitted by:
Dave Lennander
Coulee Rock Community Church
La Crosse, Wisconsin

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

Keep the Fire Burning

Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out. Leviticus 6:13

The burnt offering was to be burning continually, it was not to go out. The priest had to add wood and burn the fat of the fellowship offering. The fire did not stay lit on its own. Fuel needed to be added continually.

This seems like an analogy for Christians. In our walk with Jesus we need to keep our fire within burning constantly. Salvation is not a one-time deal. Accept Jesus as Savior and Ta-Da!—you will live a fruitful, prosperous, fire-filled life from then on. That's why Philippians 2:12 says to "work out your salvation." You won't lose your salvation, but if you don't work at it, the fire will burn low, and even become embers.

So how do you work at your salvation? What does it even mean? Well, every morning the priest had to add more firewood. For us this means time with God. Read the Bible, pray, meditate on His Word—everyday. The priest added firewood every day because otherwise the fire would go out. So too, with us. We need to feed the fire every day, spending time with God, to keep our fire going.

The priest would also rearrange the burnt offering. This is like digging in, making changes in life—not leaving things the way they were. Looking to grow. The last thing the priest would do was burn the fat. The fat was the best part, set aside for God. This is where God is glorified. How can we burn the fat? Apply God's Word to your life. Don't just be a hearer, be a doer. Keep the fire burning within.

Submitted by:
Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

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

Wednesday, February 20

God's Will: The Battle of the Wills

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the Lord. . . . Jonah 1:1-3 NIV

Sometimes I would like more direction in life. I wish an angel would appear, or that I would hear an audible voice. Most of us would probably like to hear from God more clearly. As much as I think this is a wonderful thing, I think it is also important to realize that the problem is not always that I don't hear clearly enough what to do; the greater problem is often that I just don't want to do what God tells me to.

Take Jonah for example. He was a prophet and a man of God. You would think that such a person would want to hear from God and would do what God asked of him. However, when Jonah heard that God wanted him to head east to Nineveh, he went west toward Tarshish. Basically, he was trying to get as far away from Nineveh, and the will of God, as possible. He didn't want anything to do with God's will.

It is easy to think that Jonah's response was audacious. Who would be brazen enough to do the exact opposite of what God asked? Before we judge Jonah too severely, we may want to examine our own hearts and actions. Is there anything that God has asked us to do that we haven't done? Anything at all? Perhaps instead of starting off by praying, "God show me Your will," it would be wise to begin with, "God show me where I have ignored Your will." That will reveal those places where our will is being prioritized over God's.

Submitted by:
Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

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

God's Will: Open Doors

But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. 1 Corinthians 16:8-9 NIV

Sometimes God opens the door for His work to be carried out. We rightly see this as God leading us into His will. But sometimes we get confused and can be tempted to think that all sorts of opportunities are signs from God. However, life is full of choices and not every opportunity is an open door from God. It is easy for us to interpret opportunities that line up with our will as open doors, while easily dismissing less attractive opportunities as closed doors.

When King Saul was jealous of David and trying to kill him, David hid in a cave. Saul, not knowing that David and his men were in the cave, went in to use it as a bathroom. David's men saw this as an open door for David to kill Saul. In 1 Samuel 24:4 they said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish'" (NIV). They wanted David to kill Saul and thought that was what God wanted as well. However, David was discerning and realized that he had no right to kill the man whom God had appointed as king. David had an open door, but he didn't take it.

As we can see in 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, some open doors lead us right down the path of the will of God. However, some situations that we perceive as open doors may be better indicators of our own will than God's. We need to ask God for much wisdom and insight as we seek out His will!

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

God's Will: Closed Doors

Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Proverbs 4:26 NIV

Just as we see open doors in life, we also see closed doors. There is no doubt that God can close doors at times. We've all heard stories of people who adverted some tragedy by missing a flight or having some hiccup in their schedule. It seems that God does move through both opening and closing doors.

One mistake that I've seen people make is to plunge headlong into a decision without much prayer, counsel, or leading from the Spirit. They haven't given careful thought to their paths. To cover their carelessness they pray, "God, if this isn't Your will, stop me." This seems to be a fine prayer after a person has really sought God over a matter. However, to plunge carelessly down a path in life and assume that God will save the day seems to be expecting more of God than He has promised. God wants us to seek Him.

It is tempting to use this closed-door strategy when we want our own way: "God, I'm going to date this unbeliever, and I want You to stop me if You don't approve." Yet we are less likely to do this with something that might run contrary to our own personal desires: "God, I'm going to move to a third-world country to be a missionary, and You can close the door if You don't approve." Our own hearts can deceive us at times, and we need to give careful thought to the paths we take to ensure that our desires don't lead us down paths of danger. There are choices to make in life, and God wants us to carefully seek Him and His ways.

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Joyful Path of Suffering

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 1 Peter 4:1-2 NIV

Sometimes suffering is a good thing. At times we want to follow a course in life that is different from the path that God desires for us. That makes it difficult to follow God. When our wills diverge, our path seems to us to be the easier way, whereas what God wants seems to be more the difficult. Our path appears to be the one that will bring happiness, and His the one that leads to suffering. Of course, God's path is the better path and will actually end in true joy. If we view our will as the path of comfort and His as the path of suffering, then suffering (in this sense) is a good thing.

Imagine someone suggesting that you pray, "God I will do whatever You want. I completely yield myself to You." Would that be easy to do? Or would you be afraid that God would lead you to be a missionary in a remote tribal village where you would have to eat bugs and coexist with spiders the size of manhole covers? Many times our fear of suffering makes us afraid to follow God. We fear where God wants to take us because we fear suffering.

When we accept that God's path will often involve suffering, it frees us to choose His way and to live for the will of God. In the long run we can trust that His will doesn't end in suffering but eventually leads to true joy.

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

God Is Never Surprised

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people. Luke 22:1-2

Surprises can be good or bad, wanted or unwanted, pleasant or painful. We are surprised by an unexpected check in the mail, meeting a kind client, or a cheerful server on a rainy day. On the other hand, a change in the weather that ruins our plans or an unexpected illness or bill are surprises we wish we could avoid. How can we prepare for surprises and not become discouraged by the bad news—or feel prideful that our abilities made something good happen when things are unexpectedly positive?

Jesus was going to be betrayed, beaten beyond recognition, and then crucified. He was not surprised. He was never surprised because He was God and knew the future. He also knew there would be a victorious resurrection and the purchase of a Bride made from sinful people! Knowing the future gave Him courage to face the present trials, as well as the future betrayals and abandonment by His best friends.

You do not know the future. But then again, you actually do! If you are a Christian, you know that you will be raised to eternal life with Christ! You also know the One who knows everything about the future! You can live with consistent hope, courage, and optimism when difficult surprises come by trusting God, who knows your future and loves His children. You don't have to be caught off guard or discouraged when nasty surprises come. Your God was not!

Remember, He holds you in the palm of His hand: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28). Rest hopefully in His hand.

Submitted by:

Stephen Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Dealing with Roadblocks

For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you. Matthew 17:20 ESV

I was recently driving home from my son and daughter-in-law's home late at night on a winding, narrow road by the river. I suddenly saw someone up ahead of me flashing their headlights. When I stopped my car, I noticed that a tree had fallen across the road, making it impossible to get around. Cars were starting to back up, and it was interesting for me to watch the different reactions people had.

Some tried unsuccessfully to turn around. Some sat in their cars fuming. But then a resident came out with his chainsaw, and some people got out of their cars and began to work together to remove the tree. I sat in my car helplessly for a while since the tree was too large for me to be of any real help. Then I noticed stray limbs and branches that were small enough for me to handle, so I joined in and did my part. Everyone worked well and was friendly and, before we knew it, we were on our way again.

It made me think of obstacles God puts in my life and how I deal with them. I can be like the drivers who tried frantically to avoid the problem and turn around. Sometimes God puts something hard in my life, and I don't want to face it. But like Jonah couldn't run away and those cars couldn't turn around, I can't avoid the lessons God has for me. I want to be like the people who faced the challenge and worked for the solution. It struck me that none of them could do it alone but enlisted the help of others. I may need help carrying the big stuff while I take care of the branches. What a great reminder that God can help us deal with whatever roadblocks we encounter today.

Submitted by:

Kelly Lewis
Grace Point Community Church
Lewis Center, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Wednesday, February 27

Farewell Speech

*I have set before you life and death . . . choose life. Deuteronomy 30:19
Choose . . . today whom you will serve. Joshua 24:15*

Earlier this year I wrote about a favorite topic of mine, people's encounters with God, particularly Peter's personal encounters with Jesus. The parting messages of God's people as recorded in His Word also speak powerfully to me. As I get older, I think more seriously about one of the most momentous events of this life: passing out of it and into the next.

Moses, who initially claimed he couldn't talk, gave quite a farewell speech, the book of Deuteronomy. Joshua, in his shorter farewell of two chapters, gave a similar parting exhortation: "Choose today whom you will serve." Choose today—how important are the life-changing decisions we make, but also how important are the little ones that may lead to bigger ones! (If something a little "off" appears on your computer screen, how quickly do you get away from it?)

Consider David. He was allowed the "last word" twice. His "last song" in 2 Samuel 23 is introduced by "Now these are the last words of David." How appropriate that it was a song celebrating God's wonderful working in his life! Then in 1 Kings 2, we see him, spurred by the urging of Bathsheba and Nathan, tying up some loose ends: "He charged Solomon . . . I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways." He assigned some pleasant tasks—"Show kindness to the sons of Barzillai"—and some unpleasant, unfinished business: Joab . . . Shimei.

Has God assigned you some unfinished business to take care of? How about "Make disciples of all the nations" and "Feed My sheep"?

Submitted by:

Keith Newman
New Life Community Church
Belton, Missouri

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Death by Greed

My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. Proverbs 1:10 NKJV

So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners. Proverbs 1:19 NKJV

Death can be by myriad causes: cancer, stroke, heart attack, accident, and on and on. When I peruse our local newspaper, I always check the obituaries. And especially with young people, I wonder how they passed from this life. Often the cause of death isn't disclosed.

Here's a cause of death that I've never seen mentioned: greed. And I don't ever expect to see it listed in a coroner's report. But Solomon states that greed takes away one's life. Obviously, he doesn't mean that it can be listed as a direct cause of death, but greed will sap the vitality out of our lives.

In addition to this, because of greed, people do stupid things (and sometimes those stupid deeds are the cause of death). Have you ever read those "dumb criminal stories"? Here's one: A man intent on robbing a Starbucks jumped in front of two men who were in line to order coffee and attempted to hold up the cashier. He could've done a better job of "casing the joint," though, because he didn't notice that the two men were uniformed police officers!

Because of greed, we are prone to make ill-advised choices and stupid decisions which can prove costly. Greed saps life of its vitality. But the opposite is also true: generosity is like an infusion of **life** into our veins. Proverbs 11:25 says, "*The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself*" (NKJV). Nobody likes a greedy person, but we all respect and love the one who is generous. Give yourself an injection of **life** today by showing generosity to someone!

Submitted by:

Tom Dunham
Cottonwood Community Church
Grand Forks, North Dakota

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Thursday, February 28

Farewell Speech — 2

To Timothy, my beloved son. . . . Make every effort to come to me soon.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 2 Timothy 1:2, 4:9, 4:6

Paul, knowing that he would soon depart from this life and be with the Lord, writes this very personal, heartfelt letter to his disciple, co-worker, and "son" in the faith. He reminds Timothy that Christian service and leadership are not for the faint of heart. "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

For the past 39 years I have trained and worked as a nurse, the last 32 in the field of rehab nursing. I've worked often with patients with spinal cord injuries. A fairly common procedure those patients have had done is the placement of rods, other hardware, or bone grafts into their spine. This strengthens and supports a spine that would otherwise not hold up, resulting in further injury to something as vital as their spinal cord.

Paul, like a combination orthopedic surgeon, neurosurgeon, and physical therapist, is striving in his last "prescription" to give Timothy more "backbone." In the process he blesses us as well. Interestingly, the very last word in the letter, "you," is plural. It is intended for us as well as Timothy. When one believer stands courageously, the spines of his fellow believers and co-workers stiffen and straighten up.

The message of 2 Timothy is so rich that it is difficult to pick out favorite verses, but I find this one particularly challenging: "Do not be ashamed of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God" (1:8). When I had a serious back problem, I tried everything before I finally had surgery. It turned out to be exactly what was needed.

How's your backbone? Need spine surgery?

Submitted by:

Keith Newman
New Life Community Church
Belton, Missouri

One-Year Bible Reading

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

