

All Things New

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." Revelation 21:1-3 ESV

Happy New Year! It always amazes me how quickly one year comes to an end, and another one takes its place in a never-ending cycle. While reading the book of Revelation, what really stood out to me was that when Jesus comes to make all things new, it will be the end of the "out with the old and in with the new" mentality we've all come to know.

A time is coming when everything will be perfect, exactly as it was meant to be. God will actually dwell with us! Christian, are you excited about this? Do you believe this? It is a promise from God.

As Christians, we can be sure of what will happen when our earthly lives come to an end! We aren't supposed to just "hope for the best." There should be no question about where we will spend eternity, wondering if we've done enough good. We're not counting on our own works or righteousness to determine what will happen after we breathe our last; we are counting on the promises of God and the righteousness of Jesus! **He** made us righteous by His death and His resurrection. *That* is our assurance.

God promises us an eternal future with Him, an eternal resting place where He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, where death and mourning will be no more. A future where there will be no more crying or pain. Jesus made us a promise—He said, "Behold, I am making all things new." The book of Revelation ends with Jesus saying, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Submitted by:

Billy Johnson
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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Thursday, January 3

Sore Thumbs

So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 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 1:15-16

Have you ever been afraid of "sticking out like a sore thumb?" Several years ago, I had the privilege of participating as a groomsman in my brother's wedding in New York City. His bride was an immigrant from the Philippines, so their ceremony took on a decidedly international flavor, with the wedding party (which included my wife, son, sister, and parents) regaled in traditional, brightly colored Filipino garb. After the wedding, our family had to walk several blocks back to our hotel through the perpetually crowded Times Square. I felt an old fear rising within me: "Won't everyone stare at me in my unusual get-up?!" Fortunately, it being New York, the sight of a half-dozen western Americans in Asian garb wasn't bizarre enough to garner even a second glance.

There is a deep fear inside most (if not all) of us of being the object of stares, pointed fingers, and hushed whispers. We all have a desire to mesh and meld with the background, to feel comfortable in our own skins. Paul's introduction to Romans addresses this old fear of "sticking-out" as it pertains to the Christian faith: won't lost people point, stare, ridicule? Yes, they will, but Paul shows us that the Gospel should lead us to be "not ashamed." Why? Because it is a message that brings salvation to everyone: all races, origins, and ethnic groups.

Today I'm aiming to release my fear of what others might think about my faith-informed choices. Let them stare at my unorthodox get-up: I'm not ashamed. Will you join me and stick-out as one of God's "sore thumbs"?

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Ringin' in the New

For I am about to do something new.

See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland. Isaiah 43:19 NLT

As I write this, my husband Terry and I look forward the privilege of attending the wedding of Adam, the son of our associate pastor. He and his bride plan to have their ceremony on New Year's Eve in Branson, Missouri, followed by a reception with fireworks at midnight. What a fun way to begin the adventure of married life!

January 1 might not begin with such a bang (no pun intended!) for you, but it is still a time of hopeful, fresh starts. I recently looked up the word "new" in the dictionary and some of the synonyms that resonated with me were *restored, altered, renewed and improved*. Some antonyms were *deteriorated, past, and worn*. The choice is ours of whether we are stuck in the past, rooted in mediocrity, or constantly challenging ourselves to grow and change. Here are some questions to ponder as you launch into a new calendar year:

What new disciplines or practices could revitalize your spiritual life? Consider trying a new form of prayer, meeting in a weekly discipleship group, committing to a daily quiet time, or memorizing a passage of Scripture. In what area of your life would you like to see growth? It might be time management, exercise, intentional relationships, financial peace, or numerous other things. What new hobby would bring fresh wind to your sails? What bad habit or sin area do you need to turn from and leave in the past?

Whatever comes to mind, remember God's promise to strengthen you, help you, and hold you up with His victorious right hand (Isaiah 41:10 NLT). Happy New Year!

Submitted by:

Kelly Lewis
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Lewis Center, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Friday, January 4

The Evangelist's Job

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Acts 8:4

The early church suffered persecution for proclaiming Jesus Christ had risen from the dead and was the Savior of the world. This led to their being scattered throughout Israel. They fled for their safety from Jerusalem. Then they huddled in homes with fear until the danger past. **Not!** The gospel continued to be proclaimed with boldness. The question is: By whom? The answer—by everyone!

The only way to impact a world with the radical message of Jesus Christ is when every believer is committed to the cause. "Isn't that the job of the evangelist?" some may ask. Yes, evangelists should call people to turn to Jesus Christ for salvation. But their job is much, much more! The evangelist is to equip all Christ's followers to evangelize, as we read in Ephesians 4:11: "And He gave some as . . . evangelists . . . for the equipping of the saints for the work of service." Their job is to model, train, and inspire *all the saints* to sincerely care enough about unbelievers so that they share Christ with them in word and deed. They should inspire all the saints to live exemplary lives where Jesus Christ is seen in their marriages, friendships, at work, and at home.

Evangelism is much more than a message; it's revealing Jesus Christ alive in us! In my opinion, the evangelist has failed if he or she does all the evangelizing. Furthermore, evangelism is much more than learning a gospel presentation and going out to share it with others. It is developing a heart of compassion for those who don't know Christ yet, praying fervently for them to be saved, and sincerely caring about them. The lost are not to be viewed as our projects! God, help all of us today to have Your compassion for unbelievers.

Submitted by:

Stephen Scott Nelson
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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Amazing Words

But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living. Matthew 22:31-32

This passage is doubly amazing. A first point to notice is the fact that while quoting God from the Pentateuch (which was written by Moses), Jesus bases His argument for the reality of the resurrection on the tense of the verb "to be"! God did **not** say, "I was the God of Abraham . . ." Since He still is Abraham's God, long after Abraham had died, the resurrection is real. That is how precise God's word is!

But there is another word in verse 31 that should blow us away. Did you see what Jesus just told the Sadducees in the previous verse? He said, "Have you not read what was spoken to you by God"! Not only is Jesus communicating that what Moses wrote is the actual word of God, but that it still is His personal communication to us from God! The implications are nothing short of profound.

God literally speaks to us today simply through our reading of the Bible! Hebrews 4:12 tells us that His word is living, active, and sharp enough to reveal the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. This underlines how important it is to learn to read (thanks, teachers!), but also to use that skill on a daily basis to spend time listening to God. Don't neglect this awesome privilege! His living Word goes on to say (in Hebrews 12:25) "see to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking." Notice again the tense of the verb "to be." He is still speaking.

Are you listening?

Submitted by:

Daniel Goering
Great Commission Europe
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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Monday, January 7

Take Off Your Headphones

Does not wisdom call?

Does not understanding raise her voice?

"To you, O men, I call,

and my cry is to the children of man.

O simple ones, learn prudence;

O fools, learn sense." Proverbs 8:1, 4-5 ESV

I called you so often, but you wouldn't come. I reached out to you, but you paid no attention. Proverbs 1:24 NLT

But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears. Zechariah 7:11 NIV

I have a problem with headphones. I don't wear them. I just don't like my ears covered. So I don't understand very well how people go through life listening to something I can't even hear.

We had a teenage guest at our house, and I wanted to speak to him. So I told him, "Take off your headphones."

His innocent response was "Why?" As far as he was concerned, it was fine to be listening to his own private program or music.

"Because I want to talk to you," I said. So he obligingly removed his headphones for me. I just wanted to acquaint our guest with the possibilities for his next meal: French toast, eggs he might want to make himself, chicken and stuffing, a cheese and yellow squash casserole, or some turkey. I had a project on my mind and would be leaving soon, so my communication would help him fill his stomach when he got hungry.

Aren't we so often like this teenage guest? God says, "Take off your headphones." And we ask, "Why?" We have our mind on something else, and God can surely wait. But why does God want to talk to us? To tell us what is good! He has food stored up for our souls, rich in nutrients and delicious. Will we uncover our ears and pay attention?

Submitted by:

Dotty Vanderhorst
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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Amazing Words – 2

For so the Lord has commanded us, "I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH." [quoted from Isaiah 49:6] Acts 13:47

Buckle your seatbelts! We are about to take a look at another surprising word in an amazing verse.

To set the scene, Paul and Barnabas are sharing the gospel with some Jews in Pisidian Antioch on their first missionary journey. They had a very positive reception from many of the Jews who listened. But there were also many of the leading Jews who rejected the message and started blaspheming. It is to those people that Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6.

The Jews understood that this verse primarily referred to the coming Messiah, who would come as a Light for the Gentiles (and not only for the Jews). But notice carefully what Paul says. He does **not** say, "For so the Lord has commanded Him (the Messiah). And further, Paul does **not** say, "For so the Lord has commanded me [Paul]." Paul boldly says, "For so the Lord has commanded **us!**" If we didn't already know that Paul was speaking (and Luke, who wrote Acts, was writing) under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we would be tempted to condemn such a notion as presumptuous or even audacious.

The clear application for us is that God has "placed us" specifically to be instruments of His love through sharing the gospel with every person, both Jew and Gentile! Jesus Himself said to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, "you are the light of the world." Yes, Jesus was the light which came into the world (John 1). You and I are now placed as a light for the nations, to bring salvation to the end of the earth!

How are you living out this high calling?

Submitted by:

Daniel Goering
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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Tuesday, January 8

God's LOL!

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter . . ." Genesis 21:6 NIV

Recently while corresponding with a prison pal of ours, I sent my husband, David, my verse for the day, 2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory . . ." (NIV84).

A while later I received an amusing reply. It seems that David had just been to the dentist that morning to have a tooth filled. The numbing agent that the dentist used somehow affected David's left eye, making it impossible for him to close that eye for a couple of hours. David was forced to walk around with a cloth over his face to protect his eye from the sunlight.

Because his face somehow resembled a stroke victim's, the combination of the cloth along with his droopy face led to his bosses and co-workers having a "field day" with him. Laughter was everywhere, including from David!

Later David found my email. Squinting to read the scripture verse that I sent, with the cloth still literally over his eye, he read, "And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory..." Now it was really David's turn to laugh, right along with God who strategically lined up and shared that perfect verse and special moment with him!

Did you ever stop to think that our God is one who loves to laugh and sports a good sense of humor? We can conclude that first of all because we are made in His image, and we humans certainly love a good joke and laughter!

The Bible repeatedly instructs us that our God is a God of joy! He rejoices; He laughs; and I believe He likes to laugh along with us... just as He did this day with David.

Submitted by:

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Stonebrook Community Church
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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Double Joy

Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. 2 Timothy 4:11

No one likes stories where people no longer trust each other. Weddings are happy occasions—and divorces are sad. Births are filled with joy—but that joy turns into sadness when a child becomes a prodigal, estranged from the family. But when divorced couples become reunited, or when a prodigal returns, there is a double joy. There is joy from people being united and double joy because they were formerly estranged.

Our God is a God of double joy. He is the One who reconciles all things. Man brought sin and sorrow—but Christ brought righteousness and life. Man's sin led to broken relationships. The grace of Christ results in the reconciliation of all things.

In the verse above, we see an example of double joy. In Acts 13 we read about Mark being chosen by Paul and Barnabas for their missionary team. Later Mark abandons the team. When Paul and Barnabas begin to plan for their next missionary trip, Barnabas wants Mark to come but Paul disagrees. This leads to Paul and Barnabas going their separate ways. At the end of Acts 15, you would think that Mark was the last person whom Paul would choose for his team.

But lo and behold—this is exactly what happens at the end of Paul's life. At the moment when Paul was the most lonely, when he had so many people who had abandoned him, Mark is the one Paul chooses to be with him.

How can this be explained? What happened that led Paul to say that Mark was "useful" to him? We do not know the answer. But we do know this: God did a work of reconciliation. And with all the miracles that Paul saw, this was arguably the greatest miracle of all.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Friday, January 11

What to Leave Behind

When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. 2 Timothy 4:13

Paul at the end of his life makes a simple request: "Bring the cloak and the parchments." We do not know for sure what the parchments were. But probably they were writings of Scripture. And as for his request for his cloak—Paul probably did not have many earthly possessions. But he did have treasures in heaven.

This reminds me of the words spoken by author Leonard Ravenhill about John Wesley: "John died in 1791, converted at 35. Turn that round it makes 53. Add them together it makes 88. Because he was saved at 35, he preached for 53 years. And you know what he left when he died? He left a handful of books, a faded Geneva gown that he preached in all over England, six silver spoons somebody gave him, six pound notes, 'give one to each of the poor men that carry me to my grave.' And that's all he left: six pound notes, six silver spoons, a handful of books, a Geneva gown and ah . . . there's something else . . . what was it, the other thing? Oh, I know, something else he left, the Methodist Church.

He could have died as rich as your famous TV preacher Sunday. Sure he made money, and he built orphanages. Sure he made money, he printed bibles. Sure he made money. He compiled, with Charles, the Methodist hymnbook and look at his orphanages. And he died worth about thirty dollars. He printed bibles. He printed hymnbooks. He financed missionaries to go across the earth. That's the way to use your money. You think of the reward. Why, in God's name, do you think it says don't lay up treasure on earth? Lay up treasure in heaven."

John Wesley left behind people who loved Jesus—and not much else. And so did Paul. What do you want to leave behind when you die?

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Still Sending

But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 2 Timothy 4:12

At the end of Paul's life, he is in prison. As is seen in this letter, Paul is still teaching his disciple Timothy. He is still believing God. And he is still sending people to fulfill Christ's mission.

One of my heroes of the faith is Herschel Martindale. For over 50 years, Herschel has been faithfully praying and believing God for the gospel to spread to the ends of the earth. During his lifetime Herschel has sent out teams from his church to proclaim Christ both in the United States and overseas. It was largely due to Herschel's faith that churches and ministries have been started in Europe. Herschel did so by "sending" workers to Europe.

Now Herschel is nearly 90 years old. He is limited in his ability to go. But he is not limited in praying. He is not limited in skyping with people in other countries. And he is not limited in his ability to send. He has sent his son-in-law, George Sebek, and others to proclaim Jesus Christ in the Dominican Republic. Like Paul who sent Tychicus, Herschel is still sending people today.

Christianity is ultimately a sending religion. God sent Jesus to the earth to live a sinless life, to die on the cross, and to be raised from the dead. Jesus sent the Twelve and the Apostle Paul to preach the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. Over the last 2000 years churches and ministries have sent out workers to advance the name of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. And today God, by the Holy Spirit, continues to send out workers into His harvest so that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Are you ready to be sent? And are you ready to send others?

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Saturday, January 12

Anyone Can Be Saved

Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. Isaiah 59:1

Through a DNA test, I have discovered that I am 98% German with a little Scandinavian heritage making up the other 2%. One of my ancestors led an interesting and inspiring life.

My grandfather's cousin was Henry Gerecke. Have you heard of him? I hadn't either until I read a book about him. Henry Gerecke, of German descent, was a Lutheran minister in St. Louis, Missouri, where he lived with his wife and three sons. His two older sons enlisted in World War II and fought valiantly. This inspired Henry Gerecke to also enlist as an army chaplain. He served in England from 1943 until the end of the war. Ready to head home to his family, Chaplain Gerecke was recruited for his most difficult and interesting task. He was asked to be the chaplain for the German Nazis on trial in Nuremberg.

Because he was fluent in German, he seemed perfect for this job. However, how does one put aside the horrors of what took place by the Germans and see these men as redeemable? I'm not sure I could do that. But Henry Gerecke felt it was God's calling to serve Him as one of the chaplains to these seemingly horrible men. He was able to separate himself from their horrific actions and look at them as men in need of a Savior. In the book, *Mission at Nuremberg*, Henry Gerecke's life is followed as he ministers to Hermann Goering, Albert Speer, Wilhelm Keitel, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and other imprisoned Nazis as they awaited trial. He had the unique opportunity to speak the saving words of salvation into the lives of each of these men.

My ancestor's life challenges me to see everyone as redeemable. God's hand is not too short to save anyone.

Submitted by:

Barbara Wilson
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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Winter Guest

He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

Psalm 91:11 NIV

It was a cold winter's night. My grandfather and grandmother finished up all the nightly duties after getting the kids to bed: checking the heating stoves, locking the doors, and extinguishing the lights. They lived in a large house, and due to no central heating, the upstairs bedrooms were closed off, leaving only the upstairs bathroom (heated by a small kerosene stove) open.

The house quieted and sleep came. Sometime during the night, my grandpa awoke to a voice and what appeared to be an angel. Dismissing it as a dream, he went back to sleep. The angel called him a second time, and again Grandpa ignored it, assuming it to be a dream, and returned to his sleep. Upon a third call Grandpa decided to follow up on this "dream."

Putting on his slippers and robe, Grandpa made his way through the darkened room to the stairway door, for in his dream, he had seen the angel standing at the top of the steps beckoning him to come up.

As Grandpa opened the door, he was greeted with the acrid smell of kerosene fumes. Now fully awake, he quickly opened some windows, woke my grandma, and then carefully made his way up to the bathroom to tend to the malfunctioning heater.

It's hard to say what might have happened that night had Grandpa not gotten up on the promptings of this winter guest . . . perhaps asphyxiation of the family or a house-fire. There were many questions left unanswered along with grateful ponderings.

One thing is certain: God has created angels to be his ministering servants here on earth, and that wintry night of long ago convinced our family of that!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Jesus as a Kid

Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. Luke 2:46 NLT

We know little about Jesus' years growing up, but Luke records one interesting event. This brief passage gives us wonderful insights on parenting. You may find you have more in common with Mary and Joseph than you thought!

Kids will make you worry: "Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. . . . Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't miss him at first, because they assumed he was among the other travelers" (Luke 2:41-44 NLT). From today's opening verses, we know they found Him three days later.

Three days? They had to be beside themselves. They knew Jesus was a special kid. The angel told Mary they would call Him the "Son of God." How's that for special? And for three days, they lose God's Son.

Great, just great. I'd worry too.

Kids will surprise you: "All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47 NLT).

I remember once being annoyed at a fly in our house. "Who let the fly in?" I called out, trying to keep a lid on my irritation. My son, about eight, ran in to solve the problem.

"Don't worry, Dad, I'll get him." He scanned the room for the buzzing intruder.

"Son, that's fine, let me get the swatter . . ."

And then he did it. The fly came zig-zagging by, and my boy caught him in his cupped hands. He can do that? I looked at my wife with a "Did you see that?" look on my face. My son took the imprisoned insect outside.

Kids will worry you. Kids will surprise you. Learn from Mary and Joseph.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Jesus as a Kid – 2

His parents didn't know what to think. "Son," his mother said to him, "why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere."

"But why did you need to search?" he asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they didn't understand what he meant. Luke 2:48-49 NLT

As we look at the passage in Luke that shows Jesus as a kid (Luke 2:41-52), we find excellent parenting insights. Let's continue where we left off. In the passage above, can you identify with the bafflement of these parents?

There will be miscommunication: Communication is a challenge. One person assumes one thing, another assumes something else. Jesus' parents do the right thing. They want to know the reasons for Jesus' actions. So they ask him a question and show us an example of great parenting. How?

They listen.

As a parent, I know how easy it is to fall into "lecture" mode. But good stuff happens when we ask our kids questions and listen to what they say. (This works with friends too.)

Today's irritations become cherished memories: "Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51 NLT).

As a family we've only gone camping once or twice. I remember the four of us squeezing into a hot, stuffy tent. And then it rained.

Four people, small tent, rain. All righty then . . .

But it gets worse. How? Frogs. (More on that tomorrow.)

What is irritating you today? Could God make it a cherished memory?

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Jesus as a Kid – 3

"But why did you need to search?" he asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they didn't understand what he meant.

Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart. Luke 2:49-51 NLT

Today's irritations become cherished memories: Mary stored up all her impressions and memories of her Son in her heart. These were precious to her, even those which had worried and puzzled her.

To review from yesterday, as a family we've only gone camping once or twice. When we did, it rained. Four people, small tent, rain.

But it gets worse. How? Frogs.

Every time we opened the tent flap to get a gulp of fresh air, small frogs would jump in. Aren't frogs supposed to like wet stuff? Why didn't they stay in the rain? What's wrong with these guys? Ever try to get a frog out of a crowded tent? Try it sometime, and let me know what you think.

It was a miserable time, but now a great memory.

And it's stored in my heart.

God's purpose will be fulfilled: "Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people" (Luke 2:52 NLT).

Mary and Joseph found Jesus. It took three days (yowza!), but they found Him. Jesus grew up. He accomplished God's plan for His life. And one more thing.

We get a great passage of Scripture that offers encouragement for parents.

Maybe parenting right now feels like a losing battle. Maybe it's one frustration after another. But that doesn't mean God's purpose won't be fulfilled in your kids also. Hang in there. Mary and Joseph had their hard days too.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

In the Pocket

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase. Acts 9:31

I'm happy to report that in my walk with the Lord I feel "in the pocket" with Jesus. I'll tell you what I mean by this. There is a sweet spot musicians call being "in the pocket." It means singing in time and being in the "groove" with the rhythm of the song. You can be in pitch, but if you're wavering ahead or behind the beat it won't feel right. As I write this, I'm feeling in rhythm with my Creator. It might help that I'm enjoying two cups of good coffee and a good night's sleep. I'm also looking forward to a relatively peaceful day. As far as I can tell so far, I'm "in the pocket."

The early church experienced something like being "in the pocket" of faith at a specific time in Acts (see 9:31 above). We live in a country today where we have the freedom to pursue our faith freely. Like the early church, we enjoy peace, being built-up, and "going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit."

Perhaps the biggest obstacle we face is complacency, the temptation to relax in the Lazyboy seat of Christianity. Because of this the church is not always in a peaceful place. Not everyone is growing in their faith; we can easily lack a healthy fear of the Lord. But even despite our complacency, we still have an incredibly grace-filled, merciful, and all-powerful God, one who chooses to carry us along in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

How about this for being "in the pocket"? God loves us unconditionally and for those of us who have faith in Jesus, His blood has made us right with God. Hallelujah! It makes it easy for us to obey this verse: "*Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*" (Psalm 32:11 ESV).

Submitted by:

Steve McInroy
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Genesis 35:1-36:43
Matthew 12:1-21
Psalm 15:1-5
Proverbs 3:21-26

Not as Costly

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. Isaiah 61:10 NKJV

Way back in college, three friends and I spent our Thanksgiving vacation in New York City. I had never been there before, and, coming from Clemson, South Carolina, I was totally in awe of the mass of buildings and people. We stayed at the Roosevelt Hotel, watched the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, trooped through Central Park, and took in as much of 5th Avenue as possible. We drooled over all the latest fashions and gorgeous jewels that we could look at but certainly not afford to buy!

However, in perusing the racks of clothing in Saks Fifth Avenue, I came across a blouse for \$12.00. I couldn't believe it. Who cared if it wasn't my favorite color? It was my size, and I was quite excited that I was going to have one piece of clothing with an extremely trendy label. I proudly marched up to the sales clerk to make my purchase. As I pulled out my wallet, my heart dropped—the woman told me the blouse would be \$112.00 plus tax. What?! I had unfortunately failed to see that extra one after the dollar sign.

The above verse tells us how God clothes us. No trendy labels, no outrageous cost. Jesus has already paid for that clothing – with His life. The garment of salvation and the robe of righteousness always fit, and they never go out of style. In fact, the more I get to know Jesus through obeying the Bible and prayer, my clothing fits me better and better. Are you excited about your garment and robe? It looks good on you!

Submitted by:

Barbara Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

Genesis 37:1-38:30
Matthew 12:22-45
Psalm 16:1-11
Proverbs 3:27-32

Confusion

God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

1 Corinthians 14:33, 40

Rioting, hatred, and confusion have become more commonplace in our society. Some citizens feel disenfranchised, and some become angry and take to the streets to protest. Unfortunately, what may start as an organized, peaceful protest for justice can become confusion when violence erupts. Why does this result? Because a few individuals may feel like violence is the only way to get action on an issue. Behind the scenes, stirring up hatred, is Satan, the author of confusion!

Today I read the story of the Ephesians rioting over their goddess because they felt threatened by this new deity—Jesus, the miracle worker from Nazareth: "The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. . . . So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together" (Acts 19:29, 32).

Our God is a God of order, while the devil is the author of confusion. He deceives and divides us and is thrilled to get us riled up and angry with one another. Satan wants us to act more on our emotions, and not to think things through by using our minds to understand the truth and figure out positive solutions.

Let's pray for our fellow citizens to consider their actions and the consequences of anger and violence. Then ask God to give us compassion for those in confusion. Finally, ask God to use all true believers to speak the truth to those in darkness, held captive by Satan to do his will.

Submitted by:

Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

Genesis 39:1-41:16
Matthew 12:46-13:23
Psalm 17:1-15
Proverbs 3:33-35

Fresh Oil

But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil. Psalm 92:10 ESV

They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green. Psalm 92:14 ESV

As I grow older, I have become more aware of the wonderful promises and comfort in God's word about aging. It is troubling when I experience lapses in memory, decreasing stamina, aches and pains that go with aging. I am experiencing a reduced ability and energy to carry out my responsibilities in life and ministry.

The above two verses paint a great picture of God's blessing our lives even as we age. First, God pours fresh oil on us through His Holy Spirit. The picture I get is that the oil was new and squeezed from freshly picked olives. It was not sitting around for a long time getting rancid. I can look to the Lord each day for a fresh boost of grace to make up my declining strength.

The second promise is that God keeps us fruitful in old age. He describes this as being green and full of sap. My family loves maple syrup. It is so natural, sweet, tasty, healthy—and expensive! Fortunately, we have a friend who has a commercial operation of maple trees. He keeps us well supplied. The sap is the life-giving liquid of the maple tree and can be harvested for our use. It is a great picture of the life of God flowing through our veins even in old age. The old maples produce more.

As I get older, I wonder if I am getting dried up and brittle in a spiritual sense. But through the promises and indwelling Holy Spirit, I can be confident to have fresh oil and sweet sap flowing through my life. I can continue to be a blessing to the people around me.

Submitted by:

Dave Lennander
Coulee Rock Community Church
La Crosse, Wisconsin

One-Year Bible Reading

Genesis 41:17-42:17
Matthew 13:24-46
Psalm 18:1-15
Proverbs 4:1-6

Aged Fruit

They will still bear fruit in their old age. Psalm 92:14 NIV

My mother-in-law Ruth turned ninety years old last fall. That's quite an accomplishment for an average person, but especially noteworthy considering she has been battling Alzheimer's for over ten years.

Ruth has had quite a number of accomplishments in her life—returning to college after rearing her family, enjoying a career as an elementary education teacher specializing in reading disorders, championing family genealogy, and writing her autobiography, *Memories of a Country Girl*.

Faith has been a big part of her life. Ruth devoted herself to God and the church (faithful pianist and Sunday school teacher for years) and ministering to others, whether through lay-witness, meeting with handicapped folks, or regularly visiting and singing with retirement home elderly. Everywhere Ruth went, she took her warm smile and heart of love.

Now Alzheimer's has silenced Ruth and reduced her mind to that of a toddler. Yet even now her life is bearing fruit! Due to her condition, caregivers are required in the home and many of these have heard the gospel, whether through songs played for Ruth or family members interacting with them. One of the caregivers is reading through the Bible as Ruth listens; another plays the Bible on her phone app for Ruth to hear. Brothers-in-law who daily care for her sing hymns to her when they put her to bed each night. God's truth is reverberating all around the house!

Because of Ruth's earlier choices in life, the fruit continues to follow, even in her compromised state. She still bears fruit in her old age!

This is so reassuring and comforting to me! God takes care of His own, providing for their needs, working powerfully in and through their circumstances, and bearing fruit for Him—beautifully aged!

Submitted by:

Dawn Bovenmyer
Stonebrook Community Church
Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading

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

They've Only Run Ahead

The devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death. Isaiah 57:1-2

When I was a homeschooling mom, on my birthday I took a hike in the afternoon with my students. Sometimes their dad came along. Now that I'm a retired teacher, I've kept that tradition, and I invite grown children and grandchildren, whoever can make it. Last year was a particularly good year as we went on a Sunday and were 24 humans, including 14 grandkids, plus two dogs. I chose a two-mile path around a lake. It was an exhilarating trek on a winter's day with dogs racing past pulling kids on leashes, and the baby Amos passing from aunt to aunt.

But when we got halfway, and one mom counted noses, two were missing. We identified the absent cousins—six-year-old Miles and five-year-old Aliyah. Interviewing children revealed that these two were trying to keep ahead of everybody in the party. As bad scenarios instantly came to mind, a concerned uncle and parents mobilized a search party. Great was the relief of all when a text came: "Found them." The explanation was that the two wanted to beat the rest to the end of the track: "They've only run ahead." (Parental instruction followed.)

The day my mother stopped breathing in her wheelchair in our kitchen with seven of us around her, a friend from church called a couple hours later. Judy asked about Mom. She wasn't surprised to hear my news. She had had a dream the night before. She had seen my mom jump out of her wheelchair with a big smile on her face and throw her arms up in the air! My mom's older sister, Essie, was only nine when she left for heaven. (My grandmother wore white to the funeral to show her hope.) Mom waited until she was 86. I believe it's true: "They've only run ahead."

Submitted by:

Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Authority

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 1 Timothy 2:1-2

Last October Justice Brett Kavanaugh was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in a narrow 50-48 vote. He has now taken his seat next to the other eight Supreme Court Justices on our nation's highest court. Some people are encouraged, some are disappointed, some are protesting, and some don't care. Donald Trump is the President of the United States of America; it seems like at least a few times a week we hear about something he tweeted, said, wore, or did. Again, some people are happy, some are mad, some are protesting, and some don't care.

How should we, as Christians, respond to our government leaders and those in authority over us? We can glean some instruction from Paul in the opening verses above from 1 Timothy 2. What exactly does that mean for us? How do we respond?

It means we should pray faithfully and respectfully for those in authority over us. When it comes to leaders in our government, we will not always agree with people's lifestyles, history, beliefs, worldviews, or political stances. That's okay. Here are some verses to remind us that this world is not the permanent home of the Christian and that God is working to make us more like Jesus.

Both the apostles Peter and Paul speak to this subject: "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor" (1 Peter 2:17 ESV). Paul says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1 ESV). Honor, respect and a prayerful attitude should be what characterize us as Christians, not criticism.

Submitted by:

Billy Johnson
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Authority – 2

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. Jeremiah 29:7

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. Titus 3:1-2

Both of the above scriptures are addressed to people living under an alien political power. Jeremiah wrote to exiled Jews in Babylon. Titus wrote to Christians living under Roman rule around the Mediterranean. Neither Babylon nor Rome were God-fearing governments. Living under a foreign power meant people needed instruction on how to handle their political situation—just like us.

Let's *not* be known as the outspoken "know-it-all" when political opinions are aired at the office. Let's *not* be known for what political party we associate with (or don't associate with). The Bible doesn't call us to be that person. Don't get me wrong; it's very good to be knowledgeable and informed about political issues. As Americans, we should learn the facts about issues and either mail in our ballots or make it to the polls on Election Day to cast our votes.

But God wants us to be known for loving Him, being quiet and gentle, while at the same time being ready to speak the truth. We need to boldly, lovingly, and respectfully proclaim the gospel to anyone who asks us about our hope in Jesus. The Bible calls us to be loving and kind to our family, friends, and neighbors. The Bible calls us to pray for everyone, even those we don't agree with—even our enemies.

When the Bible speaks to an issue, we need to obey it. Because we do this, we will indeed be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12); our persecution, however, should only be the result of us obeying God's Word.

Submitted by:

Billy Johnson
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Man of God, Servant of the Lord

(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.) Numbers 12:3

Besides the above titles given to Moses at the end of Deuteronomy, he is particularly commended by God Himself in one of the shortest chapters of Numbers, chapter 12. In addition to the parenthetical statement above, it is here that we find God saying, "My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household . . ." (12:7), referred to in Hebrews 3:2-5. And in case Moses' siblings, Aaron and Miriam, didn't catch it the first time, the Lord again says, "My servant . . . Moses . . ." (12:8).

Let's think a moment about love and the dynamics of mingling of family and leadership. (And try turning your thinking about leadership upside down like Jesus did). Aaron and Miriam "spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married" (12:1). But their real issue was: "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" There is nothing so far that indicates Moses being aware of their jealous complaint, but "The Lord heard it" (12:2). The Lord takes action: "You three come out to the tent of meeting," He says, which apparently could double as the "woodshed."

Bear in mind that Moses is the little brother, that Miriam played an important role in saving Moses' life, that she is in some sense a worship leader, and that Aaron (remember, older brother) had served, at least initially, as Moses' mouthpiece. Moses had used his lack of eloquence as an excuse not to take on this role. (I can relate: my younger brother was a much better athlete than I was. I lettered in football and track because I participated and survived. Terry set records.)

Here's our take-away: Do we truly rejoice in the success of others? Or are we anxious to preserve our own reputation? "Love is not jealous."

Submitted by:

Keith Newman
New Life Community Church
Belton, Missouri

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Sunday, January 27

In the Beginning Was the Word

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Proverbs 18:21 ESV

Today is International Holocaust Remembrance Day. A friend of mine visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. and described a painting he saw there. Hitler was standing on a platform in a suit and tie and animatedly addressing a group of 40 people who were listening with rapt attention. The painting was captioned, "In the Beginning Was the Word."

Think about that. Why *that* caption? What "beginning" was the painter thinking about? I imagine he had in mind something along the lines of the beginning of Hitler's rise to power or the beginning of ideologies that would cost millions their lives. What was at that beginning? Guns? Tanks? Gas chambers? No. At that beginning were arrogant and evil ideas inside a man's head. Those were communicated, using words—nothing but words. They may have been shared as private whisperings or in rooms full of people, but eventually those words landed in people's hearts, took root, and spread. And the power of the ideas carried by those words is now undeniable.

Sometimes I foolishly think that the words I use have no power. I forget that the scriptures are the "very words of God," and that His Word is "living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword." I suppose that in my own pride I forget that I am not sharing my message, but His. And that "In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God." And that the "Word," Jesus, has things to say that can turn the world upside down.

May we speak with confidence and faith that God's message is vastly more powerful and world-impacting than the message of evil that started with the words of Hitler.

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Who? Me?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5

From the burning bush, God calls Moses. Moses says, "Who? Me? I can't do that!" God says, "Perfect! I can." Earlier in Egypt Moses thought he could save the Jews on his own. Not! He fell flat on his face.

So too with us. On our own, we fall flat, we can't do. But God can. So rejoice in your weakness—it gives God room to work.

When Moses first received God's call, he was ready to do it on his own. He was Moses, he could do it all. But he failed miserably. The second time he received the call, Moses knew he couldn't do it. He had tried and failed. He had no idea how it could be done.

Moses goes through all the reasons why he is the wrong man for the job. God goes and answers every one of his reasons. Moses knows he can't do it, only God can do it through him. He trusts God, and God takes his weakness and uses it for His glory.

How about you? When God asks you to act, do you act on your own strength like Moses did in Egypt? Do you give God the reasons you can't do it? "God obviously has the wrong person." Or will you trust God, knowing you can't do it, but He can?

Lord, help me to trust You.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Monday, January 28

Nehemiah – A Heart for Prayer

When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said, "I beseech You, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. Nehemiah 1:4-6

I like Nehemiah. He was a great project manager with a big heart. When he learns that even though Israel has been released from Babylon, the city has not been rebuilt, he is shocked and dismayed.

Have you ever gotten bad news that just knocked you over? What did you do? Nehemiah gets on his knees and prays his heart out to God. He pleads for the lovingkindness of God, while confessing the sin of his people. He identifies with them. He acknowledges the righteousness of God's judgment. What was their sin? They had followed other gods.

Nehemiah was expecting Israel to get back on its feet and start rebuilding Jerusalem when they got there—but they hadn't. Have you ever faced something daunting that came as a surprise? Like a car accident, a sickness, a death in the family, or a project you were not expecting?

With continual issues within and without our church (or my daughter's sickness), it often feels like I am facing impossible tasks, but the alternative of giving up is unacceptable. What should you and I do in the face of this? What Nehemiah did: Pray! Pray! Pray!

If you really believe this stuff, you pray to Him who has it all under control. When it looks like it is going to be a slog and I could just give up, I need to start with prayer. If you want to accomplish the impossible in the face of the unacceptable, you have to pray with a heart like Nehemiah's.

Submitted by:

Greg Standinger
Glen Arbor Community Church
West Chicago, Illinois

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Nehemiah – Remember the Lord and Fight

When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses." When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. Nehemiah 4:14-16

The apostle Paul says to his disciple Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:7, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."*

Do you have any fears? I have many. We all have them. Fear of fitting in, fear of rejection, fear of going door-to-door, fear of little children. Fear asks all sorts of questions like, "Are you sure you can do it? Are you really good with people? Won't people hate you? Are you skilled enough? Wouldn't you be happier doing something else?" and so on.

Let the Lord ask questions of your fear. Remember the Lord: "Who made you? Who is with you? Who can stand against the Lord? Who made men's mouths, is it not I?" Remember the Lord, whom you trust in, "who is great and awesome," and fight for Him.

There is hymn that says "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war. . . ." This verse is not about physical war. It is about spiritual war. When we get afraid, we want to quit, and that is the point where we have a choice to put our faith to the test. Is our faith in our finances, our abilities, our house, our land, or our world? If it is, you should be afraid.

If it is in the Lord who is awesome and great, you have nothing to be afraid of. He will go before you.

That is what Nehemiah knew—his heart was to keep going and build and be ready to defend the work.

Submitted by:

Greg Standinger
Glen Arbor Community Church
West Chicago, Illinois

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Thursday, January 31

Nehemiah – A Passion for God

In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people. So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Nehemiah 13:23-25

Nehemiah is a unique book in that it is written entirely in the first-person. We thus get an a deeper look into the author's character as he describes the various ways he corrects Israel so they will follow the Law of God in all aspects. In 13:11-12 Nehemiah reprimands them when the tithes are not given to the priests. Soon after that he commands that the city be closed for business on the Sabbath and threatens the merchants hanging around the gates. Finally, he curses, strikes, and pulls out the hair of those who had allowed their families to intermarry with foreign people, as was forbidden.

There are other examples earlier in the book of just how nuts Nehemiah was for Israel to completely obey God. Why? God had just exiled Israel for allowing these sins to flourish in their midst! Nehemiah didn't want this to happen again. He might have said, "Come on, man! What's wrong with you?" They were allowing things to slip and the outside world to creep into their lives again.

Do we talk, walk, and act like any other person who has rejected Christ? Have we allowed our relationship with the Lord to be so watered down that we are indistinguishable from unbelievers? Are we passionate about being different from the world around us? Do we care about the house of our heart, Christ's home? Do we let our eyes see anything they want? Are we entertained by the sin of others?

Would Nehemiah pull our hair out also?

Submitted by:

Greg Standinger
Glen Arbor Community Church
West Chicago, Illinois

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Nehemiah – A Game of Compromise

Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together at Cephirim in the plain of Ono." But they were planning to harm me. So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" They sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way. Nehemiah 6:1-4

The guys listed in verse 1 above did not want Nehemiah and Israel to succeed in rebuilding Jerusalem or become a nation again. They were part of the two people groups originally driven out of the Promised Land by the Jews. They liked the defeated Jewish nation.

That is what the enemies of God like too. They like defeated Christians. They don't bother them when they are defeated, but if you start building a wall, that is, doing ministry, or if you stand up for Christ—there will be opposition (2 Timothy 3:12).

These men had tried other tactics, such as threats or name-calling to stop Nehemiah, but that did not work, so they try a game of compromise: "Hey, let's stop fighting, can't we be reasonable here? Let's have peace. Stop what you are doing and come over here so we can talk."

This is an old trick of Satan. He will by all means get you to stop God's work by distracting you for another cause that seems good. But it is just trying to get you to stop in the name of a cause that does not exist. Satan tries a similar tactic on Jesus in Matthew 4:5-7. Does Satan really care about Jesus or showing the power of God? No—it is a distraction.

There are a lot of good things out there, all calling your name. This is really a trap. Answer as Nehemiah does: "I am doing a great work and cannot come down." Just say "No" as Nehemiah did, and keep pressing.

Submitted by:

Greg Standinger
Glen Arbor Community Church
West Chicago, Illinois

One-Year Bible Reading

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