

Batter Up

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 2 Corinthians 9:6 NKJV

It's baseball season, and we all know that baseball is mentioned in the Bible: "in the big inning." On a serious note, years ago I went on a week-long mission trip to Germany. I was asked by the mission agency that sent me, "How successful was your mission trip? How many did you see receive Christ, and how many of these new believers were baptized?" To be honest, I was bothered by that question. I was in Germany. I felt successful if I got into a gospel conversation, much less saw someone receive Christ and be baptized within a week. From that our team came up with a baseball analogy. To get into a conversation and pray for somebody was a single. To move that conversation to a gospel presentation was a double. If someone received Jesus as their Savior, that was a triple, and if they were able to meet back for a basic Biblical follow up, that was a homerun! To learn that they had shared their story with their family or friend was a grand slam.

Though the triples, homeruns, and grand slams are the most exciting part of the game, it's the singles and doubles that win championships. But in order to hit a single or double the batter must step up to the plate. Every batter knows he must be willing to fail seven or eight times out of 10 to help the team win.

Compare this to sharing the gospel. Though we love to see everyone we share the gospel with receive Christ, are we willing to be consistent in hitting singles and doubles and letting God do the rest? I have yielded to God's desire for all to be saved, and I've put myself in the batter's box consistently. Want to join me?

Submitted by:

Berk Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 18:1-19:10
John 20:1-31
Psalm 119:153-176
Proverbs 16:14-15

Monday, June 3

More Brilliant than the Sun

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. Psalm 33:6 NIV

I was sitting under the warm sun yesterday and I began to ponder . . . soaking in some vitamin D, some good love for God, and, indeed, some extreme thankfulness.

The sun may appear small in our sky at a distance of 93 million miles, but the sun is actually 109 times the diameter of Earth and over a million times the volume of Earth. The sun is the largest single object in our solar system and comprises 99.86 percent of all its mass.

The sun is remarkably complex. It is naturally divided into several layers that differ by temperature and motion. The solar core is the hottest region of the sun, with temperatures exceeding 15 million degrees Celsius (27 million degrees Fahrenheit).

Not only did God create the sun on Day 4 of creation but with the breath of His mouth, no less. Don't think for a minute and certainly don't be deceived . . . that God isn't omnipotent (all-powerful), or that God isn't omniscient (all-knowing), or that God isn't in control! (sovereign).

Only the fool could come to such a conclusion—only the fool could reject such power, such knowledge, such wisdom.

Why was I thankful? Because through the grace of Jesus, I have stepped into the "light" of His salvation, I have stepped into the "light" of His glory and splendor.

Indeed, it is more brilliant than the sun.

Submitted by:

Bob Bartlett
Submerge Church
Fargo, North Dakota

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 20:14-21:22
Acts 1:1-26
Psalm 121:1-8
Proverbs 16:18

Thank God, There Is A Way!

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. John 3:14-15 ESV

I often take time to engage with people to share the gospel. Engaging people is quite adventurous. One of the recurring themes is the denial that Jesus is the only way to God. That idea is usually framed along the lines of "if I live a good life and do the best I can, you say that I will not go to heaven just because I don't believe in Jesus."

During the times of the wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites grumbled and complained about God and their circumstances. You can read the story in Numbers 21. Poisonous snakes went throughout the camp biting the Israelites, killing many. They cried out to Moses for deliverance, and God instructed him to erect a bronze serpent on a pole so that all who looked to it would be healed from the poison.

What struck me is that the Israelites did not lobby for a better solution. They were so desperate that any solution God gave them would be followed. These thoughts challenged me freshly. When I communicate the gospel, am I accurately describing the predicament sin has created? So often people are clamoring for a better solution. The claims of Jesus are exclusive, and unless individuals understand their predicament, their need for a Savior, they will be offended.

Jesus came not to make me a better person but rather to give me life. All who believe in Him will have eternal life! Remember that and communicate with confidence that Jesus is the only way out of our sin. *Thank God that there is a way!*

Submitted by:

Ed Russ
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 19:11-20:13
John 21:1-25
Psalm 120:1-7
Proverbs 16:16-17

Tuesday, June 4

The Goat

God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. Genesis 1:16

Do you know who Tom Brady is? He was born in San Mateo, CA, in 1977 and has three older sisters. He attended Junipero Sierra High School and interned at Merrill Lynch during two summers of his college career. He's married to a Brazilian supermodel and has a son and a daughter. Oh! And he plays football.

If I described Tom Brady to you this way, you would think I was crazy. When his name is mentioned, *six-time Superbowl Champion of the New England Patriots* is probably the first thing that comes to your mind. And it should be. He is considered by some as the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time) of football.

The above verse is one of my favorites. "He made the stars also." It's almost as if it's an afterword. Something said as an add-on, like "Tom Brady plays football." Yet, what is added on represents such an amazing statistic that it's crazy to just add it on. It's something that should leave us in utter amazement.

There are about 10 billion galaxies in the observable universe! The number of stars in a galaxy varies, but assuming an average of 100 billion stars per galaxy means that there are about one billion trillion stars—that's 1,000,000,000,000,000,000—in the observable universe! Really? He made the stars also?? Psalm 147:4 says, "He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them."

So God made the sun, the moon, and also the stars, which number 1 billion trillion. He counts them and gives names to them all. God—the true GOAT.

Submitted by:

Barbara Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 22:1-23:23
Acts 2:1-47
Psalm 122:1-9
Proverbs 16:19-20

We are God's Handiwork

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10 NIV

On a pleasant, autumn afternoon my five-year-old granddaughter and I sat in the outdoor arena at the zoo and watched Sparky the sea lion slip through a pool of water with remarkable speed and agility, aided by strong flippers and a long, sleek body that narrowed to a pointy nose. I marveled at how God designed this creature.

Later that day, in cool of the evening, my three-year-old grandson and I hid behind a patch of raspberries in my backyard and stared at a rabbit as it munched on clover, its big eyes staring back at us. After a few minutes my grandson whispered to me, "I'm going to run after that rabbit," which he did, his short legs racing as fast as they could. The rabbit hunched down for a moment and then easily bounded away into the woods. Again, I marveled at God's handiwork.

The sea lion is fast in the water but slow on land. The rabbit is fast on land but a poor swimmer. My grandchildren? Well, I'm still wondering how they'll turn out, but I'm confident they'll prove to be gifted at something.

How can I be so sure? My confidence comes from the Bible, which says that God formed every creature on this planet. We are God's carefully handcrafted work of art, not an assembly line product, mass-produced without thought. We are custom designed, one-of-a-kind, original masterpieces, made by God for a purpose: good works!

Thank you, Lord, that I am Your handiwork, created by You for the purpose of doing good works. Show me what to do with the time and talents you've given me, how I can use them for the benefit of others.

Submitted by:

Ken Johnson
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 23:24-24:25
Acts 3:1-26
Psalm 123:1-4
Proverbs 16:21-23

Friday, June 7

Blessings of Salvation

... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

Ephesians 1:4-5

This verse is often debated in regard to the Calvinism versus Arminianism debate, that is, around the question of how much of our salvation is actually our choice versus God's sovereignty. Though that discussion is important, I would like to focus on several other important blessings that are packed in this verse.

The Father deeply cares about you and me. David in Psalm 139:16 describes God seeing our unformed substance before we are born. I don't really know what that means, but He appears to know us in some way before we existed as we are. He then took action before the Earth was created to not lose us and to set in motion the many facets and details required for His Son to come and die for us on the cross so that we can be adopted through Him. That is incredible love and caring in action toward you and me that I cannot comprehend.

The Father embraces you and me. He adopts us as His own children. We are the one lost sheep, the coin, and the pearl of great price which He gives all to have. He envelops us in His lovingkindness.

The Father transforms you and me. As I was, He accepted me, and as I am, He transformed me through His Son to be His child. Why? *"yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (Colossians 1:22).* We have a relationship with Him which cannot be broken, which He seals for all eternity, so that He can present to Himself: **you**. "Holy and blameless." What an indescribable blessing.

Submitted by:

Greg Standinger
Glen Arbor Community Church
West Chicago, Illinois

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 2:1-3:2
Acts 5:1-42
Psalm 125:1-5
Proverbs 16:25

What Is Your Net Worth?

To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 1:7

Some of us seasoned citizens are thinking about retirement, whether we want to or not. Some of the rest of you have given retirement some thought; some of you may not care. You should. (Retirement from our job does not mean retirement from serving Jesus!) Recently, I have had financial experts calling me and asking if I am prepared to retire. They politely probe with questions like, "Do you and your wife have enough to live on in the future to maintain your current lifestyle?" After a while they get to the mother of all questions, "What is your net worth?" Wow! It is a little intimidating to answer such a personal question. Now my "net worth" is all the money, stocks, and assets I own. But do they accurately summarize my worth? What is *your* net worth?

God has a different perspective on your worth, as He does with everything the world values. If you believe your worth is tied to your investments, you will live in fear and insecurity. Ultimately, we must get all of our worth from our Creator. He alone created you unique and special. He alone values you so much that He took your place on the cross to pay for your sin debt. He alone loves you unconditionally and sacrificially, even when you were selfish and living in rebellion to Him. He loved you in that condition, so He will always love you as His child.

If that doesn't make you feel valuable, nothing will! If that doesn't fill your cup, satisfy your soul, and give you great joy, nothing will! Remember today—you are priceless!

Submitted by:

Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 1:1-53
Acts 4:1-37
Psalm 124:1-8
Proverbs 16:24

Saturday, June 8

Only a Breath

Lord, what are human beings that you care for them, mere mortals that you think of them?

They are like a breath; their days are like a fleeting shadow. Psalm 144: 3-4 NIV

(This is from the March 21st Facebook post of the writer, an American missionary. Used by permission.)

Today is March 21, one year since David died. There are many friends here who would come to me, would be with me on this very difficult day. But I think I will remember this day alone—a sacred remembrance that will allow me to fully grieve, to beat my fists against the chest of God, to read my journals, look at photos, listen to recordings of David's voice . . . and to give release to the unrelenting pain in my heart.

In the midst of this immense, deep sorrow, God gave me the verses above—surprising verses at first glance, to one desperate for comfort.

Why does God—powerful, holy, radiant in splendor beyond our imagination—even care about us? We are only a breath, a fleeting shadow that passes quickly. We are **only a breath**. But then I remember David's final moments on earth, when I frantically tried to keep him alive, when I felt his last breath on my face. **Only a breath**—and yet I would have given all the breaths of my life to save him, and that last, precious breath held all of life to me . . . when he died, I died . . .

Only a breath—if I, frail, imperfect human, can love like that, if I love David enough to have wanted to give my life to give him one more breath, then isn't it possible that the God of the universe, the God who created me, can feel the same way about me? Although I am but a mere breath, yet the God who spoke a billion stars into being loves me. And Jesus did give all the breaths of His life to save me—to save us.

There is something bigger than the universe in these verses . . . and God is trying to reach my broken heart to tell me.

Submitted by:

Mindy Henson
Great Commission Europe
Kiev, Ukraine

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 3:3-4:34
Acts 6:1-15
Psalm 126:1-6
Proverbs 16:26-27

Grieving with Hope

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NIV [Bold added]

What does it mean to grieve like those who have no hope? When we grieve without hope, all we have is what is in front of us. Death. Loss. Pain. Although it can seem impossible to imagine, there are bright days ahead. We will smile again. And love. And be loved.

One of those bright days ahead will surpass all the others: Jesus Himself will come back! He will meet us in the air and take us away to be with Him forever in a place where there is comfort, healing, and joy. The temporal life will pass, but that which is eternal will continue in glory. That is our confident hope!

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

One-Year Bible Reading
1 Kings 5:1-6:38
Acts 7:1-29
Psalm 127:1-5
Proverbs 16:28-30

Tuesday, June 11

Brokenness Undisguised

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 2 Corinthians 4:7 NIV

Kintsugi—have you ever heard of it? It is a Japanese art form that originated in the fifteenth century. The story goes that a Japanese shogun, dissatisfied with a repair job on a broken tea bowl, turned to a craftsman to improve the damaged appearance of his prized possession.

This craftsman developed a special glue or lacquer derived from the Chinese lacquer tree. After gluing the broken bowl back together, he covered the glued cracks with gold powder mixed with the resin and polished them to a sheen. The shogun was delighted with the finished product, and thus a new art form was born.

While most people like to hide the repairs made to damaged objects, hoping that they will look “as good as new,” *Kintsugi* has a different approach. Instead of trying to disguise the repairs, artists highlight them, by outlining the cracks or dents with various precious metals. The result is an object more beautiful and unique than its original form.

In the verse above Paul describes our lives as common jars of clay. There's nothing fancy about us—in fact, in the “school of hard knocks,” we get chipped up, cracked, even broken. We can try to camouflage or hide the damage, but perhaps the better approach is to take our brokenness to the Master Craftsman.

Jesus knows how to mend the pot with careful attention to detail. His grace and power, His forgiveness and understanding, His compassion and faithfulness are like the resin and precious metals that fill in the cracks and turn a broken, unattractive pot into a vessel of beauty and glory to its Craftsman! Beautiful brokenness, undisguised!

Submitted by:
Dawn Bovenmyer
Stonebrook Community Church
Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading
1 Kings 8:1-66
Acts 7:51-8:13
Psalm 129:1-8
Proverbs 17:1

Preparing Rooms

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. Matthew 14:2 NIV

“It seems like I do a lot of preparing rooms,” I was saying to myself. It had been a very quiet day at home. Because of extreme cold, two activities had been cancelled, and staying inside was a pleasant surprise. Guests were due the next evening, so I dusted and vacuumed our daughter Amy's bedroom that she and her husband occupied over the Christmas holidays with their kids across the hall. The mattress needed repositioning as grandchildren later had been using it as base for freeze tag. I carted out the crib our grandson Amos uses for naps to the other bedroom to clear the bigger room. Since I was working in that mode, I went to the basement bedroom and restored a white bedskirt to the single bed down there, recently vacated by a friend who had sojourned with us.

I also decided to surprise a son by washing his sheets and re-making his bed. Friends had passed on to him a king-size mattress attached to its springs. When I make that bed, I feel like I'd been through a wrestling match and am not sure I won!

So my tone was on the edge of complaint when I mentioned “preparing rooms.” But immediately the Lord's words popped into my head! “In my Father's house are many rooms. . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you.” The Lord is preparing a place for me! Preparing a room for me is not beneath Him—it was something He looked forward to doing for His best friends. Suddenly I felt in very good company. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” The reason we prepare for company is for the special time together that follows. It's what friends do for each other. Thank you, Lord, that You have chosen to befriend me.

Submitted by:
Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading
1 Kings 7:1-50
Acts 7:30-50
Psalm 128:1-6
Proverbs 16:31-33

Wednesday, June 12

An Awesome and Hidden Treasure!

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Matthew 13:44 ESV

At 55 years old in a multi-generational church, I see firsthand the aging and disintegration process of the human body. I have known many people with cancer, heart disease, arthritis, and other physical ailments. I have been to many funerals. The blessing in this is that it helps to make clear the reality that this world is no one's home. As one hymn puts it, “We are just passing through!”

The other clear reality is that we cannot find lasting hope and peace in the pleasures and comforts of this world. Eventually the pleasures of this world cease to bring pleasure, and the comforts of this world cease to bring comfort. Will we not all encounter the painful decay of the body? Will we not all encounter death? Has anyone avoided these realities?

Yet there is a true source of satisfaction and peace that is not overcome by the inevitable decay of the body! Listen to the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen. . . . For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwell outside of our physical view, yet are eternally existent and present at all times and in all places. Their unseen, heavenly abode is the perfect, joy-filled home of all who have trusted in Jesus to save them. If we wish to find comfort, peace, and joy that remain in the midst of the afflictions, losses, and death of this life, we must believe in the unseen God and the saving work of His Son!

Submitted by:
David Brandts
New Life Church
Cincinnati, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading
1 Kings 9:1-10:29
Acts 8:14-40
Psalm 130:1-8
Proverbs 17:2-3

Let

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

Are you going through a trial right now? I bet you are. Most of us are met with weekly, if not daily trials. Right now I have a friend of over ten years who has decided not to be my friend anymore. I'm sad. She was a great encourager and a sister in Christ. Her walking out of my life is hard and, I dare say, a trial.

The above verse is quite familiar to me and probably to you. I quote it often when I'm going through a trial, focusing on considering it all joy. Yet when I recently read it, the word "let" stood out to me. We "let" a lot during the day. We "let" out the dog, we "let" bygones be bygones, and we "let" other people have their way even when we want our own. To "let" something happen requires a decision accompanied with action.

I had never considered that rejoicing in my trials was really a definite decision to "let" endurance do its job. I considered endurance something difficult to deal with, something I would rather avoid. Yet the verse confirms that trials test my faith. I can choose to throw a temper tantrum in front of God, or I can accept the trial with joy and "let" endurance through the trial accomplish its purpose—to be "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." What a wonderful work endurance performs when I "let" it.

One day I will see this sister in heaven. I can thank her for helping me be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Submitted by:

Barbara Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 11:1-12:19
Acts 9:1-25
Psalm 131:1-3
Proverbs 17:4-5

Betrayed – 2

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13 KJV

Have you ever felt forsaken by friends or family who let you down, don't come through for you? Or worse—who abandon their faith in our Savior? Yesterday I mentioned a few examples of this kind of disappointment.

I have even more personal and hurtful examples of betrayal that include brothers I've walked with for years. Men I've been with side-by-side and arm-in-arm. We've served our great God together, and yet they have abandoned their faith or our friendship. These are brothers I've prayed to receive Christ with, brothers I've baptized, brothers I've served with in worship bands, brothers I've been in small groups and on mission trips with. Brothers I've rebuked and been rebuked by. Brothers I've prayed with hundreds, if not thousands, of times. Brothers I've belly-laughed with and secretly wept for.

These brothers have left and forsaken me and others who deeply cared about them. It has been unbelievably painful. Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Do you know who that is? His name is Jesus—and He loves you! "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Have you been forsaken or betrayed? Take heart, Christian, because God promises you that He will be with you always, even to the end of the age. He promises that He will never leave you or forsake you. He's the author and perfecter of your faith. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the Day of Christ Jesus. No matter how alone you feel, you are *not* alone. No matter how hard this season may be for you, God is going to see you through it. What a friend we have in Jesus!

Submitted by:

Billy Johnson
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 14:1-15:24
Acts 10:1-23
Psalm 133:1-3
Proverbs 17:7-8

Betrayed

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24 ESV

Have you ever been betrayed by a friend or family member? How about a co-worker or classmate? Maybe you've felt betrayed by someone you didn't even know? I've been forsaken or betrayed many times in my life.

I took a guitar class when I went to college; I needed the credits and figured it would be an easy A. One of my classmates was an amazing, classical guitarist, and we became friends. We decided to do a classical guitar duet for our final project; I bought a guitar and grew the fingernails on my picking hand for a few months. We had the duet memorized, and it sounded great. Two weeks before the final, however, my friend stopped coming to class. He didn't show up for the final, so I had to play what was meant to be a duet all by myself. Because he didn't show up, I didn't get an A in that class. Not a big deal, but I was forsaken by my friend, nonetheless.

A little closer to home, I've had friends abandon their faith. They were friends and musicians that I looked up to as Christian brothers. Men I did Bible studies with and borrowed C.S. Lewis books from while we were on tour together. Men who recommended Christian resources and wrote entire worship albums. Men who then completely abandoned their faith. They didn't abandon me personally, but I sure do feel betrayed when I think about them. It's incredibly painful.

What do we do when we feel betrayed or forsaken? Where do we go with the pain? Who do we go to? The key is our friendship with Jesus. Please come back tomorrow for more on this subject.

Submitted by:

Billy Johnson
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 12:20-13:34
Acts 9:26-43
Psalm 132:1-18
Proverbs 17:6

Love from My Father

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life. Psalm 23:6 NLT

My parents were coming to visit shortly after we moved into our home. I wasn't looking forward to it so much because I assumed the visit would end in disappointment. I had ordered my life around one goal—to hear my father say, "I love you, and I'm so proud of you." No matter what I accomplished through school and motherhood, I never heard those words. I was sure I wouldn't hear them this time either. But I prayed that, if my father loved me, God would make it abundantly clear in this visit.

My parents arrived, and my father immediately pulled out a ladder to install a new ceiling fan in one of our bedrooms. In fact, my father spent most of the next three days going up and down ladders installing light fixtures, ceiling fans, and replacing old plugs. By the end of the visit we had a much brighter and light-friendly home. When I sat down for my quiet time the day after their visit, I felt like God was telling me, "See, your father loves you. You were longing for it in words, but your father gave it to you in actions."

What a great lesson for me! I had put my father in a box of my own expectations, what I thought I needed from him. I had also been living with a wrong focus—primarily pleasing my earthly dad rather than my Heavenly Father. Even with God, I want to see His love toward me happen in one way, yet sometimes He shows it to me in another way, the best way. I pray for one thing, yet God answers my prayer in a way I wasn't wanting. But it is God's perfect way of showing His love to me.

The above verse reminds me that God's love pursues us. Every day God makes His love abundantly clear to us. We need to receive it His way, not our way.

Submitted by:

Barbara Wilson
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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 15:25-17:24
Acts 10:24-48
Psalm 134:1-3
Proverbs 17:9-11

The Best Part of Ministry

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. 2 Timothy 4:19

The best part of doing ministry is being with people—particularly with people whose lives are changed because of our ministry.

Paul writes about many things in this letter—theological statements, practical guidance for Timothy, and personal struggles he was having. But he ends this letter in a most fitting way—focusing on people.

Paul begins by greeting some people who were loyal to him. Prisca and Aquila had been his work partners for many years. The household of Onesiphorus had refreshed Paul while he was in prison (2 Timothy 1:16). Paul benefited from their loyalty—and he ends this letter by urging Timothy to greet them.

In ministry there are always going to be needy people. Those people tend to get a lot of attention. But if we are going to go the distance in ministry, it is imperative that we surround ourselves with people who are devoted to our best interests.

In his book, *12 Rules for Life*, Jordan Peterson offers this advice: “Make friends with people who want the best for you.” When I read this, I thought, “Of course!” But then I thought, “We oftentimes get caught in relationships where people do not want what’s best for us.” Sometimes we stay in relationships out of fear or out of duty.

If this is your habit, take a tip from the Apostle Paul. Make friends with people who will be loyal to you—who will stick by you till the end. If you do, you will be in a stronger position to love and serve even the most unlovable people.

Submitted by:

John Hopley
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 18:1-46
Acts 11:1-30
Psalm 135:1-21
Proverbs 17:12-13

Wednesday, June 19

Bear with One Another

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Colossians 3:12-13

Early on a Saturday morning I chose to drive to a park for a walk with my grandson, soon to be four years old. I had gone to this park before, in fact, just a month ago. I was confident I knew the way. I didn’t need to check google maps, why bother? But now, 10 minutes into the trip I was confused. I drove through a residential area of twisting streets, not recognizing any landmark. Finally, I did a U-turn, pulled over to the side of the road and stopped. I wondered, is this old age? Am I losing it? Why can’t I do this?

“Papa, why are we turning around?”

I slowly inhaled, exhaled, looked down into my lap, gathered my thoughts, and mumbled, “Papa made a mistake.”

“That’s okay, Papa, we all make mistakes.”

When have I heard this before? Not from my parents. Not from my peers. It’s not a part of my self-talk. Actually, I’ve never heard anyone say to me, “It’s okay, we all make mistakes.”

People can be so harsh, critical, sarcastic. I know I am. J. C. Ryle, an Anglican bishop of the 1800s, admonished his congregation: “Our Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull pupils in His school, many raw soldiers in His army, many lame sheep in His flock. Yet He bears with them all, and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to do likewise with his brethren.”

Lord, help me to bear with the people you bring into my life today. I know I will be challenged to think the best of them. Help me to rely upon Your grace to do so.

Submitted by:

Ken Johnson
Evergreen Church
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 20:1-21:29
Acts 12:24-13:15
Psalm 137:1-9
Proverbs 17:16

The Best Part of Ministry – 2

Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. 2 Timothy 4:20

The best part of ministry is being with people—particularly people who have played a key role in our lives. Two such people for Paul were Erastus and Trophimus.

Erastus is referred to in two other verses: “And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while” (Acts 19:22). To the Romans Paul writes, “Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother” (16:23).

Trophimus is also mentioned in two other verses: “And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Ty-chicus and Trophimus of Asia” (Acts 20:4). In the next chapter we learn more about this man: “For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple” (Acts 21:29).

Erastus was a distinguished man—the city treasurer in Corinth—who played a key role in being with Paul at an important time in his ministry. Likewise, Trophimus was a strategic part of his team whose accompanying of Paul eventually led to Paul being imprisoned. Both men were more than friends—they were “human markers” in Paul’s personal timeline and history. No wonder Paul ends his letter noting their whereabouts.

This verse highlights a precious truth—God puts the right people in our lives at the right time in our personal history. That’s why people are more than “just people.” They are God’s gifts to us. May we appreciate these gifts from God.

Submitted by:

John Hopley
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 19:1-21
Acts 12:1-23
Psalm 136:1-26
Proverbs 17:14-15

Thursday, June 20

“How Do I Join This Group?”

Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. 2 Timothy 4:21

As Paul closes this letter to Timothy he concludes with the best part of ministry—he focuses on people. In this second to last verse that he ever wrote, Paul makes Timothy his supreme focus.

Paul loved Timothy as his son. He wanted him to be with him. Paul urged Timothy to come to be with him before the winter cold hit. Paul then notes four others who greeted Timothy, together with “all the brethren.” In essence Paul is telling Timothy, “Join us!”

This is a great picture of the Christian life and Christian ministry. Here is the aged apostle yearning for Timothy, calling him to join him with all the brethren who were with Paul. Just as Jesus as the second person in the Trinity came to earth to bring us into fellowship with the Triune God, so too we are called to bring others into this divine fellowship.

The day my wife put her faith in Jesus Christ, she went to a fellowship gathering of believers. This gathering was different from what she had experienced before. People loved God and loved each other. And they wanted her to experience what they had experienced. My wife asked the person who invited her to church, “How do I join this group?” In response her friend explained the gospel of Jesus Christ, and she became a believer that night.

Like my wife, Timothy was being called—to be with Paul and to be with those who had made Christ their Lord. May God call more and more people to experience and enjoy the rich fellowship we have in Jesus Christ.

Submitted by:

John Hopley
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 22:1-53
Acts 13:16-41
Psalm 138:1-8
Proverbs 17:17-18

Show Hospitality to Strangers.

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2 NIV

We sat outside at a coffee shop, my friend and I, enjoying our drinks on a bright summer morning. My friend mentioned that he felt prompted by God to help people living on the edge and proceeded to tell me stories about several people whom he had helped.

I said, "That's wonderful, but I don't think I've ever helped a needy person I've met on the street without getting burned."

He responded, "Just because you've been burned doesn't mean you shouldn't have helped them."

Later that day, as I was closing up the church building after an evening meeting, a man I'd never seen before walked through the door. He looked worn and ragged. I thought, "Oh, please Lord, why now, why me?"

It didn't take long for him to tell me his story. He had occasionally attended my church, had spent 18 months in Teen Challenge, was sentenced to 6 days in jail for a DWI; his prison time was scheduled to begin the next day. He had spent the previous night curled up in a blanket in the woods, and he was surviving on what food he had stolen from convenience stores.

I marveled at God's sovereign timing. I gave him food and a place to stay for the night. The next morning we drove to the train station so he could get to the county jail downtown. As we parted, I encouraged him to look me up when he got out, which he did, but that's another story.

Lord, it seems that helping others often comes at an inconvenient time. Help me to be okay with this, to be obedient to Your will, and to freely give myself to strangers in need.

Submitted by:

Ken Johnson
Evergreen Church
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 1:1-2:25
Acts 13:42-14:7
Psalm 139:1-24
Proverbs 17:19-21

Sunday, June 23

The Power of Us

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. Matthew 3:13-15 ESV

Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized by him. Imagine being in John's sandals right then. The "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" has come to you and asked you to share in a life-defining moment with Him. Me? No way, who am I to baptize You, Son of God, Son of David, Son of Abraham, Creator of the Universe, Savior, LORD, Promised One, Messiah? John resisted—as would I!

Notice in verse 15 Jesus' response to John's resistance: "Jesus said 'it is fitting for **us** to do this to fulfill all righteousness.'" He said "us," not "me." When we join in the work God is doing today, we are with God fulfilling all righteousness. In meditating on this passage I wrote in my journal, "God **won't** do it ("fulfill all righteousness") without us, and we **can't** do it without Him."

So the next time you obey in some way such as blessing instead of grumbling, rejoicing instead of complaining, serving instead of demanding, sharing instead of remaining silent, praying instead of worrying, giving instead of hoarding, loving instead of focusing on self, hoping instead of despairing, believing instead of rejecting, fellowshiping instead of being aloof, you are together with God fulfilling all righteousness.

How exciting is that?!

Submitted by:

Ed Russ
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 4:18-5:27
Acts 15:1-35
Psalm 141:1-10
Proverbs 17:23

Grace to All

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. 2 Timothy 4:22

These are the last words penned by Paul. Knowing Paul, I think these words were deliberately chosen.

"*The Lord be with your spirit.*" Interesting words. Profound words. Powerful words.

Who we are in the spirit is who we really are. It is not about our methods or our money or our management skills. It is about the Master being with our spirit. When the Lord is with our spirit, can anything stop us?

"Grace be with you." Consider all the words uttered or written by Paul in his life. Are there any words that sum up his life and ministry better than these words?

Paul was leaving this world. He was no longer going to be with Timothy. But no matter. The Lord was with Timothy. In fact, the Lord was with Timothy's spirit. The Lord was closer to Timothy than Paul ever could be. And as wonderful as it was for Paul to share the grace of God with Timothy, God's grace to Timothy through His Spirit was much more wonderful.

I have reflected on this phrase: "Grace to All." This sums up Paul's life. He brought grace to all people. And he brought grace to all areas of a person's life.

May we all follow in the steps of the Apostle Paul. May we finish the course God has given us, just as Paul did. May we live our lives with "Grace to All" being our motto, proclaiming the grace of Jesus Christ to every tribe, tongue, and people, and bringing His grace to every area of a person's life, so that all creation will worship Jesus Christ with our hearts, with our words, and with our deeds. To Jesus Christ be all the glory.

Submitted by:

John Hopler
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 3:1-4:17
Acts 14:8-28
Psalm 140:1-13
Proverbs 17:22

Monday, June 24

Radical Transformation

Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God." Acts 2:38-39 NIV

Sometimes Christianity feels flat. I see it in America. I see it in others. I see it in myself. In the early church it didn't seem that way at all. It was exciting and powerful. People's lives were radically transformed. The same disciples who fled like cowards at Jesus' arrest suddenly became brave and defied the authorities who opposed God. Paul went from persecuting the people of God to being one of their key teachers. God changed these early Christians into completely different people. They spoke in languages they had never learned, healed people, and even raised a guy from the dead. Additionally, they boldly spread the message of Jesus across the known world! These guys were like super heroes!

Of course, it would be wrong to give them the credit. The key to radical transformation was the Spirit working powerfully within them and through them. The same Spirit who empowered them to change, enabled them to perform miracles, and emboldened them to spread Jesus' message, is the same Spirit who was promised to "all who have been called by the Lord our God." The promise of the Spirit was not just for the people in the book of Acts, but for all of us—even you and me!

Perhaps the beginning of great change for you and me and other Christians is as simple as listening to the Spirit who already lives in us—following His promptings and letting Him lead every aspect of our lives.

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 6:1-7:20
Acts 15:36-16:15
Psalm 142:1-7
Proverbs 17:24-25

Live in Fellowship

They worshipped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Acts 2:46-47 NLT

This formula for living (as Luke writes in Acts) is not any different than how we should live our lives today. Go to church on the weekend, share communion together, hang out after church, be in Small Groups, be generous to the community around us and to those within our church body. God will use these times to give us opportunities where we can share our stories and the love of Jesus. He will then save those around us!

I want to encourage you, Church, that there are new people walking through the doors of our church services every weekend. We need to follow this example in Acts. First, the Christians connected with others in church services, and then they shared meals together. For us today, we need to look at our church services as place of learning, yes. But we also need to be looking for new people, for the saved and un-saved; we need to include them and try to get them plugged in.

We live in a completely distracted world, and it's detrimental to how we interact with people. It's easy to think, "I'm sure they'll go to the Connections Booth," or "One of the pastors will talk to that new person." This isn't always the case. We need to focus on seeing the new person, interacting with him, inviting her to Small Group, inviting ones over for dinner, lunch, or coffee. The new person needs to feel included and in fellowship! God will use these opportunities to change lives.

The more we are willing to this, to greet and meet new people before focusing on ourselves, the more we will see people get plugged in. Invite them over for lunch or dinner, maybe a hangout time? Anything to build fellowship in the church. Let's pray for more changed lives!

Submitted by:

Tony D'Amico
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 8:1-9:13
Acts 16:16-40
Psalm 143:1-12
Proverbs 17:26

Thursday, June 27

The Amazing Truth of the Gospel

Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Acts 13:12 ESV

In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey. They arrived in the town of Salamis and the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, invited them to come and speak to him. However, he had an advisor who was also a sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet named Elymas. Elymas opposed them and tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith. However, Paul rebuked him, telling him he was going to be blind for a short while. Paul and Barnabas then told the proconsul the truth of the gospel and he believed. Acts 13:12 states he believed because "he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord."

That is powerful! I am sure Sergius Paulus was amazed that Elymas was now walking around blind. But his main response was being "astonished at the teaching of the Lord." It reminds me that we need to never ever forget the astonishing truth of the gospel! Jesus, the Creator of the Universe, left heaven because He loved us and knew there was only one way to save us—through His death. He actually came to earth as a helpless baby, lived among people and loved them totally, day in and day out. He died a horrific death on the cross, at the same time experiencing a separation from His Father that we really can't comprehend. Jesus went to all these lengths so He could save us! When you take the time to really think about the depth of God's love for us and how truly inconceivable it is that He did all this for us, you will be astonished too!

Remember that astonishing truth, especially when you are faced with people like Elymas. Let's go through our days having hearts to love others around us by being bold and full of awe ourselves!

Submitted by:

Danelle Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 10:32-12:21
Acts 18:1-22
Psalm 145:1-21
Proverbs 18:1

Mocking Miracles

They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? . . . we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine." Acts 2:7-8, 12-13

There will always be those who mock the miracles of God as these Jews mocked these Spirit-filled Christians in Jerusalem. As we all know, drunkards don't speak clear, intelligible language, nor do they typically praise God. It was 9 a.m. and any drunkards most likely were hung over from the night before, or still sleeping. In addition, there were over a dozen different languages from outside Israel being spoken intelligibly by these new Christians who were all Galileans. Therefore, they would not know these languages. It was miraculous!

Some will try to explain away the works of God in your life instead of acknowledging the acts of the Almighty. If you prayed to God, and a friend was healed, a marriage was restored, or someone's life was supernaturally changed, some will mock. They may blow off your credit to God by rationalizing or using science. After all, what is more powerful than the human mind and science? But don't give in. Instead, "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts" (2 Peter 3:3).

Expect to be mocked as these Christians were. Don't fall for the false narrative when a true miracle has occurred. Remember, God can and will use the professionals, the doctors, and the scientists to perform His miracles. He will also do mighty deeds that are beyond science or logic. Expect Him to do miracles in your life today!

Submitted by:

Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 9:14-10:31
Acts 17:1-34
Psalm 144:1-15
Proverbs 17:27-28

Friday, June 28

False Prophets

Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, "Listen to the word of the Lord!" Thus says the Lord God, "Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing." Ezekiel 13:2-3

The prophets from God said the same things over and over: turn to God, don't listen to those false prophets. They gave the same message over and over, warning after warning, but to no avail. Israel didn't listen. Having eyes, they saw not, and having ears, they heard not.

Today it can be the same thing. Look around—you don't need to look far. People live selfishly, looking out for Number One. Even in our churches, selfishness can abound. It's so easy to only want to hear things that tickle our ears. We only want to hear things like: God is love; I am a King's kid; name it and claim it; Jesus died not because I sinned, but because He loves me; I deserve salvation . . . While the Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8), and we are children of God when we enter His family as forgiven sinners (John 1:12), these are misleading in isolation from other truths. The others in the list are false teachings, not from God. They tickle our ears and draw us away from God. Beware!

We don't want to hear God. We don't want the truth, truths such as: God is a God of love, but love includes mercy and justice **both**. As a King's kid, I need to take up my cross and follow Him. "Name it and claim it" theology encourages material lust. Jesus died **because** my sin separated me from God—I could never enter heaven without His death. My sin put Jesus on that cross. I **do not** deserve salvation. It is only by God's grace I am saved; nothing I have done or will do will ever be enough to earn salvation.

Thank You, God, for the clear truths in Your Word. Let us follow You and not the "foolish prophets who are following their own spirit."

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 13:1-14:29
Acts 18:23-19:12
Psalm 146:1-10
Proverbs 18:2-3

The Enemy of Worry

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 NLT

Lisa and I have two kids in college. Life's expensive. It's not a good time to be in any kind of financial uncertainty. At the moment, we have what we need, but what if we somehow didn't? Once a scenario is imagined, it's easy to "move in" emotionally. In other words, worry. What should I do? Plan? Strategize? Write a *Faithwalkers* post? Or I could just do this:

Tell God what you need. This is a wonderful "worry transfer." Instead of internalizing it, we transfer the worry to God. As His child, we tell Him what we need. Just like kids do with their parents. Sometimes we can "pray around" our needs but stop short of simply telling God what we want Him to do. It can make us feel vulnerable, like we're putting our faith on the line.

That's probably why God wants us to ask bluntly for our needs.

Thank Him for what He's done. When we get serious about thanking God, something wonderful happens. We remember how faithful He's always been. That helps us know He'll be faithful to us today and tomorrow. The more time you spend recalling how He's been faithful and thanking him for it, the more your faith rises.

Experience God's peace. Paul says we won't understand this peace, we'll just experience it. Why won't we understand it?

Because our circumstances may be unchanged.

Yet we feel different. We feel better. More peaceful. Even though we haven't experienced a clear answer. So what is the enemy of our worry?

Blunt and thankful prayer. Try it.

Submitted by:
Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading
2 Kings 15:1-16:20
Acts 19:13-41
Psalm 147:1-20
Proverbs 18:4-5

Worry Over This!

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Joshua 1:8 NKJV

We live in a nation of worriers. Worrying is endemic and pandemic. We stress out and worry through endless issues. Worrying is irrational because it involves situations over which we have no control—see Jesus' words in Matthew 7:27: "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

We worry without even realizing it—I know I have to be awakened to it often. The physical effects of unmitigated worry and anxiety are legion: headaches, rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, nausea, fatigue, sweating, digestive disorders, immune suppression, coronary heart disease and heart attacks, respiratory disorders, insomnia, and more. Worry can be debilitating, to say the least.

Here is one thing you **can** "worry" over: The Bible. When you find yourself obsessing and stressing out about something, let that be a signal to turn your focus to the Bible and spend that energy in memorizing and meditating in it. It often isn't easy to switch the channel, but God promises that good things will result. Meditation is the key to character transformation—when our focus is on Scripture, rather than ourselves, a godly metamorphosis takes place. Our verse today promises that when we meditate, obedience and conformity to God's will is a natural by-product. Prosperity and success (God's definition of both, not the world's) are promised.

Christian, there are lots of reasons not to worry. There are even more reasons to memorize and meditate in the Bible. Worry over it!

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

One-Year Bible Reading
2 Kings 17:1-18:12
Acts 20:1-38
Psalm 148:1-14
Proverbs 18:6-7