

Be Firm in Faith

Thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass." – Isaiah 7:7 ESV

And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all. – Isaiah 7:9 ESV

The above verses describe an interesting story. The kingdom of Judah had a number of years with good kings and prosperity. They seemed to be minding their own business when an evil alliance took place. Their wandering brothers, the tribes of Israel, got designs on conquering them. Israel aligned itself with its more powerful neighbor, Syria. Seeing this, the leaders of Judah became fearful; the Scripture says they "shook as trees before the wind." It was a critical moment for them.

But God in His great grace sent a prophet to them with a word of encouragement. God said, in essence, "Guys, their evil plans are not going to happen." At this point, the challenge for the leaders of Judah was whether to believe God's word or to fear their circumstances. Which choice was going to influence them the most—the threatening crisis or the Word of God? Then the Lord gives a powerful teaching of truth: "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all." What does it mean to be "firm in faith"? It means to trust God's Word, rely on it, and act on it. If we are not acting in faith, we will become fearful, anxious, and possibly panic, resulting in poor and unwise decisions.

God raises up crises in our lives to develop our faith. A response of faith in difficulty is very important to God. The Lord challenges each of us to trust implicitly His Word. We can depend on it when the world seems to be falling apart. If we are not walking in faith, we will not be stable in life. We will be, like James says, tossed here and there by every wave. Be a faithwalker today!

Submitted by:

Dave Lennander
Coulee Rock Community Church
La Crosse, Wisconsin

One-Year Bible Reading

Leviticus 24:1-25:46
Mark 10:13-31
Psalm 44:9-26
Proverbs 10:20-21

Our Blueprint

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. – Matthew 6:33 NLT

I have made mistakes as a pastor. At times I have wondered if I should go back to my former profession. I was good at it, it paid well, and I enjoyed it. But years ago I heard God's voice telling me to leave that work and serve Him as a pastor. Matthew 6:33 above spoke to me. My prayer for 30 years has been to love God with my whole heart and to bring Him glory. So I will continue to follow Him as a pastor.

I am going to mention two spiritual disciplines that provide a blueprint for our lives. These disciplines are not hard to understand; they are simple concepts, not grand. They may feel inconsequential, but they have a powerful impact. But let me tell you three things first about them.

A spiritual discipline is something **You** have to do. There is so much that only God can do for us, that only God does. He gives us our identity. Only He gives us security. He shows us our purpose in life. But we do have to do something! Response is required of us. Each one of us. Let me repeat: **You** have to do it.

A second reality is that you have to **Do** it. Action is required. You as an individual must exert yourself to do something. Thinking about doing it, planning to do it, listening to others talk about doing it, reading about doing it will not cut it. You have to **Do** it!

A spiritual discipline is like daily exercise. What do we know about exercise? You do it for more than one day. You will need to live in these disciplines for a long time. **You have to do it. You have to Do it. You have to do these exercises for a long time.**

Submitted by:

Rob Gerber
Exercise Daily
Faithwalkers Midwest 2016

One-Year Bible Reading

Leviticus 27:14-Numbers 1:54
Mark 11:1-26
Psalm 46:1-11
Proverbs 10:23

Celebrating Lent

I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you; I will praise your name, Lord, for it is good. – Psalm 54:6 NIV

I read the following quote recently, and it led me to make the following list of ways to observe Lent. "Faith, in general, is less about the sacrifice of stuff and more about the surrender of our souls. Lent, in kind, is less about well-mannered denials and more about thinning our lives in order to thicken our communion with God" (from *Awed by Christ's Resurrection* by Alicia Britt Chole).

Here are some suggestions for "thickening your communion with God" in private: Give God the best part of your day—commit to read the Bible before checking emails or Facebook for one week. Or, give up social media entirely, and use the extra time to focus on God. Choose to memorize a Bible verse, or more than one! You could also decide to study the life of Jesus through the gospels. Perhaps while studying Jesus, you could think of one of the fruits of the Spirit you would like to grow in and concentrate on that area. Have you ever fasted for one meal and used that money to buy items for a food pantry?

You could fast from isolation by getting out of your comfort zone and talking to someone new; or take time to ask someone how she is doing and really listen. Try writing an encouraging note to someone going through a difficult time. Invite someone over for dinner and hear his faith story. Pray for a different friend or family member every day.

Use art to focus on God! Google "famous works of sacred art." Find a painting about the life of Jesus and spend time studying it. Or meditate on the words of a favorite worship song. May we know Jesus more deeply and become more like Him during these forty days of Lent!

Submitted by:

Kelly Lewis
Grace Point Community Church
Lewis Center, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

Leviticus 25:47-27:13
Mark 10:32-52
Psalm 45:1-17
Proverbs 10:22

How to Use a Wheelbarrow

But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" – Matthew 4:4 NLT

I made a short video on how to use a wheelbarrow. (You can watch it at: <http://ccreek.org/teachings/wheelbarrow.mp4>.) It does not work well when you use only one hand. I am going to mention just two disciplines which are essential to practice together. Hold onto both.

The first is simple. *Read you Bible*. How long would you be healthy physically if you stopped eating? Think of the Bible as spiritual food. You cannot function spiritually without spiritual food. You will not be healthy spiritually without hearing God's voice. You are being spoken to all the time. What do you listen to? Do you listen to the world or to God? Romans 12:2-3 (NLT) tells us: "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

God's will for you is "good and pleasing and perfect." Do you want that? How will you find out what that is? Without God speaking to you, you will not know His thoughts. Without knowing His thoughts, you will not hear His voice. Listening to Him starts here—in the Bible.

The apostle Paul knew this: "When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:13 NLT). "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives (2 Timothy 3:16 NLT). God's Word can be refreshing like dew (Deuteronomy 32:2), or burning like fire and smashing like a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29). The important thing is to listen to it.

Submitted by:

Rob Gerber
Exercise Daily
Faithwalkers Midwest 2016

One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 2:1-3:51
Mark 11:27-12:17
Psalm 47:1-9
Proverbs 10:24-25

How to Use a Wheelbarrow – 2

*Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. – Psalm 73:23 NIV
But as for me, how good it is to be near God! – Psalm 73:28 NLT*

God’s words to us through His Spirit are alive to us. It is like they are radioactive, and when we take them into our system they change us. So *read your Bibles*; listen to what God is saying, and what He is saying to you as an individual about what is going on in your life.

The other handle of the wheelbarrow is: *practice God’s presence*. You need to be cognizant of, aware of, God’s presence. He is with you at all times. Then you need to be comfortable with that. Do you feel like it is good to be near God, like the psalmist in Psalm 73 above? Do you want to “dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple”? (Psalm 27:4).

If you want to be near God, to experience His presence, what would that look like? Let’s recognize that at this moment we are in God’s presence, each of us. In Psalm 139 the writer realizes that he cannot get out of God’s presence even if he wants to: “Where can I flee from Your presence?” (verse 7). And Jesus promised His disciples the night before He left them: “All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them” (John 14:23). Praying for God to “show up” is like praying for yourself to show up. We live in His presence—all the time.

But does God want to be there with us? Yes! We need to believe this. In Isaiah 44:22 He says, “I have swept away your sins like a cloud. I have scattered your offenses like the morning mist. Oh, return to me, for I have paid the price to set you free” (NLT). Paul tells us in the book of Romans, “Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God” (5:1 NLT). He is thrilled to be with us!

Submitted by:
Rob Gerber
Exercise Daily
Faithwalkers Midwest 2016

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 4:1-5:31
Mark 12:18-37
Psalm 48:1-14
Proverbs 10:26

Gifts and Triggers – 3

My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me.” And my heart responds, “Lord, I am coming.” – Psalm 27:8 NLT

We need to believe not only that we are in God’s presence every moment of every day, but also that He wants to be there in our lives with us. Our response to that truth is a desire to turn and talk to Him.

When my kids were little, I would be up before them. I’d go to the easy chair in the living room and open my Bible and have quiet time between the Lord and me. I wanted to do that, but in another part of my mind, I was waiting for my kids to wake up. I loved being with my kids. When they woke up, they would find me, and climb into my lap, and probably sit on my Bible, and sometimes knock my coffee over. But I loved that time with them—I was just waiting for them to wake up and interrupt my time alone with God! The way I feel about my kids is the way God feels about you! He is just waiting for you to wake up and come running to find Him. He looks forward to having time with you!

How can we cultivate intimacy with God, a constant awareness of Him? “In little ways” is a good start. Learn to be thankful for small things. Notice His sunset and thank Him for it. I live in the country where I can have some cattle. We have animals around us. I am so grateful for those gifts. It means a lot to me to have a barn to go to and animals inside. That’s the kindness of God to me. I thank Him for this.

Decide on triggers during the day that will remind you of God. When I was a lawyer, every ringing of the phone was a trigger. As a new lawyer I knew how little I knew about the many questions people might call and ask me. So every time the phone rang, I prayed! “Oh, God, help me to sound like I know what I’m talking about!” This practice deepened my closeness with God. *Practice His presence*. He loves being with you.

Submitted by:
Rob Gerber
Exercise Daily
Faithwalkers Midwest 2016

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 6:1-7:89
Mark 12:38-13:13
Psalm 49:1-20
Proverbs 10:27-28

The Best Gift

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. – Revelation 21:2 ESV

One of the things I really enjoy is making gifts. I especially like working with my hands and surprising people with an unexpected present. Every time my wife goes on a trip to visit her parents for a week, I make something to surprise her. I put a lot of love, time, and effort into the preparation and making of the gift. I can’t wait to see the look on her face when my surprise is revealed.

Many of you feel the same way when giving a gift at Christmas or birthdays. We love to see how the person will react and how much they will enjoy the gift. I think we get that excitement from God, who feels the same way about giving us a gift.

In today’s verse from Revelation, the gift of the New Jerusalem is revealed like a bride being prepared and given to the bridegroom. God is preparing that gift for us, and it is a gift beyond words in beauty, scope, glory, and magnificence. The city is dramatically revealed in language and words that we don’t currently understand. The walls of the city are 1,380 miles in length, width, and height. They are made from gold so pure it is clear as glass. Each of the 12 gates are made out of a single pearl. Best of all, God Himself will light this city by His glory.

Even though God has given us a small glimpse of what this gift is, when it is fully revealed we will be astounded. He has put so much into making this future home because He loves and cares for us. I think He will also get great joy from seeing the look on our faces as the gift is revealed.

Submitted by:
Ben Lennander
Candlewood Church
Lincoln, Nebraska

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 8:1-9:23
Mark 13:14-37
Psalm 50:1-23
Proverbs 10:29-30

Warm Feet, Warm Heart

He who loves his wife, loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church. – Ephesians 5:28-29 NIV

Last winter my feet developed sores on several toes that were puzzling to me. After several weeks of limping around, I decided it was time to have my feet checked out. The dermatologist immediately diagnosed the problem: painful inflammation of small blood vessels in response to repeated exposure to cold.

The remedy? Keep my feet warm and look forward to the spring thaw! Fortunately, he was right. In a few weeks time I enjoyed the return of healthy feet as the warmer seasons arrived.

My husband surprised me one cooler day this past October and suggested that we go on a shopping excursion—for warm socks and boots. Now shopping is not his favorite pastime, but he patiently helped search the shelves for footwear and socks that would keep his little lady’s feet snug. We drove home armed with wool socks and a pair of shoes and boots, each large enough to handle the extra layers of socks inside. I felt **loved!**

Love has been defined in many ways, but the verse above brings out a very practical definition. In essence, love others as you want to be loved. Pay attention to their needs and think about how you might be able to help meet them, even if it’s hard. Show special care and concern. This will warm hearts and relationships in amazing ways!

We can all be warmed by the love that God has expressed through his Son Jesus. He gladly stepped into a hurting world, laying aside His rights and His life, to meet our needs at the cross. “Greater love has no one than this . . .” (John 15:13).

Submitted by:
Dawn Bovenmeyer
Stonecreek Community Church
Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 10:1-11:23
Mark 14:1-21
Psalm 51:1-19
Proverbs 10:31-32

Get Connected

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. – Acts 2:44-47 NIV

I'm amazed at the effect the Apostle Paul's young protégé Timothy has had on the world. What's even more interesting is that we know almost nothing about him. We do know that Timothy was saved as a direct result of Paul's ministry during his first missionary journey. On Paul's second journey, he decided to take Timothy with him. And the world has never been the same!

Timothy's impact on the first century church (and on us) is incalculable. His name is mentioned 17 times in ten New Testament books. Two of the letters Paul wrote to him are included in the New Testament. In Acts 16 and 2 Timothy, we learn that his mother, Eunice, was a believer, as was his grandmother Lois. We also know that his dad was a non-believing Greek.

Other than that, we know relatively little about Timothy. In fact, pastor Robert F. Horton wrote this concerning Timothy: "We have no words from his lips, no letters from his pen. Paul loved him; that is all. Timothy comes to us as a teenager and then vanishes, never to be forgotten, never to be known, loved not for his own sake, but because Paul loved him" (*The Pastoral Epistles*).

Wow! Think of it. God connected Paul and Timothy in relationship, and God used them to change the world. Not doctrine. Not creeds. Not rules and regulations. Just relationship.

Submitted by:

Bill Young
The Rock Church
Salt Lake City, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 11:24-13:33
Mark 14:22-52
Psalm 52:1-9
Proverbs 11:1-3

Encouraged

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. – 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NLT

In the spirit of encouragement, I wanted to pass along an email that was recently sent to a few of our pastors. It so refreshed us that we wanted to make it available to you.

Dear TRC, I came to Utah for work and found myself staying through the weekend. I did some research on where I could worship God. My last query resulted in The Rock. I attended two services.... I wanted to share my experience and give thanks to the pastors who rightfully deserve it.

When I arrived at church, I was immediately greeted and welcomed.... I went into the sanctuary and before I knew it, Pastor Steele was running over to me, welcoming me. The music was incredible, uplifting and enjoyable. I felt connected with Pastor Bill throughout the service and thought the message from the Lord was clear. I loved it so much I wanted to hear it again. So that's exactly what I did, I came back the next day and got another great experience and dived deeper into the message. However, this time Pastor Steve (Mac) was the very first one to greet me in the church. At the end of the service on my way out, Pastor Bill stopped me and thanked me for coming. There was no better feeling I could have experienced in that very moment.

God brought me to The Rock, there's no doubt about it. Even though I am a young adult with no children, the message about parenting really touched me. I was not brought up in a Christian household, I came from a broken family.... I was reassured that there is no greater father than our Savior, Jesus Christ.

God is on the move!

Submitted by:

Steele Croswhite
The Rock Church
Salt Lake City, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 15:17-16:40
Mark 15:1-47
Psalm 54:1-7
Proverbs 11:5-6

Anger Issues

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared. – Proverbs 22: 24-25

If you read these verses and get angry, alarm bells should be going off. Anger is a powerfully wicked thing. Families have been torn apart, friendships squashed, lives ended, all because of anger.

If you are quick-tempered, pray. Pray, pray, pray, and then pray some more. Anger is not a death sentence. Look at James and John asking Jesus to strike someone with lightning. God still used James and John despite their anger issues—but only because they were willing to let God change them. So pray and focus on God. Anger can become a thing of the past, or at least more infrequent.

What does it mean to "not associate" with angry people? Flee them? No! They need you still. Rather, don't be influenced by them. If you are the friend (or relation to) an angry person, you have a mission too. Don't just drop all your angry friends. But be a prayerful friend. Anger is contagious. It doesn't like to be bottled up. It likes to spew forth and be vomited on everyone in sight. Pray for your friends that are quick-tempered and encourage them. Be the influencer, not the one influenced.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oak Ridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 14:1-15:16
Mark 14:53-72
Psalm 53:1-6
Proverbs 11:4

Heaven Rules!

The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes Heaven rules. Daniel 4:25-26 NIV

Whew! What an election year 2016 was! With strong stances and opinions flying, people registered in at every point of the emotional spectrum— from alarmed and angry to celebratory and relieved. People were and continue to be unsettled and divided.

In all of this, I have drawn fresh encouragement from some political events that happened long ago in the empire of Babylon. Babylon was an "evil empire," governed by a proud, powerful ego-maniac, Nebuchadnezzar. He was a cruel tyrant, and as recorded in the Bible, destroyed Jerusalem, killing all of King Zedekiah's sons in his presence before having King Zed's eyes gouged out. You didn't want to tangle with King Nebuchadnezzar!

However, God was at work. Several young Hebrew men taken captive to Babylon determined to stand fast in their belief in the Sovereign God. Though they were given Babylonian names and educated for three years in the ways of the empire, they did not lose their faith or courage. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego dared to face off with the king, refusing to bow to his idol. As a result, they were tossed into a raging furnace, only to share company with an angel of God and come out not even smelling of smoke. They were promoted in the kingdom!

Daniel experienced God's power to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in supernatural ways, leading to his appointment as second in command. And the king literally had a wilderness experience that squashed his pride. God revealed Himself powerfully to King Neb, humbled him greatly, and brought amazing repentance. Heaven rules!

Submitted by:

Dawn Bovenmeyer
Stonecreek Community Church
Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 16:41-18:32
Mark 16:1-20
Psalm 55:1-23
Proverbs 11:7

A Sober Worldview

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. – 2 Timothy 3:1

There is a lot of talk today about our “worldview.” Some have a Christian worldview. Others have a secular worldview. In this passage, the apostle Paul instructs Timothy on a “worldview”—a sober view of the way the world really is.

Paul tells Timothy that he is to realize something very important—that in the last days difficult times will come. It will not be easy to live in the world because of the people who are in the world. Paul warns Timothy in order to protect him from what is to come.

Consider this analogy. Suppose you are Jewish, living in Germany in 1900. You ask your son to go to the market to buy some bread. Before he leaves, you tell him to be careful because he might be mocked because he is a Jew. Fast forward to 1940. Now as a Jewish father you also warn your son before he goes to the market. But there is a difference. In 1940 the Jewish boy will not only be mocked; he will likely be grabbed and put into a concentration camp. So the father in 1940 would have warned his son with far more vigor than a father living in 1900.

The point is this: the level of warning we give increases as the level of danger increases. Paul knew his disciple would experience very difficult times because of the world he was entering. Therefore, he takes time in 2 Timothy 3 to warn Timothy about the dangers he was about to face.

Question: What is your view of the world? Do you see it as a treacherous place that requires us to be on the alert?

Submitted by: John Hopler
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio
One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 19:1-20:29
Luke 1:1-2:5
Psalm 56:1-13
Proverbs 11:8

A Treacherous World – 2

For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy. – 2 Timothy 3:2

In his desire to impart to Timothy a sober view of the world, the apostle Paul takes time to describe in detail the kind of people in the world. Consider this list of characteristics of the world’s people:

People will be lovers of self. In other words, people are not here for your sake but to advance their own interests. They will also be lovers of money. (So watch out for people who make choices not because they love others but because they love money.)

People will be boastful Does this sound like a lot of athletes we see on TV? They will be arrogant So many people think that they are the center of the world. They will also be revilers There are people who will call you all kinds of evil names because of your faith in Christ.

Expect ones who are disobedient to parents. A lot of youth are quick to criticize the society; note how well they themselves obey and honor their parents. Linked to this may be the ungrateful. (Watch out for people who complain about what they do *not* have rather than expressing gratitude for what they do have.) Expect many who are unholy. You will find a lot of people who are not “set apart”—they just follow the whims of the society.

I want to make two points about this list of traits. First, this list certainly sobered up Timothy. His eyes were open to the real nature of the world where he was to minister. Second, this list of traits only begins to describe how bad things really are. Over the next several verses Paul continues on to describe the treacherous world in which Timothy was serving.

Are you ready to take an honest look at the world in which we live?

Submitted by: John Hopler
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio
One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 21:1-22:20
Luke 1:26-5:6
Psalm 57:1-11
Proverbs 11:9-11

Gossip Broadcasters – 3

Unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good. – 2 Timothy 3:3

In 2 Timothy 3:1-2, Paul “sits Timothy down” and begins to describe how bad the world really is. This eye-opening list of the traits of people in the world certainly had an effect on Timothy’s view of the world.

In verses 3, this frightening and sobering description continues. People are naturally unloving. The world is not a place where love reigns. We live in a world where people are only out for themselves. Also they are irreconcilable. Have you ever been in a conflict with a person who refused to be reconciled, no matter how humble you were and no matter how much you apologized? The world is filled with people like this.

Malicious gossips abound. I personally have seen many people who just love to broadcast false and mean statements about others. These are without self-control. They do not control their words or their actions—they fly off the handle in a fit of rage whenever things do not go their way. Some are even brutal, people who are savage, untamed, and unrestrained in their fierce efforts to get what they want. Violence may become the norm.

People are haters of good. Sin has so corrupted their minds that even when they see goodness, their reaction is to hate it.

At this point in the letter, Timothy might have thought, “Are things really that bad? Paul, aren’t you being a bit negative? Can’t you be a little more positive?” But Paul was being “positive.” He was warning Timothy about the world so that he would walk the narrow path and live a positive and fruitful life.

Has your life experience confirmed whether Paul’s worldview is accurate? And guess what? Paul wasn’t finished with the list!

Submitted by: John Hopler
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio
One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 22:21-23:30
Luke 1:57-80
Psalm 58:1-11
Proverbs 11:12-13

All Just Smoke – 4

Treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. – 2 Timothy 3:4

Paul the apostle is explaining to Timothy, as a father to a son, what the world he lives in is like. He compiles adjectives about people.

People are treacherous. This word means “traitor-like”—someone who seems like he is on your side but then betrays you and hands you over to the enemy. They are also reckless. Just as the devil tried to coax Jesus to jump off the temple, there will be some who will pursue a reckless action under the assumption that it is a courageous step to take. They are conceited—this refers to someone who is puffed up and gives the impression of being someone great—in the end, it is all just “smoke.”

Most people are lovers of pleasure. People will love pleasing themselves—filling their stomachs and their minds with all kinds of sensual satisfactions. They are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. This list culminates with the real issue—their lack of love for God. They would rather obey their lusts than obey the commands of God.

But Jesus said, “If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:24-25). This is the path that Jesus followed—and we are to walk in His steps. However, most will not take up their cross. Most will be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” This is a sad commentary on the world, but a true picture of reality. In training his disciple for the ministry, Paul wanted him to know the true state of the world. But there was one more point to make . . . which is even more eye-opening.

Submitted by: John Hopler
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio
One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 24:1-25:18
Luke 2:1-35
Psalm 59:1-17
Proverbs 11:14

Religious People! – 5

Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. – 2 Timothy 3:5

Over the course of four verses, the apostle Paul has presented a sober worldview—a realistic picture of the world in which Timothy would be ministering the gospel. He paints a picture of people who are selfish, conceited, and godless. But what is most alarming is how Paul ends this part of his epistle. He says that these individuals hold to a form of godliness, “although they have denied its power.” These individuals that Paul is referring to are not atheists—they are people with a “form of godliness.” These are religious people!

Most likely Paul was warning Timothy of the Jewish legalists who were corrupting the gospel and opposing Paul. These legalists were, on the surface, devoted to God and the Bible. They no doubt quoted the Scriptures in their efforts to advance their cause. But they lacked the power of God working in them or through them. They were “white-washed tombs.” Young Timothy may have been tempted to look to some of these legalists for help or counsel. Or perhaps he was not sure how to act when they were around. So Paul gives some sound advice: Avoid such men as these.

Paul was saying, “Timothy, when you see these conceited, selfish, money-loving legalists, do not partner with them. Have nothing to do with them. Avoid them. Simply move on. Instead, proclaim the gospel of power found in the person of Jesus Christ. Love and serve the saints. Build the church. Train those who humbly receive the gospel. And rejoice, knowing that Jesus Christ will build His church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” This was Paul’s strong exhortation to Timothy, and we are to follow in his steps.

Submitted by:
John Hopler
Great Commission Churches
Columbus, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 26:1-51
Luke 2:36-52
Psalm 60:1-12
Proverbs 11:15

The Consistent Process of Faith

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. – Colossians 2:6 ESV

I came to understand and receive the free gift of salvation when I was a small child. How did I receive Christ Jesus at that point in my life? By faith. Simply. As a child, like a child, with childlike understanding, not knowing all or understanding all, yet seeing just enough to believe.

Many years have passed since I made that decision. So, according to this verse, how should I continue in my day-to-day relationship with Christ? How can I grow closer to Him and find a deeper worship of the person of Jesus? By faith. Simply. As a child, like a child, with childlike understanding, not knowing all or understanding all, yet seeing just enough to believe.

You see, there's no difference between the “faith to believe” and the “faith to live.” We don't start with one kind of faith and then proceed through the Christian life with another. And we certainly don't start with faith and then move over to works, our own righteousness. I am further encouraged by Paul's message in this verse, as he reminds us not only of the consistency of faith but also the process: that our God-given belief sinks its roots into the truth of Christ, building up our lives to reach for the “glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19 New English Translation—NET).

I want my life to abound in thanksgiving to my God for His gift of faith to me. What a marvelous path to walk with Christ! Let's enjoy each day's opportunity to grow deeper and stronger in our faith.

Submitted by:
Greg Miller
The Firehouse Church
Denver, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 28;16-29:40
Luke 3:23-38
Psalm 62:1-12
Proverbs 11:18-19

Object Lesson

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. – 2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV

Our son Paul was making a mug rack for a gift. He got an old pallet from his brother and pulled it apart, sawed off the back, hammered boards in new places, and stained it. Then he gave up on it and started over.

What was the problem? The wood of the pallet was just too old. It was brittle. Corners broke off, and boards cracked with all the nails being pulled out and pounded in different places. What was meant to look cool out of salvaged wood just looked worn out and beat up.

In pondering this problem and Paul's solution—fresh boards and new nails—I realized God had placed a perfect object lesson before my eyes. If we could put photos on this website, I would show you Mug Rack #1 (dark and broken) and Mug Rack #2 (light and sturdy). These perfectly showed me the Old Man (the damned sinner) and the New Man (the saved saint). Let me explain.

When a person receives the wonderful salvation available to us through Jesus Christ, a number of invisible things happen all at once. His sins are forgiven, he is given a heavenly inheritance, all the riches of Christ become his, the Holy Spirit comes into his body, and a new nature, the nature of Christ, is actually implanted. God is not about patching up rotten boards and putting on a dark coat of stain to cover up defects and cracks. God gives us a new nature to work with—you, saint, are a new creation!

Submitted by:
Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 26:52-28:15
Luke 3:1-22
Psalm 61:1-8
Proverbs 11:16-17

Playground Lesson

Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. – 1 Peter 5:7 ESV

Over the years, I have found myself coming back to this tremendous truth almost daily. I am a very anxious person. Sometimes it can overtake my brain in a paralyzing way. The promise in this verse has always helped remind me that I am not alone. It helps me see that God cares about my problems. He isn't surprised that I could be burdened.

God knows all of our needs (big or small) and promises to take care of every one of them. Maybe you are like me, you know this verse to be true, yet you still struggle to believe it? It's moments like these that I believe we need to emulate the meek heart of a child.

Consider with me for a moment a lesson we can learn from the playground. Your child is playing and then falls down and gets hurt. The fall wasn't that bad. But then she looks down and sees the blood running down her leg.

At that moment the sight of blood completely consumes your child. (Much like anxiety, am I right?) What's the first word that comes out of her mouth? “Mommy!! Daddy!!” She responds the only way she knows how. She cries out for the provision and comfort of Mom or Dad.

Christian, when fear and anxiety start to swell up in your brain, Jesus tells us to respond the same way a child does. You are to run to your Good Father. In Matthew, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Combine that with 1 Peter 5:7. We don't just come to Him with our burdens and anxieties, but we are to actually hand them over to Him. Throw them upon Jesus (because He *cares* for you). Consider the child on the playground—cry out to your Good Father in heaven!

Submitted by:
Bryan Edwards
The Rock Church
Taylorsville, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 30:1-31:54
Luke 4:1-30
Psalm 63:1-11
Proverbs 11:20-21

FOMO

Never satisfied are the eyes of man. – Proverbs 27:20 ESV

"He has FOMO," my sister said.

"What is that?" I replied with a puzzled look on my face.

"It is the fear of missing out," she answered. "He doesn't want to miss out on anything."

I could relate, and I'm sure you have felt that way too. We see others having a good time doing something, and we want to follow suit. We are afraid we may miss out on all the fun. Who wants to be left out? What is going on in our heads that sometimes makes us desperate to have something others have, or experience something they are doing?

I know the underlying discontent within my heart creates a vulnerability to these feelings. My eyes are not satisfied with what I have, with who I am, or with my lot in life. This discontent causes me to look for the latest and greatest, the new and interesting—instead of enjoying God and who He has made me in Christ. When there is a deep-seated discontentment in our lives, what happens when we get the new thing we desire?

The new thing or new experience that we saw making others happy eventually runs out, and we must move on to the next object, gadget, or adventure. All the while the voice of God is calling us to satisfaction in Him: "Only in returning to Me and resting in Me will you be saved" (Isaiah 30:15 NLT). Will you resist the sugary sweet voices calling you to their false nourishment for your soul? Truly nourish your soul. Feed your soul the truth of God goodness and His love for you, and He will set you free from the constant fear of missing out.

Submitted by:
Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 32:1-33:39
Luke 4:31-5:11
Psalm 64:1-10
Proverbs 11:22

God's Unfailing Love

Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. – Lamentations 3:22 NIV

"Life is pain, your Majesty. Anyone telling you different is trying to sell you something" (from *The Princess Bride*). Life is full of pain. How we handle it displays where we are spiritually. Do we throw in the towel? Curl up in a ball and give up? Or do you turn to God and trust that He indeed is in control?

Looking back, the time of my deepest pain was in college. I was in a Christian student group. There was a lot of condemnation thrown at me. This was especially hard because the Christians in the group were supposed to be my friends. I was also having trouble with my writing, which usually came easily. And to top it all off, my sister, who was my best friend, died in a car accident. It was the worst time in my life. It felt like anything I held dear was taken from me. The only thing I was confident of was God. I *knew* that Jesus loved me. He was my life preserver. Through that time of pain, God walked with me and held me close. He never let me go, and my faith in Him solidified.

I see now that was a time of growth in God. All that I had been reading, studying, and meditating on in God's Word was solidified then. But it took my daily times with God to prepare me for that onslaught. My quiet times were the digging of the foundation. That time of trial and pain was the pouring of the cement. If I had not developed my relationship with God beforehand, then instead of growing through the pain I probably would have given up. Instead God is so gracious that He walked with me every step of the way, pouring His love over me. He guided me through and brought me blessings unlimited. God is so good, and His love is indeed never failing.

Submitted by:
Shirley Ferguson
Oak Ridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 33:40-35:34
Luke 5:12-28
Psalm 65:1-13
Proverbs 11:23

Worthless, Broken Containers

For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. – Jeremiah 2:13 ESV

God alone is the source of life. Jesus affirmed this when He told the woman at the well, "The water I give [you] will become . . . a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). Therefore, it is obvious that those who flatly reject God are also turning away from the free-flowing source of all goodness, love, and purity.

But the book of Jeremiah warns those of us who have drawn close to God to be aware of how our "religious choices" can also be a rejection of His living water. In fact, God (speaking through the prophet) declares in today's verse that our choices in this arena can be "evil."

How so? One way that we commit this evil act is relying on (in essence, worshipping) a method, a means, a scheme, a pastor or a leader, a group of people, or a system of relationships for our needs or our connection to God. When we do this, we cease to trust and depend upon God Himself (through Christ) to provide for our spiritual needs, and instead devise our own "containers" or cisterns that we mistakenly believe will resource our spirituality.

So what is your cistern? What are you clinging to in your spiritual journey that has become a replacement for the worship of Jesus? Today let's reject these worthless, broken containers and pursue the spring of eternal water found in Christ alone.

Submitted by:
Greg Miller
The Firehouse Church
Denver, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 36:1-Deuteronomy 1:46
Luke 5:29-6:11
Psalm 66:1-20
Proverbs 11:24-26

Make Me Like You

Jesus . . . for the joy set before Him endured the cross. – Hebrews 12:2
There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear. – 1 John 4:18

I have noticed an unhealthy pattern in myself recently. When I finish up a Good News Club, or a family birthday dinner, or an evening with international students, or a Pebble Pit (preschool Sunday School) lesson, I can find myself thinking, "Good, I got through that!" What kind of a sick mindset is this?

"Getting through things" is about surviving, not about living abundantly. It's living at low-ebb; the "spring of water welling up to eternal life" which Jesus talked about with the woman at the well (John 4:14 ESV), the "rivers of living water" (John 7:38 ESV) that Jesus said would flow out of my heart if I believed in Him, seem more of a trickle. What does the "Good, I got through that" mindset reveal about me? A root of fear of failure, a self-focus. If I find myself fearing inadequacy, hoping to perform well for other people, hoping I won't let them down, wanting to endure through the next ministry or meeting, I've got it wrong! That's not what life's all about! *I repent, Lord.*

This life is about You—about Your great love for me and others, about joining You in Your work and Your plans for others' lives (and even in Your sufferings). When You went to a party, You thought, "I sure love these people! It's great to be among them, sharing their lives. I will show God to them in such a way that they love My Father more." Life in You is about love and joy! You walked through life, loving each individual, pouring out grace, hugely enjoying communion with the Father and friendship with those who received You. Please, Lord, live through me. Make me like You.

Submitted by:
Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading
Deuteronomy 2:1-3:29
Luke 6:12-38
Psalm 67:1-7
Proverbs 11:27

The Belief Business

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. – James 2:19

"You have been in the 'Belief Business' for many years," he said. "In your opinion, why do you think people change their beliefs?" Tom was a total stranger, but divine intervention had him sitting next to me at the reception. He had just confided in me, "My wife died five years ago, and that caused me to seriously evaluate my values and what really matters." God had prepared his heart for this moment.

I answered, "I think people change when they see what they believed didn't work for them. They feel dissatisfaction and pain that forces them to evaluate their lives. They have a moment of clarity and honestly admit they were wrong and need to change."

Many leaders tell their followers what to believe because they want to control them. I told Tom, "I encourage people to get with God and read the Bible, and find out for themselves what He is saying. I want them to develop their own convictions after hearing from God." That is the opposite of telling people what to think. I went on to add, "There are many beliefs that are wrong, harmful, and dangerous. I tell seekers to look at the results of someone believing in something or someone. Jesus said we should examine the results of a belief. He called that *fruit*. *Good fruit* comes from believing the truth—Jesus and His words. *Bad fruit* comes from following lies and liars, like Hitler. Many people believed in Hitler, and they gave their lives for that lie." As we parted that night, Tom said sincerely, "I enjoyed our conversation!"

Remember, as you engage your lost friends in the gospel, to keep the focus on the object of our belief, not the belief. It is not our faith alone that saves us, but faith in Jesus Christ!

Submitted by:
Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading
Deuteronomy 4:1-49
Luke 6:39-7:10
Psalm 68:1-18
Proverbs 11:28

Monday, March 27

One Hundred Sixty-Eight

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, "This is the way; walk in it." – Isaiah 30:21 NIV

One hundred sixty-eight. That is the number of hours we have during a week. Many of those hours will be spent on regular parts of our routine like sleeping, going to work, eating, driving, caring for our families, and maintaining our homes. How we spend the rest of them are dependent upon what are two of the most powerful words in the English language: *Yes* and *No*.

What will you say "yes" to this week? There will be many choices, and it can be overwhelming to discern the best use of our time and resources. Author Lysa TerKeurst in her book *The Best Yes* states that every time you say "yes" to something, there is less of you for something else. Make sure your "yes" is worth the less. The key for me is in living the above verse. My tendency is to impulsively jump in whenever a need presents itself. But if I take time to consider and pray, God promises to direct me toward the best path to take.

One hundred sixty-eight. God may be calling you to say "no" to a volunteer opportunity and "yes" to playing a game with your kids. Or to take time for a simple act of obedience like having a conversation with someone sitting alone in a restaurant. Or to say "no" to a television show and "yes" to taking a walk. Or maybe even to get away by yourself and rest. It will probably be different every week. One thing that you can count on is that God will give you the wisdom to spend those 168 hours wisely.

Submitted by:
Kelly Lewis
Grace Point Community Church
Lewis Center, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading
Deuteronomy 7:1-8:20
Luke 7:36-8:3
Psalm 69:1-18
Proverbs 12:1

Tested

His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron; until what he had said came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him. – Psalm 105:18-19 ESV

In Genesis 37, the seventeen-year-old Joseph had a dream in which the sun, moon, and eleven stars all bowed down to him. His eleven brothers correctly interpreted that dream to mean that they would one day bow down to Joseph. This only increased their jealousy of him. Their hatred was rooted in their father's favoritism. It prevented them from speaking nicely to Joseph. The brothers contemplated murdering Joseph but eventually sold him as a slave. This verse in Psalm 105:18 provides an additional insight to Genesis. It tells us that Joseph's feet and neck were hurt by his slave chains!

The story gets worse. Joseph was bought by an Egyptian, Potiphar, and found temporary success working for him. That is, until Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of rape! Joseph then rotted in jail for a few years. We all know the "happily ever after" to his story: eventually, he got released and exalted to the second highest position in Egypt.

I was struck by this verse. Joseph was sold as a slave and sat in prison with his feet and neck chained for some period of time. Yet God had promised Joseph in a dream that people would bow down to him. Until that came to pass, God tested him.

Do you feel tested by life? I don't know about you, but challenges with work, health, money, family, and friends can really feel like a very hard and heavy test. This verse strengthened me because Joseph was a young man who was tested by God. That wasn't just random suffering. God loved Joseph and had a plan to test him and ultimately use him in a huge way!

Submitted by:
Josh Whitney
The Rock Church
Taylorsville, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading
Deuteronomy 5:1-6:25
Luke 7:11-35
Psalm 68:19-35
Proverbs 11:29-31

Tuesday, March 28

Strengthening

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. – 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

I've found that when we make time to simply focus on the One who gave us life, He always comes through with comfort and strength.

The last year has been a season of change for all of us at The Rock Church. I am convinced the Lord has us in a season of strengthening. I appreciate what one of my brothers shared during a retreat we took. He said he felt like he had been taking daily sips of water for nourishment during a very full season of ministry. But he realized that he was simply "maintaining" spiritually rather than drinking on a deeper level.

His words reminded me of something I was encouraged to do as a young believer. I was inspired to have consistent D.A.W.G. (Day Alone With God) days. This was an uninterrupted time for just the Lord and me. I would engage with Jesus on whatever life was throwing me at that time. I honestly feel as though I maintain a pretty good walk with the Lord. I also realize there is so much more I could pursue in my relationship with Him. I tend to leave way too much spiritual water in the glass by not drinking deeply on a consistent basis.

I've decided to reinstate this important practice of getting at least a four-hour D.A.W.G. day, on a quarterly basis. When I drink deeply, then my cup overflows into all other aspects of my life. It also overflows into all the people I'm with. The Lord always strengthens me for the task at hand, for when I am weak He shows Himself strong!

I invite any of you to carve out some time in your schedule for a D.A.W.G. day. Fight for your relationship with Jesus. Drink deeply of the living water only He can provide—and do it on a consistent basis.

Submitted by:
Steve McInroy
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading
Deuteronomy 9:1-10:22
Luke 8:4-21
Psalm 69:19-36
Proverbs 12:2-3

Fire Pits and Marshmallows

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. – Psalm 103:44

"No," Elizabeth cried. "Home!" she said loudly.

"No, you are fine, Lizzie. We are staying." Mandy held on tight as Lizzie struggled to get out of her arms.

Most would consider it a nice setting. Our family was all gathered for a holiday. It was evening. There were over 20 grandchildren. And it was fun. All of us were sitting around a fire, roasting marshmallows, laughing and talking, like families do. Family, fire, and food are good ingredients.

Lizzie was the exception. She didn't like it. She doesn't like the dark. She does not like it when it's loud. (It was kind of loud.) Did I mention that Elizabeth is six years old and has Downs syndrome?

My daughter reassured Lizzie, as she continued to try to get away.

Then Uncle Cody began to play his guitar. He took requests: "Jesus Loves the Little Children", "Joy to the World." It was wonderful. I could have sung with my family all night long. It was getting cold, and everyone was bundled up, and the fire was wonderful.

Then suddenly I recognized the sweet voice of Elizabeth Joy Brown, singing songs of worship to her Lord. This is something Lizzie very much likes to do. She can sing—with all her heart!

I have sweet memories of my daughter holding onto her daughter—and of God touching a heart and opening a little mouth to sing songs of praise. Can you relate to Lizzie? Are there things you don't like in life and want to get away from? Picture God holding you tight. And in time, you just might sing.

Submitted by:

Neva Whitney
Vintage Faith Church
Stillwater, Oklahoma

One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 11:1-12:32
Luke 8:22-39
Psalm 70:1-5
Proverbs 12:4

A Precious Possession

A lazy man does not roast his prey, but the precious possession of a man is diligence. – Proverbs 12:27

Who wants to eat raw meat? The lazy man! His laziness is greater than the patience necessary to roast his dinner. Yuck! Diligence is precious and necessary for tasty meals and in every area of a life lived well for Christ. Impatience, from a lack of faith in God, will always be our undoing.

Recently I have been learning how diligence is essential in leading others to Christ. It takes that "Never give up!" attitude to win others to Christ. Not everyone is ready to commit their lives to the Lord when you first meet them.

A good friend of ours is still not a Christian, even though many of us in our church have shared their testimonies and the gospel with him. It has been tempting to give up on him. God has given us diligence to continue to pray for him and reach out to him instead of writing him off. We did back off some, but we kept in touch every few months as we asked God to open his eyes to his need for a relationship with Jesus Christ. Recently I called him, and we met. He told me about his scary car accident a few months ago. A few weeks ago he had some severe emotional problems. His heart was much more open to the Good News as he knew God was trying to get his attention.

Yesterday my wife and I met with my friend and his parents to visit and find out what God was doing in their hearts. We explained how they could be born again one more time. This time they were more sober and receptive.

Who do you know that needs your diligent love, prayers, and witness?

Submitted by:

Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 13:1-15:23
Luke 8:40-9:6
Psalm 71:1-24
Proverbs 12:5-7

Service, not Duty

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. – Galatians 6: 9-10 NIV

I had a Martha moment today. You know how it is, you are cheerfully doing your "duties" at church—OK, maybe not cheerfully, but you are doing them. You notice several people talking. You think: "Wouldn't it be nice if they helped?" But of course, they don't. "Don't you see I could use your help?" you think as you start doing your duties louder. (Can you hear Martha start banging those pots in the kitchen?) "Don't they know that what I'm doing is important? Why don't they help?" Cheerfulness at this point is no longer present. Anger is ruling the day. Lord, help those Marys if they say anything to you because that anger is just waiting to boil out.

Ever have one of those moments?

Martha, you need to do it differently. First, your "duty" needs to be your love ministry, your act of service. You need to pray and serve because you love God and not out of duty. Second, you need to ask nicely for help. It is OK, just ask lovingly. Mary probably hasn't even noticed you need help. Or if you aren't going to ask, you need to choose to remain joyful. After all you are doing this service for God, and He knows. God sees. Do it for Him.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oak Ridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 16:1-17:20
Luke 9:7-27
Psalm 72:1-20
Proverbs 12:8-9