

Farewell Speech – 3

Behold, I am coming quickly...Behold, I am coming quickly...Yes, I am coming quickly. Revelation 22:7,12,20

Do you think Jesus is making a point here? This is the One who is “the Alpha and the Omega.” Five times in Revelation 22:7-20 Jesus says, “I am.” Paul writes in Philippians 2:10, “So that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” As a young child, almost the only way I heard the name of Jesus was in cursing, not so much from my immediate family but more from uncles and great uncles. How different now! All those people have passed from this life to the next. Writing this, I paused to get on my knees and pray to this One who is “the beginning and the end,” who “is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Listening to a message recently by Tom Short, a Great Commission campus evangelist, I was struck by his statement that Mohammed will bow before Jesus Christ.

Jesus really has no “last words.” Peter tells us, “THE WORD OF THE LORD ABIDES FOREVER” (1 Peter 1:25). He is quoting from Isaiah 40:8, which says, “The word of our God stands forever.” The psalmist of 119:89 wrote, “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled [stands firm] in heaven.”

After His resurrection Jesus spent 40 days speaking to the disciples; later He spoke to Paul, later yet to John, and through him to the seven churches. The Holy Spirit was sent partly for the purpose of helping the apostles to recall Jesus’ words and to enable and ensure the accurate writing of the New Testament. As Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus had, has, and will forever have a lot to communicate. He is “the Word of God.” In Ephesians 2:7 we read, “So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

We can look forward to hearing so much more from Jesus!

Submitted by:
Keith Newman
New Life Community Church
Belton, Missouri

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

Sunday, March 3

Light for the Lost

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. Proverbs 4:18-19 ESV

In our early twenties, a friend and I explored Spring Cave in northwestern Colorado. Within a few minutes I was hopelessly turned around and became totally dependent on Roger’s sense of direction. The cave featured an underground river which local legend said had no known outlet. I thought about this as we stood in an oblong tube, a few feet above the raging water. I noticed the smooth sides that formed the channel through which the water flowed, and I pondered the lack of handholds. It would be a hopeless situation should an explorer find himself in the river and grasping at a last chance of life before he washed into the depths of the earth. It was at this point that my only flashlight fell into the water, never to be retrieved.

For the rest of our time in the cave I worried about what would happen should our remaining light go out, or should Roger get knocked unconscious. Being lost and in the dark would be unimaginably awful.

The majority of people in this world know that feeling because of spiritual darkness. They know that they are eternal beings, and that someday they will face judgment. Like being lost in a cave, it is a horrifyingly unpleasant thought to consider.

Thankfully, they don’t need to be lost and in darkness. Jesus has shown us that the way of life is through belief in Him and His payment of our sins. Sadly, most don’t know this. Let’s be thankful that we can restore their hope by compassionately finding them, giving them light, and showing them the way.

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

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

Deep Underground

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

Psalm 139:7-8 ESV

Last year my family and I had a chance to hike up to Timpanogos Cave National Monument. The hike was fairly steep, hot, and pretty exposed in some areas. Once we made it to the cave entrance, however, we entered a very different world.

The cave was 50 degrees colder than the outside air temperature. We had to put on coats in the middle of summer! Plus, the cave air was humid; it was a stark contrast from the hot, dry, summer air outside. We spent an hour hiking through the cave. At one point, the ranger tour guide made everyone turn off their flashlights. It was so dark that you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face. You couldn’t tell if your eyes were open or closed. The ranger said our eyes would *never* adjust to the complete darkness. My kids and I later discussed being deep in the cave without any lights.

After that, we crawled through an old fault. It struck me, we were thousands of feet beneath the top of Mount Timpanogos. We were in an inky black cave, walking through an old fault line. Honestly? It was a little unnerving to be that deep in the earth.

But this verse in Psalms teaches us that God was there with us in Timpanogos Cave. David wrote that God was always keeping an eye on him. You can’t go high enough into the heavens, or deep enough into the earth to escape God’s presence! That should be a comforting thought. It could also be a convicting thought. Where can I flee from Your omnipresence, God?

Submitted by:

Josh Whitney
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Sunday, March 3

Monday, March 4

Fragile Clay Jars

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. 2 Corinthians 4:7 NLT

When Lisa and I lived in Nashville, the city was just about to get its first pro football team. A debate raged over what to name the team. One name never even considered..? “The Tennessee Fragile Clay Jars.”

That wouldn’t fit a football team. But that name fits us. It’s what we are.

We are ordinary. When Paul wrote this, clay pots were everywhere. It’s like saying we’re all Tupperware bowls or paper plates today. When someone offers me food from a Tupperware bowl, I’m never impressed with the bowl. Put a sloppy joe on a paper plate, and I’m thinking about the joe. What’s worth noticing in us is Christ. His love. His hope. Him.

We are humbled.

“Hey, nice trophy. What’s it for?”

“Oh, that? First place for humility. Third year in a row!”

But seriously, folks. . . . Humility is a tricky thing. In church life, calling yourself humble can be a boast. But when we grasp the Gospel, it becomes something better than a boast. It becomes our reality. The cross, once understood and believed, makes it impossible to brag.

We’re easily broken. The Apostle Peter was tougher than most of us. He was a fisherman and a “take charge” leader. He thought Jesus could rely on his strength when he said he’d go to prison or die for Jesus. But Peter folded like a cheap card table and denied Jesus three times. Under stress, Peter broke.

Imagine a clay pot knocked off a shelf and hitting the floor. **Crash!**

That’s Peter. And us. We are clay pots. Ordinary, humbled, and fragile.

Good news? Yes. Because of what shines in us.

Submitted by:
Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Who Would Have Dreamed?

... so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Luke 1:35 NIV

Births are amazing—miracles really! And if you have ever had an opportunity to attend one, I think you will agree. As one friend of mine exclaimed upon the birth of her firstborn, "It's a baby!!" (Duh!) Yet, when you think about it, it is simply incredulous how a tiny human is formed and born in such a surprising and wondrous way.

I have had the privilege of attending a number of births over the years, from those of my own kids to those of friends and relatives. The highlight of this past year, I must confess, was attending the homebirth of our youngest grandson. With my son, the newborn's dad, at the hospital with their older son Max (sick with pneumonia), and the mid-wife and birth attendant still on the road to the birth, I was given the surprising and glorious opportunity of catching my grandson! He decided he didn't want to wait any longer to emerge. Who would have dreamed that this pregnancy and labor would end in such a surprising and lively fashion with Grandma doing the delivery? I was still pinching myself days after, asking, "Did that really happen?!"

Last December I was reminded afresh of another surprising birth when we sang these words from "Who Would Have Dreamed."

On a starlit hillside, shepherds watched their sheep

Slowly, David's city drifted off to sleep . . .

And who would have dreamed or ever foreseen

That we could hold God in our hands?

The Giver of Life is born in the night

Revealing God's glorious plan to save the world

Only God could come up with such an amazing salvation plan that leaves us asking, "Who would have dreamed?"

Submitted by:

Dawn Bovenmyer
Stonebrook Community Church
Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Always Looking to Him

At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out; they kept the Lord's charge, according to the command of the Lord through Moses. Numbers 9:23

Every day the Israelites had to look to God to see what they were going to do. They might be one place today, but tomorrow? Only God knew. God led, they followed. We too need to follow God.

As the Israelites set up their camp, the tabernacle was always in the center. Then the Levites and priests set up around the tabernacle. On the outer circle of the camp were the rest of the Israelites. But God was in the center. They lived their lives centered around God. Imagine a Jewish mom going out to wash clothes or gather manna: between the hustle of people and the ocean of tents, in the distance she sees purple—it's the tabernacle. The Israeli man, going about his daily work, looks up and sees the tabernacle. God was there in their midst, a part of their everyday lives.

We too need to center our lives around God, not God around our lives. He needs to be in the midst of my day-to-day living. Not just put aside for Sunday or quiet times.

God is a personal God. He wants to be involved in everything you do. He isn't content only to be met with at church, in your life group, or even in your quiet times. He wants to be part of your life when you are washing the dishes, changing the diapers, finishing that project at work. Each day look to Him to see what He wants you to do. Not "This is my plan, bless it, Lord." But "What is Your plan for me today?" Am I willing to set down my plan for God's? Am I always looking to Him?

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Confidence

Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. Through their faith, the people in the days of old earned a good reputation. Hebrews 11:1-2 NLT

I regularly need to bolster my confidence in the Lord; the Bible is always my resource. Lately the truths found in Hebrews 11 have been incredibly helpful to me. In this chapter, often referred to as the "Hall of Faith," the author brings us to a place of remembering the past, in order to bring clarity to the present.

Look at how the chapter begins, verses 1 and 2 above. Meditate on these verses with me. These truths bring me confidence by changing my perspective. I ask myself a parade of questions: Does my lack of confidence reflect my faith? What do I hope for? Is it even plausible that what I hope for will actually happen? Is my faith helping my assurance in what I cannot see? Are the examples of faith from the days of old, and even in the present, enough for me?

Of course, God may give you a whole different set of questions to ask yourself. My point is this — the Lord has answers! Good answers. Not the "this should appease you for a while" answers, but solid, foundational, life-giving, truthful answers. As if that wasn't enough, He goes above and beyond by giving us examples of real people, from the past and the present. People like you and me—ones who are living by faith. People who are unsure of what to expect moment by moment, but with enough confidence in the Lord to move forward.

This is our time and opportunity to confidently live by faith in Jesus. I believe that one day very soon, those of us who know Him will be with Him: living by sight, seeing Him, and realizing all that He has promised us. I'm confident in Christ!

Submitted by:

Steve McInroy
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Jeopardy!

How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorn- ing, and fools hate knowledge. Turn at my reproof; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make known my words to you. Proverbs 1:22-23 NKJV

My favorite TV show is *Jeopardy!* My aim is to get home by 5:00 every afternoon so I can watch it and match wits with the contestants—though I'm no Ken Jennings (74 wins in a row and over \$2.5 million) or Austin Rogers (New York City bartender who won \$411K). There are a lot of people out there who have digested the minutia of many diverse subjects and have come out winners on this game show.

One observation I have made, though, is that a number of otherwise "worldly-wise folks" draw a blank when the category has to do with the Bible. One contestant, when responding to a clue about where Jesus was crucified—and was given G as the first letter—responded, "What is Gibraltar?" Another said, "Who is Peter?" when given the clue of "He received the Ten Commandments." I have noted, particularly, that the college crowd and young professionals have the scantiest knowledge of the Bible, all the while brimming with advanced degrees and professional accomplishments.

I'm not deriding them, but it reminds me of this from Dr. William Lyon Phelps: "I thoroughly believe in a university education. Yet I believe a knowledge of the Bible without a college education is more valuable than a college education without a knowledge of the Bible."

I second Dr. Phelps' sentiments. While all of my seven children and their spouses have college degrees, it is vastly more important that they know and love the Bible. *Christian, get all the education you can, but be sure to major in the Bible!*

Submitted by:

Tom Dunham
Cottonwood Community Church
Grand Forks, North Dakota

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Smartest Person You Know

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has seen his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:34-36 ESV

Who is the smartest person you know? I have encountered so many really intelligent—even brilliant—individuals in my life, whose capacity for knowledge and wisdom is astounding.

One such brainiac was a gifted engineer whose understanding of the intricacies of his field of specialization was unsurpassed. His office was located near mine, and we shared a small conference room. One day, I watched him push his desk chair out of his office and into the meeting area, where he swapped it for another chair (identical in make and model to his current seat). Out of curiosity, I asked him if I could be of assistance. He replied, "My chair is too short, but this other one is just the right height." As gently as possible, I pointed-out that each chair had a lever on the side which, when depressed, would raise and lower the chair to the desired height. My colleague grinned sheepishly and returned to his office with his chair.

This interaction illustrates: the smartest person you know still doesn't know everything. You could sit with the world's top genius and bring wisdom or knowledge that individual is lacking (even if it was just your own phone number!). But today's verse tells us that this is not the case with God: He knows everything! He even knows insignificant, seemingly pointless details (Matthew 10:30), and He holds unsurpassed wisdom for all of the deepest, most complicated challenges of the universe.

What should my response be to God's wisdom and knowledge? "To Him be glory forever!" Let's worship the Lord today.

Submitted by:

Greg Miller
Denver Firehouse Church
Denver, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Monday, March 11

Growing Up

Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:12-14 NIV

A natural part of physical life is that we grow. When we are infants, we are needy and helpless. Others care for us until we grow up enough that we can take care of ourselves. Eventually, we mature to the point that we can even take care of others. We progress from needy to needed.

Spiritually, we are much the same. We are on a journey of spiritual growth, starting as those who need basic instruction and progressing to becoming teachers ourselves. While this seems natural and good, it can also be frustrating. No one likes to be immature. Why aren't we as grown up as we would like?

Here's something that is helpful to remember: Parents aren't disappointed when their three-month-old can't talk, or their four-year-old can't cook, or their ten-year-old can't drive. God is not disappointed with you either. It is important to grow and mature, but you are where you are. God loves you because you are His, not because you have achieved a certain maturity level. God's family is not a maturity-based popularity contest. He loves all of His children. Once you understand that, it frees you up to pursue growing in love and obedience without feeling like a failure at those moments when it becomes clear that you aren't as grown up as you would like.

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Who is the Greatest?

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:1-4 ESV

The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Was this a question of doctrine: is it Moses or Elijah? Could it be John the Baptist or David?

Or, "which of us twelve is the greatest?" Jesus' answer is not to the question they asked. (How often He did that!) They asked who is greatest in the kingdom, while Jesus answered who can enter the kingdom. Jesus always knows the answer to the right question even when the wrong one is asked! To enter the kingdom is indeed to find greatness!

Jesus answers that whoever humbles himself or herself like a child will enter the kingdom. What might that mean? Fortunately, we continue to read Jesus' words that describe that kind of humility: this kind of person wants to bring out the best in others and not lead into temptation; this person will pursue that one lost sheep, recognizing the value of even that one out of a hundred; and this kind of person understands how much she or he has been forgiven and readily forgives others.

Understanding the message of the New Testament, we know that Jesus would never say, "Do these things, and then you get in." Rather He describes the life of one who is *in* the kingdom!

Today, how can you grow in the humility of a child? For you are a child of God!

Submitted by:

Ed Russ
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Tuesday, March 12

All the Chaos

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not get involved with things too great or too difficult for me. Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself like a little weaned child with its mother; I am like a little child. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, both now and forever. Psalm 131:1-3 HCSB

My three-year-old grandson Ferris is adorable (of course). Whenever he sees us, he runs up and tightly hugs us and stays there for a while. When things get a bit crazy at family gatherings (with 15 grandchildren it can tend to be that way), he seeks out his father. Matthew picks him up and holds him in his arms where he rests his head on his shoulder, and you can just see all of the anxiety melting away. He is now at peace because he knows his father is going to hold him tightly and not let go. He knows his father is going to keep him safe and secure from all the chaos going on around him.

God brought these verses and Ferris to mind recently. I was feeling depressed and discouraged about situations going on in our country, our world, and the lives of friends and family. I needed to take a lesson from my grandson and Psalm 131.

So many problems and situations in our world and people's lives can be overwhelming. Many times I don't know the answer—but my God does! He is totally in control, and that is where my hope and my focus need to be. I don't need to—and God doesn't want me to—get involved in matters too difficult for me. He certainly wants me to pray for and to lovingly speak truth to ones in my life. He also wants me to love and serve with all my heart, all the while resting in my Father's arms and placing my hope in Him, not in whether things change or my friend's problems are solved.

Are the challenges in your life causing you anxiety? Maybe like me you need to stop and rest in the Father's arms. He is a loving God you can trust wholeheartedly.

Submitted by:

Danelle Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Pillars

If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. 1 Timothy 3:15 ESV

Recently studying through 1 Timothy, I was struck by the Apostle Paul's illustration of a pillar. Why a pillar? There's no big theological concept behind the word; it doesn't carry any special meaning. A pillar is, quite simply, a pillar. It has one job — to hold up whatever is on top of it. That is exactly what pillars are known for.

In the city of Ephesus where Timothy was, there was one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World—The Temple of Artemis. This roof of this temple was supported by over 100 pillars. People would travel near and far to visit the temple so they could worship this pagan goddess. Everyone knew about the temple.

What stood out to me is this. Paul uses the image of a pillar to remind Timothy of who he is and what he is to be known for. It's as if Paul is saying, "*Timothy, you know how those big, beautiful pillars are holding up that pagan temple down the street from you? You are an even more beautiful pillar, because you are holding up the truth of the Gospel.*"

It is the same for us today. We are like pillars who are essential to holding up Jesus Christ. As the church of the living God, we have the great privilege of standing tall, elevating Jesus for all to see. Whether we are at church, at work, or in our own neighborhoods, our lives should be like solid pillars, holding up what we believe.

I encourage you to spend some time today reflecting on these questions: Is my life a living testimony to the grace of God? Do the people around me know who I belong to? Am I a light in this world leading people to the mercy of Jesus? Am I a pillar who holds up the truth of the Gospel? Beloved, what will you be known for?

Submitted by:
Bryan D. Edwards
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 19:1-20:29
Luke 1:1-25
Psalm 56:1-13
Proverbs 11:8

Friday, March 15

Christus Victor

For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God. John 16:27 HCSB

The end of John 16 is often quoted. Jesus has overcome the world. You will have peace but also some suffering. Be courageous. These are legendary words: we are overcomers because Christ has overcome! Quickly, we turn good theology into bad: *we can overcome anything because Christ is with us*. Did Jesus say you could overcome and conquer anything? We have turned "Christ triumphant" into a battle cry of not just spiritual victory, but of temporal victory. The only problem with such a cry is sacrificial love is sacrificed on the altar of self-promotion. In other words, "Jesus died and has the victory, and I believe in Jesus, therefore I should get what I want. . . ."

In this cosmic theology gone wrong we forget our greatest victory—the Father now loves us because we have believed and loved the Son. Our great victory is the Father's love in Christ, not a house in the suburbs with a few children and a posh retirement. Allow me to be blunt: Jesus did not die so we could have victorious shopping experiences and good vacations. Jesus died so we could experience the Father's love.

The Father's love is wrapped up into the love of His Son, and as a result our love of the Son secures the Father's love. We cannot obtain loving communion with the Father without loving the Son.

The reason why Christ was sent was to show the extent of the Father's love—first, for His Son, then for humanity. Christ was loved by the Father and obedient to the Father. As a result, humanity is able to experience the love of the Father through the Son. We have the Father's love because we believe in Jesus. This theological truth grounds us. Christ's great triumph is the unfolding, manifold love of the Father toward us.

Submitted by:
Andrew D. Roberts
Awaken Church
Jacksonville, Florida

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 22:21-23:30
Luke 1:57-80
Psalm 58:1-11
Proverbs 11:12-13

What God Requires

He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8 NIV

God has called us to act justly—not to ask for justice. *Justice* is a big word now. People say they want justice. But do we really want justice? Think about it . . . Justice is getting what we deserve. I know I don't want what I deserve. I want, I need, mercy. That is why God says to act justly. Treat others the way you want to be treated, the Golden Rule.

Yes, I should act justly, but love mercy. This I can wholeheartedly agree with. I need an abundance of God's mercy, which is why I should walk humbly. I know I can't do things on my own. I *always* need God's help. As I remember and live out this knowledge of always needing God, I will walk humbly.

God is amazing. He tells us what He desires: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." This is what He requires, and it is good.

Lord, may I act justly today. Help me to love and serve others just as Jesus did. Help me to love mercy, love it enough to bestow it, as well as receive it. Help me to continually look to You for Your mercy and help. Help me to not forget that I *always*, in every situation, need You. As You remember my need, help me to be humble. Let me live my life with You today.

Submitted by:
Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 21:1-22:20
Luke 1:26-56
Psalm 57:1-11
Proverbs 11:9-11

Saturday, March 16

True Contentment

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 1 Timothy 6:6

With our church partly concentrating on the college campus, we meet many students who come to college to achieve the "American Dream"—get a good education with a college degree, obtain that perfect job, and find that contentment they've been longing for since childhood. Obviously, coming to college, getting a college degree, and a job afterwards isn't a bad thing at all. Paul encourages us in Titus 3:14 to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs so that our lives may be fruitful.

However, one of the best things we can do for these starry-eyed college students is to let them know their joy and contentment will not come in that coveted degree and that amazing job. The Bible says that true contentment comes from godliness—that true contentment comes from living a life completely surrendered to the Lord day in and day out.

Sometimes we lose sight of that contentment on those days when trials come, fatigue overwhelms us, and anger seems to be the predominant emotion of the day. However, all of this, given over to the Lord to be renewed in the Holy Spirit, really does breed contentment. How much less stress do we experience when God has control of our finances rather than us? Or how much less stress do we experience when we look to the Lord to fill our loneliness, give us joy, and rest in the fact that He always has our best at heart, no matter the circumstances? These show we are on the path of godliness and when we are content with God being in control, we have great gain! My prayer is that you are experiencing that great gain today.

Submitted by:
Barbara Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading
Numbers 24:1-25:18
Luke 2:1-35
Psalm 59:1-17
Proverbs 11:14

Do You Want To Quit?

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18

With sadness in her voice she opened up about her 23-year-old son and his girlfriend problems. He had been in a rotten relationship with a young lady for years. There was no doubt, after listening to his mother, that they were toxic for each other. Despite the pain, her son could not let her go—even though they hurt each other often. Everyone saw the relationship was doomed to failure. He would call his mother and pour out his broken heart to her and ask for her advice. Sadly, nothing ever changed. His girlfriend was like having a bad cold that would never go away. She even followed him out to California from Atlanta. My friend was at the end of her rope. She wanted to give up on her son.

I encouraged her with the truth above from Ephesians and this truth from Hebrews: “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end” (6:11). I admonished her not to quit with this promise, “And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Who do you know who hasn't changed and shows no signs of repentance, much less understands that he or she has a problem? Who are you tempted to quit praying for? What you are feeling is normal, but don't quit trusting God to change them, ever! It seems like a paradox. They may never change, but we must never stop believing they can. Instead, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary” (Galatians 6:9).

Submitted by:

Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Live with the Mysteries

Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light?

Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Isaiah 50:10

There are little mysteries in life that puzzle me. One was how to turn off the back window windshield wiper on our car. I was driving along, had just dropped someone off on a sunny day, and the windshield wiper came on! It is embarrassing to have your windshield wiper going on a sunny day without a hint of rain! (I had to pull into a parking lot and fiddle with the wiper control arm until I found the little button on the end I had accidentally activated.)

And then there was the English hunting horn that would sound forth from my cell phone. My husband John always laughed. I would then express my bewilderment at why my phone did that. It seemed to have an affinity to Robin Hood. Eventually I noticed it coincided with new email, looked under Settings, and solved the mystery! (I kept it—I like it.)

These are little mysteries I can live with. The big mysteries remain. Read the book of Job. Read the book of Ecclesiastes. Read the end of the book of Judges (Talk about X-rated movies. I hope this is *never* dramatized.) Why did God create a world that could be so marred by sin? In individual lives, why do some lose their Christian spouses early to cancer? Why would a Christian daughter be killed on a fun day of skiing? Or a young teenager on a huge slide at a water park near here in Kansas? We all know about the Fall, and the resulting equation that sin brings pain, loss, and death. It's the individual applications that we struggle with. How do we survive and continue to walk in faith?

Because faith by its nature deals with the unseen and the unknown. We must live with the mysteries. We must trust God in the dark.

Submitted by:

Doty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

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

It's Possible

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NLT

Awhile back I contracted Bells Palsy for a second time. Bells Palsy is a virus that paralyzes half your face. It usually goes away after a month. Sometimes longer. Sometimes it's permanent. It took me seven months.

In the first few weeks my speech was affected. My blurred enunciation distressed me. I had to withdraw from preaching assignments, and from officiating the wedding of two good friends.

Why did God allow this? I'll tell you a reason. A possible reason, that is. Because other people needed something. What did they need? Comfort.

But here comes the hard part. . . . God gives us the ability to comfort others by first receiving His comfort. But before we can receive His comfort, we need something. What do we need?

Discomfort. We need to be uncomfortable. We need trouble. Pain. Distress. Having Bells Palsy gave me a new perspective. People I met averted their eyes, noticing something was wrong with me. Some assumed I was a stroke victim. Embarrassed, I tried to hide it when interacting with people by standing at an angle. I looked terrible in photos.

Discomfort. There was a chance the Bells Palsy would never heal. I asked God a few times why this was happening. I still don't have a clear answer, but I have a guess. Maybe He wanted me to receive comfort from Him, so I could show His love to others. *With God our pain is not wasted.* Is that the reason God allowed my Bells Palsy to happen?

It's possible.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Burdens to Bear

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. Psalm 34:18 NLT

Last year I was absolutely crushed by the news of a 30-year-old man who committed suicide in California. I know it is the *extremely* tragic and unfortunate truth that this sort of thing happens daily, but reading this particular story hit close to home. This man was very close to my age, he was a husband, a father of three boys, and also a pastor at a church. The more I read about his story, the more my heart broke for him, his family, and his church. Here are some thoughts I'd like to share.

The first thing I'd like to acknowledge is that this life is **not** easy. I don't think we should sugar coat it. I'm not saying that it's all bad, but it sure ain't all simple. The daily pressures of just being a contributing member of society alone can be awfully heavy. Then we as Christians have to pick up our cross daily and choose to follow Jesus (against the flow of culture around us). Again I'm not saying that's bad—it's good!—but we are remiss if we ignore the hardships. Life is not just a nice stroll in the park.

All around us people may be walking in despair, depression, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, and the pain of betrayal. Life is messy and hard. Too often we want to make it seem like everything is just fine and dandy. Why do we do this?

I believe we need to release ourselves from that façade or expectation. Almost all of the people in the Bible were broken and inadequate. God used those who were tattered and tearing at the seams. Our Lord used the ones who didn't have it all together and weren't afraid to admit it. I think this was so that God's glory would shine through those broken vessels (1 Corinthians 4:7). I think we need to be okay with not being okay. God is fine with it. He just says, “Come to Me.”

Submitted by:

Caleb Yetton
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 30:1-31:54
Luke 4:1-30
Psalm 63:1-11
Proverbs 11:20-21

Burdens to Bear – 2

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. Psalm 34:18 NLT

Yesterday I said, "I think we need to be okay with not being okay." I also believe we need to be people who are okay with those around us *not* being okay. We all know people who are going through massively hard things. As we talk with them, it can seem easier for us to say super-Christian words such as, "Remember, God is good all the time."

Rather than sit in the middle of those hurts with them, I tend to want to slap a Romans 8:28 Band-Aid on their forehead. I can communicate, "*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" So buck up." Oh, I know that that Bible verse is true, but what practical good does that do for someone who may be in the deepest pain imaginable? Romans 12:15 tells us not to overthink it. Instead, *feel* their pain: "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*" Jesus was really good at this.

One of the most beautiful things we need to remember is that God intends us to be the healing hands of Jesus. This isn't just for the lost, but also for the body of Christ. This is how He most often meets us and provides for us—through each other. I'm reminded of Galatians 6:2: "*Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.*"

If you are struggling, my prayer is that you would be able to reach out to someone. I pray that you will be able to talk to a relative, friend, small group leader, deacon, or pastor. If you don't feel like there is someone like that you can call, seek a Christian counselor.

My prayer is that we would all understand this truth: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed" (Psalm 34:18 NLT).

Submitted by:

Caleb Yetton
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Saturday, March 23

Why Pray at Night

When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers— the moon and the stars you set in place—what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Psalm 8:3-4 NLT

A few of my neighbors think I'm odd. I've accepted that.

Why?

Most evenings I go for a walk, taking the same route through the streets filled with rambler homes built in the early 60s. That makes me look crazy? Well, it does when I talk out loud to myself, which I do. I walk around mumbling. Why?

Because I'm praying. At least sometimes. When I pray, I forget basic stuff like "it looks weird when you talk to yourself."

But it's worth it. Because right above me is the sky. And the sky is the perfect backdrop for prayer. Try it. Look up and remind yourself that our Lord created the orange and purple sunset. The stars. The textures of the moon. They're not just "there." He made them and positioned them.

Oh, and the One who created this stunning evening sky thinks about . . . You.

And this amazing Creator cares about . . .

You.

Your problems, cares, and joy.

You.

Your prayers matter. He listens. He acts. Or doesn't act. Whatever shows His love and glory. Whatever He determines is best.

Put these thoughts together while you have a view of the dark sky, and it's pretty cool.

Try it.

Pray at night.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

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

The Triune God and Joy

I assure you: You will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. John 16:20 HCSB

The Christian God has been pictured as an angry, old dad, with Jesus as a caring carpenter turned Savior, and the Holy Spirit as a mystical force.

This is a gross misrepresentation. The Triune God is deeply attuned to the emotions of humanity, His children. Allow me to say this one more time. God cares deeply for the emotions of your heart. He is not interested only in theological exegesis. The Triune God desires for your life to be one of joy. When we read this, we revolt. We recall the pain and hurt in our life, or the lives of loved ones, we recall the injustice and brutality of the world, and we weep. Our experiences tell us that God cannot possibly be interested in the holistic harmony of our emotions—joy.

John does something interesting in John 16—he introduces an analogy of a laboring woman in pain. John does not ignore the *pain of childbirth*, but he concludes with the *joy of childbirth*. Such is the vision of emotions that the Triune God sees for humanity. There will be a time, not now, but soon, where our emotions will be bundled together into one: joy. This passage reveals that the disciples experienced this moment at the resurrection. As a result, their hearts rejoiced, and no one was ever able to rob them of their joy. Has your joy been robbed?

Jesus promises that your sorrow will turn to joy, and that your prayers will be answered so that your joy may be complete. This is not empty theology, but a compelling picture of a suffering servant God who longs for our joy. At the same time He knows that joy will come through a labor of sorrow. In fact, He experienced the same sorrow and suffering. The joy of Jesus remained in His covenant obedience to the Father, and His longing for us is to have the same joy.

Submitted by:

Andrew D. Roberts
Awaken Church
Jacksonville, Florida

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Sunday, March 24

Desires of My Heart

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. I Thessalonians 5: 16-18

Lord, help me to rejoice always. Fill me with Your joy. Not mine, not the world's, but Yours. Let Your joy be my lifestyle.

But how can I rejoice always? Ah, by praying continually. By praying continually, I am keeping my mind on God, and thus I will be full of God and His joy. If I am joyful and continually pray, then I can be thankful in all circumstances. I will be trusting God, I will believe that He is in control and that He wants the best for me.

"Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart," says David in Psalm 37:4. If I am delighting in God, I'll get all I desire? What does it mean *to delight? To be pleased, to take joy in.* So, if I am finding my joy ("rejoicing always") and peace in God, if I am trusting in Him, I will get my desires. The hidden truth is that if I am delighting in God—spending time with Him, meditating on His Word, praying—finding joy in Him, then God's desires will become my desires. I will want what He wants. Then, ta-da, I can have my heart's desires.

In order to delight myself in God, I need to be joyful, pray continually, and be thankful. When I am praying and thankful, I will also be joyful. When I pray and have God's joy, I will be thankful. Prayer is the link. You want the desires of your heart? Rejoice, continually pray, and be thankful.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Joyful Noise

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Psalm 100:1-2 ESV

I have had the privilege of helping lead three worship services at our church the same weekend. I was reminded this morning, while reading my Bible, that singing and entering into God's presence with music is a command from the Lord.

Think about this. How amazing is our God that He tells us to come to Him with music and singing and gladness? What a great God we serve—one who reminds us that we have so much to sing about. He even asks us to come to Him with a *joyful noise*!

There is a time to come to the Lord with quietness and stillness; there is also a time for joyful singing! Sometimes I catch my young kids singing. I've noticed that it's a response to a happy heart.

This week reflect upon some of these attributes of God and allow these truths to lead you into making a *joyful noise*.

God is all-loving (Isaiah 54:10).

God is all-knowing (Isaiah 46:11).

God is good through and through (Psalm 119:68).

God has good plans for your life (Jeremiah 29:11).

You are forgiven forever (1 Peter 3:18).

These are just a few of the wonderful truths about the greatness of God.

I think I hear a song coming right now!

Have a blessed and "song-filled" week.

Submitted by:

Steele Croswhite

The Rock Church

Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 4:1-49

Luke 6:39-7:10

Psalm 68:1-18

Proverbs 11:28

His Thoughts and My Thoughts

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

Psalm 139:2 ESV

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Psalm 139:17 ESV

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

Psalm 139:23 ESV

There is an interesting progression in Psalm 139. It starts out with David realizing that God knows all his thoughts before he thinks them. God has given us the freedom to have thoughts from within our own being. He doesn't coerce them. But He knows and understands all of them.

David then grows to understand how valuable it is to know God's thoughts. God has made His thoughts and thinking available to us in His Word. David was one who meditated a lot on God's Word. He gleaned God's thoughts from God's Word, thus giving us many wonderful psalms. He thinks God's thoughts after Him.

David's heart response is then openness and a desire to have his thoughts tested and corrected by the Lord. Although David knows he has the freedom to let his mind go to where it will, he willingly invites God to expose his wrong thoughts in order for him to make changes.

What are some of God's many thoughts that I should meditate on? God's great love and patience toward me. His grace in me, not my works, is what pleases Him. His deep compassion toward the needs and hurts of people. His sovereign power over the affairs of man. These are just a few. What are some of God's thoughts that you can think about today?

Submitted by:

Dave Lennander

Coulee Rock Community Church

La Crosse, Wisconsin

One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 5:1-6:25

Luke 7:11-35

Psalm 68:19-35

Proverbs 11:29-31

Value

What blessings await you when people hate you and exclude you and mock you and curse you as evil because you follow the Son of Man. When that happens, be happy! Yes, leap for joy! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, their ancestors treated the ancient prophets that same way. Luke 6:22-23 NLT

Andrew Brunson is a pastor. For 23 years he was a missionary in Turkey sharing the Gospel without incident. But then he was accused of terrorism and trying to overthrow the government. As a result, he spent two years in a Turkish prison, stuck with 21 men in a cell designed for 8. Other times he was in solitary. After his release, he shared how he came close to losing all hope. But he didn't. Why?

Pastor Brunson had no contact with the outside world, except for weekly visits with his wife, Norine. They visited through glass, talking into phone receivers. Norine told her imprisoned husband that people all over the world were praying for him. That's when Pastor Brunson realized something. Here's how he says it: *"She would bring encouragement to me and tell me that people are praying for me," he said. 'And as I learned that, I began to see that God was involved in this and that God was going to do something with my suffering.'*" His suffering had value.

Pain that has value differs greatly from pointless suffering. Think about childbirth. Pretend that there are no medicines to relieve the pain. Why would any woman endure it? Because it isn't meaningless. She's having a baby. Her suffering has value.

When you go through difficulties because of your faith in Jesus, don't get discouraged. If you've been teased, lost a friend, or worse, hang in there. The hurt has value. God promises to use it. Jesus encourages us to have such faith in this promise that we celebrate when we suffer because of Him. Reread Luke 6:22-23 above.

Value.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard

Evergreen Churches

Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 7:1-8:20

Luke 7:36-8:3

Psalm 69:1-18

Proverbs 12:1

Covenant Persecution

If I had not done the works among them that no one else has done, they would not have sin. Now they have seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this happened so that the statement written in their scripture might be fulfilled: They hated Me for no reason. John 15:24-25 HCSB

As Christians, we extol many things about the new covenant in Christ, the covenant available through His death on the cross. However, we also need to stop and consider that we are under covenant persecution. In fact, the Triune God experiences such persecution. From the rejection of God's power and invisible attributes in Romans 1, to Christ's utter rejection recorded by the gospel writers, to the Holy Spirit's power being ridiculed as the effect of wine in Acts 2, the Triune God has been under relentless persecution since the garden.

As the Father, Son, and Spirit have been persecuted, so too will the disciples be. The world hates the presence, Person, and people of the gospel. As a result, the world will persecute and hate believers.

Let's arrive at a definition of *the world, cosmos* in Greek. It may refer to all of the cosmos and heavens, or the broken people and systems enslaved to sin, or the ruler of the world who is opposed to God.

Rarely is *world* a positive term. In John 3:16 Jesus loves the world and is sent by the Father to save us. Later in John 3 we learn that, though the Son has been sent, the world still loves darkness. As a result, the world and its deeds of darkness will continually persecute the church.

Jesus never promised us friendship with the world. Rather, He promised us and His church persecution, hardship, and antagonism from the world. Pray that God would open your eyes to the on-going, spiritual battle. The Triune God is no stranger to persecution, and neither should we be. John is perhaps echoing the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are you when they persecute you for you shall be sons and daughters of God.

Submitted by:

Andrew D. Roberts

Awaken Church

Jacksonville, Florida

One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 9:1-10:22

Luke 8:4-21

Psalm 69:19-36

Proverbs 12:2-3

Though I Stumble

If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand. Ps. 37:23-24 NIV

Too many times people quote Psalm 37:24, "Though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand." But they miss verse 23: "If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm." Verse 23 is the beginning of a sentence that continues through verse 24. The sentence starts with a big IF.

If the Lord delights in a man's way, then what will happen? Your steps will be firm. They will be firm because you have prayed, sought God, conferred with other believers. Thus you know that this is the path God is leading you on. You know that God will delight in this way. So your steps are firm. When we have sought God, know His directions, and are started down His path, and then we stumble, God will catch us. We won't fall. God has our hand. David affirms this in Psalm 16:11: "You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever."

Christians, seek God to know His way first, starting with daily quiet times and communion with God. Then He will make His path known, He will catch you when you fall, He will fill you with joy and eternal pleasures at His right hand. He has promised. It is so.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Sunday, March 31

The Heart of the Trinity

I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. John 13:34 HCSB

Many read this verse and focus on the command: Love one another. However, what if we are missing something? What if we are missing "Just as I have loved you"? So in what manner did Jesus love the disciples? Certainly, we can enumerate all of the things He did to show them His glory. Or we can recount all of His teachings and parables. What about the most recent event: washing their feet as both an example of His love and the coming cleansing of sin? Yes, to all of those things, but what if there was another, deeper reason Jesus loved His disciples? *Jesus loved the disciples as He was loved by the Father.*

The kind of love from Jesus to His disciples was the same kind of love the Father has for the Son. Jesus was washed by the Father at His baptism in John 1, revealing two things: the identity of Jesus as beloved of God and the relationship between God and Jesus: Father and Son.

The Father loves the Son and has given Him all things. Jesus turns to the disciples and loves them and asks them to love one another in the same way. This love is the heart of the Trinity. What identifies the Trinity is the love of the Father for the Son, the Son's love for the Father, and the Spirit's communication of such love to us, leading us into a loving relationship with all three.

Love remains the heart of the Trinity. Love is the way to ID the Father. All things that do not have love at their core are ultimately not from the Father. The best way to spot a counterfeit bill is not to study counterfeit currency, but to study the real thing so much that you know how it feels, looks, weighs, folds and behaves under light. Only the Triune God offers love able to pay the debt of sin. All other payments are counterfeit.

Submitted by:

Andrew D. Roberts
Awaken Church
Jacksonville, Florida

One-Year Bible Reading

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

Inspiration

But that does not mean we want to dominate you by telling you how to put your faith into practice. We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy, for it is by your own faith that you stand firm. 2 Corinthians 1:24 NLT

If you lead a ministry, disciple others, or parent kids, this is an interesting verse. When we're leaders, we often tell people what to do.

Attend church. Have a quiet time. Share your faith. . . .

Nothing wrong with these things, but what Paul says is interesting. He's going beyond telling them "how to put their faith into practice." What does he do instead?

He wants them to experience the Gospel.

When we emphasize the joy of knowing Jesus instead of a to-do list, something wonderful happens. What is it?

Inspiration.

It's easy for us to think, "OK, what do I have to do to keep God happy with me?" When we do that, we become legalistic in our faith. Our relationship with God becomes a burden.

Inspiration is better.

How do we get there?

Remember who we are in Christ. Revisit it. Dwell in the Gospel. You are forgiven and adopted into God's family. You have the Holy Spirit and a priceless inheritance. You are saved.

You are loved.

Much loved.

Because of Jesus.

Inspiration.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

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