

With Eager Longing

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. Romans 8:18–19 ESV

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:28–29 ESV

God has a purpose, and Romans 8 says that it is to redeem all of creation, to straighten out all the mess of this world. It starts with conforming those who love God and believe in Jesus into the image of Christ. This is talking about our character, but probably also referencing our future resurrection, when our bodies will be resurrected and become like His. We will actually be His brothers, equals of a sort.

Then God will work through us, Christ's brothers and sisters, to transform all that is wrong in the world and in creation, which will be set free from its bondage to corruption. No more niggling. No more frustration. No more futility. All will be set free. Paul says that this will far outweigh all the suffering that we experience now. Since our suffering here is often so intense, this must be referring to an amazing amount of glorious wonder to come.

Along with our focus on today, let's look to the future, to what God has planned, and find hope and joy in what is to come.

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

Vision to Love God

Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." Matthew 22:7 NLT

As I sit at my desk and think about how to love God, I think about disciplines or practices that have helped me in staying focused on this area over the last thirty-five years.

When I think of my heart, I think about my emotions, that which separates me from the animal world. A simple practice that I have done with my wife and with my God is to say, "Good morning," "Good night," and "I love you." The Bible says that out of the heart the mouth speaks. I pray daily that I would love God more today than I did yesterday. My desire is to grow in this area of my life: to feel joy, grief, contentment, excitement, courage, peace, laughter, the full range of emotions. God wants us as His to embrace our humanity and to experience all of this as we walk day by day with the Creator of the universe who loves us completely.

When I think of your soul, I think of who you are. You are the only you ever created, there will never be a duplicate. God has entrusted us with gifts, talents, and passions. These attributes are unique to you. How is someone to love God with all his soul? Eric Liddell was a missionary who could run like the wind. Before he went to China, he ran in the 1924 Olympics. As he was training, his sister became concerned that running was interfering with his work for God. Eric responded to her with a quote that I will never forget. He said this: "God made me for a purpose, but He also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure."

Here's the answer to loving God with all your soul: discover your talents, gifts, and passions. Commit them to the Lord. Roll up your sleeves in your local church and give back to God all that you have been given. You, too, will "feel His pleasure."

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

The Cross and the Cosmos

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Colossians 1:19-20

Our world, both the world of mankind and the created world itself, is broken. The created world is broken because the world of mankind is in rebellion against God.

God had made the cosmos and called it good. He made it habitable for mankind to worship the Creator by living in it with Him and enjoying Him. Man was made to subdue it, to rule it and to take care of it.

However, after Adam sinned, God cursed the ground to make it difficult and wearisome for mankind to live in it independently from Him. God did this for man to realize the futility of his way and his life apart from God—with the hope that man would turn back to God.

The whole creation now groans with the pains of childbirth as it longs for the day of freedom. That day will come because of a day that took place long ago, the Day of the Cross. It is at the Cross where Christ broke the curse. He became a curse in order to set us and the creation free from the curse.

It is the blood of the Cross that has made the way for mankind to be reconciled to God. One day the whole creation—heaven and earth—will be set free and reveal all of its glory!

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

Punching Eve

The woman saw that the tree had fruit that was good to eat, nice to look at, and desirable for making someone wise. So she took some fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6 GW

When I was little, my mom used to joke about punching Eve when she got to heaven because Eve ruined paradise for all of us. That came back to mind when reading this passage recently.

Eve was literally in paradise. There was no lack of fresh, delicious food, beauty as far as the eye could see in every direction, and the perfect relationship with her husband and God. Then Satan shifted her focus from everything she had to the one thing she didn't.

When the department store Sears first opened up, business was dismal. Until, of course, they sent catalogs of all their shiny new products to every household. Women realized all the things they lacked that would make their lives *so much easier*, and Sears made a killing.

Don't get me wrong. I am not anti-capitalism or anti-marketing, but I am anti-discontentment. The Scriptures tell us that godliness with contentment is a means of great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). The Scriptures also tell us that Paul *learned* how to be content in every circumstance (Philippians 4:12). There is no gift of contentment; it is a skill that can be learned and must be practiced. If Eve, who lived in paradise, can fall into that sin, how much more susceptible are we?

So what's a gal to do? How do we practice? By "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:2). When Satan, the world, or our flesh leads our focus to what we don't have, we must discipline ourselves to look back to Christ. Focus on all He is, and all He has done for us. There's a lesson learned from Eve.

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

Giving Thanks 21 Years Later

In his great mercy [God] has given us new birth into a living hope . . . In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 1 Peter 1:3-6 NIV

In hopes of gaining some new insights about grief, I pored over some of the old sermons I wrote after we suffered the loss of a child during delivery. Interestingly, all the sermons I gave after this heartbreak seemed routine. However, I discovered that the Sunday before we lost the baby I spoke on thanksgiving. How easy it must have been to deliver that sermon! It would have been so different the following week. Gratefulness is easy when your life has been wonderful and your future looks bright. Being thankful after your hopes have been dashed to pieces would have taken a depth of character I doubt I had.

I tracked down a paper copy of the old thanksgiving message. It seemed pretty routine: thank God, take your eyes off yourself, find things to be thankful for . . . But at the very end was a verse that was scratched out due to editing. And how precious it was! It talked about God's mercy, an enduring inheritance, and a coming salvation—and all of this in the midst of grief, suffering, and trials.

Now that I have compiled 21 more years of trials, I understand more about thanksgiving. This life is hard. Really hard. We hurt. We cry out. We weep. But even as all kinds of grief reach into our souls from time to time, a hope rises up. In the midst of the heartache of life, we are loved by a God who gives us a living hope. And for that, we can give thanks.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Saturday, March 7

Spending to Save

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 2:17 NIV

I used to have a playful black lab. He would catch a tennis ball and then refuse to give it back. I would chase him around the yard trying to get it from him. He would toy with me and let me get close at times, but he would always dodge my grasp at the last second. Basically, there was no getting the ball until he wanted me to have the ball.

The expression "chasing after the wind" is much the same. No matter how hard you try, you can never catch the wind. It is easy to spend our lives chasing after the wind. In Ecclesiastes we are told how Solomon tried everything to find some sort of purpose in life. He relentlessly chased after a host of things he thought might bring him life, but nine separate times he admitted that his efforts were just "chasing after the wind." He didn't find life in the money. It wasn't in the fame. Not even in the pursuit of pleasure. Everything left him empty.

No matter your resources or how hard you try, you can never catch the wind. It is easy to spend your whole life looking for life, but in the end, you'll be left empty-handed if your pursuit is for your own gain. A counter-intuitive approach is to live for God and spend your life loving His people. Then you can truly take hold of life!

"Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way . . . they may take hold of the life that is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:18-19 NIV). So said Paul to Timothy. So says God to you.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Staying Afloat

The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. Genesis 7:8 NIV

You've probably heard the old saying, "When it rains, it pours." This past year was a "pouring" year in many ways for my family. We experienced the death of a grandson, several family members struggling with depression, unemployment, relationship disappointments, changes in ministry focus, career changes . . . unsettling and traumatic events.

In it all, as the year wound down, I found myself burdened with these challenges, full of concern for loved ones, and feeling a deep inability to fix anything. The rain seemed to keep falling and, if anything, increased in intensity.

Have you experienced a "rainy season" like this? Life's trials can come upon us like a flood at times: "springs from the great deep" bursting forth, floodgates of heaven opened . . . (Genesis 7:11). The floodwaters just keep rising, and we helplessly watch the damaging effects. As I recently read once again in Genesis of the "flood to end all floods," I was encouraged by the phrase "and the ark floated on the surface of the water." In the torrential rains and tumultuous rising waters, God had prepared for His people. He provided a plan of rescue, a place of shelter to keep them safe in the storm.

Whereas I have no physical ark to keep me afloat, I do have the precious promises of my Savior: He is with me, He cares for me, His grace is sufficient, He will work things out for good, and more. This "ark" enables me to float on the surface of these turbulent waters and not drown. Just as He took care of Noah and his family, He will take care of me and mine!

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Sunday, March 8

Bedbugs

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 ESV

For Christmas this last year, we got bedbugs. Actually, it was an early Christmas present. But let me back up and tell you the story. December came, and I was realizing how little time I had to get ready for Christmas. Then, a week in, my mom went into the hospital **and** we found the bedbugs.

In my mom's hospital room, waiting to hear her diagnosis, I was talking on the phone with my husband, Dave. (As it turned out, my mom had had a mini-stroke and would need surgery on a clogged artery.) Dave told me that we needed to put all our clothes and material items in bags. Then we needed to take everything to the laundromat to wash, dry, and rebag. We would live out of the bags for the next two weeks—during Christmas and the Faithwalkers conference in North Carolina. Plus, all the furniture needed to be moved away from the wall and all the pictures taken down. There was a gargantuan task ahead! And we still needed to prepare for Christmas and Faithwalker Jr. (a Bible program for the children during Faithwalkers). I was overwhelmed. I cried for a day.

But amid all this God was there. God cared. With my mom in the hospital, people brought meals. (God was so gracious to have the bedbugs at the same time because we didn't need to worry about meals!) Friends came to help move and prepare the house for treatment. During the long hours at the laundromat our lovely children (almost all adult) graciously and generously helped. God used the time to draw us as a family closer together.

God once again took my lemons and made strawberry shortcake. What a gracious God we serve.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

“And”

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Isaiah 26:3 NLT

Being unemployed tests your peace of mind. Especially when you have a mortgage to pay. Actually, make that two mortgages (long story). Plus, a car payment. Oh, and \$5000 owed to the hospital for the baby delivery our insurance didn't cover.

Which reminds me, we had just had our first child.

I was unexpectedly unemployed. Previously I had a job in the music industry. A “one of a kind” career that was tough to replace. I needed a good paying job. Fast.

I had a friend who needed a job once, so he became a car salesman. Turned out he had a knack for it, and ten years later he owned a Ford dealership. If he could do all that, I could at least sell enough to make a living. How hard could it be?

Pretty hard, it turns out. I'm not a salesman, but, oy vey, I tried for a while. The job was straight commission. Some weeks my pay was \$0.

I had grown up on the edge financially. My parents were divorced, and money was often tight. As a result, financial security became important to me as an adult. But what happens when you lose that financial security? I'll tell you what happened to me.

I discovered my “and.”

It's easy to base our peace on the Lord “and” something else. For me, I trusted God **and** a steady income. It turns out, when there's an “and,” we aren't trusting God at all. During that time I learned to trust God in very real ways, and God always came through. Even though our finances weren't stable again for about two years.

And peace with no “and” is the real deal.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Wednesday, March 11

God Supplies

And He said, “My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.” Exodus 33:14

Father, I am so tired, so worn. I need Your strength. I clearly can't do it on my own. Lead and guide me—I need *Your* wisdom, *Your* strength. Help me to do Your will throughout my day.

I started my day with the prayer above. Then I checked out the verses in *Jesus Calling*. I was a day behind, so it was verses from the day before. These were the verses given: Exodus 33:14 (above) and then Hebrews 13:20-21: “Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” The third verse given, also seemingly in direct response to my exhausted plea for strength, was “The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace” (Psalm 29: 11).

Then, if that wasn't enough, I looked at that day's verses and read: “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 13, 19).

God meets us where we are. What do you need? Look to God. He is more than willing to supply what you need—in His time, in His way. The answer may not come as you expect, but it will be that which will bring glory to God and a blessing to you.

What an awesome God we serve.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Depend on Yourself?

I lift my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalms 121:1-2 CSB

On Sundays we regularly sing a song based on this verse. It is a song of dependence on God. Do we need to depend on God today?

I often feel pretty self-reliant. I'm an organized person who knows what he's doing, when he's doing it, why he's doing it, and how he's doing it. I've got it together and use the resources around me to further the cause that's in front of me.

I can do this is a very spiritual way or in a very unspiritual way.

But whether spiritual or not, it's still not dependent on God.

I can lift my eyes “to the mountains” and see my helping coming from my own experiences, my own wisdom, my own skills and the people that I can rally around me. I can do it on my own.

God likes to make us dependent on Him. He puts us in places of crisis small and large, everyday and extraordinary, natural and supernatural, all to help us look to Him.

What are you facing today that you could probably “do on your own,” but God wants you to depend on Him for? Work? School? Parenting? Marriage? Family? Finances? Roommates?

God is ready to walk with you through the trials, crises, and pain. He may remove a trial from you, or He may just want to be your strength as it rolls over you.

Through learning to depend on Him, we find true peace, true comfort, and true rescue because our help comes from the one who made heaven and earth. Let's depend on God. It's a whole lot better than depending on ourselves.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Wednesday, March 11

Thursday, March 12

Who Am I Fighting?

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God . . .

Ephesians 6:12-13 CSB

How many cosmic powers have you faced this week?

My struggle yesterday didn't feel like it was against cosmic forces. It felt like it was against brake pads. And mice in my basement. And naughty children. It sure seems like a struggle “against flesh and blood,” especially when I skinned my knuckles getting a bolt out.

Life really feels like a struggle, and I'm not coasting through it. How do we succeed? How do we win?

I have to realize that there is something deeper going on than the brakes, mice, and children.

My attitude needs to be independent of my circumstances. That's what putting on the armor of God is all about. Spiritual armor for a spiritual fight.

So don't get caught in thinking that the petty junk that life throws at you is all that there is. We're in the war of the ages every day as light conquers darkness.

What you do and how you respond matters. We can win. Put on God's armor and fight the good fight because He has already won.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Missing the Mark

There is none righteous, no not one . . . For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:10, 23

When I was a little girl, we had a “chalk-talk” evangelist who would often come to our closing Vacation Bible School ceremony to share a gospel message. I remember in one of his drawings there was a tall apartment building on fire with three frightened people looking out the upper floor windows to the firemen below. The firemen were holding a round life net and were yelling up to the panicked people, “JUMP!” The first one, an athlete, thought he could make it on his own. Aiming to jump through a window of the building across the street, he ran and sprang out as far as he could. He not only missed the building across the street, but also the life net by a couple of yards! Splat! Our jaws dropped, and our eyes bugged out in disbelief that someone didn’t make it! Then he said another one jumped out but missed it only by a few inches. Bummer! So close and yet so far! Then the last one jumped, and the firemen caught him in the life net, saving his life.

The point of the story was that whether you were a good jumper or not, if you missed the life net, you fell short. It didn’t matter whether you were blocks away from hitting it or only inches. You still fell short.

Essentially, that is what the Greek word for “sin” (*harmartia*) means here. It was a common term used by Greek archers while target shooting. If one did not hit the bull’s eye, he missed the mark—*harmatia*.

There’s only one way to hit the mark, and that is to trust and rely on Jesus: “. . . whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

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One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 19:1-20:29
 Luke 1:1-25
 Psalm 56:1-13
 Proverbs 11:8

Sunday, March 15

Get Out of the Way

The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his demands. Psalm 25:10 NLT

Things looked bleak for Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites in Egypt. Pharaoh commanded the same number of bricks be made, but now they would have to gather their own straw. Thus, the Israelite foremen got whipped because the work was lagging. The angry foremen blamed Moses for their trouble, and Moses turned around and blamed God: “What are you doing, God? Things are only getting worse and you’re doing nothing to rescue your people!”

Do you ever feel that way? You’re doing what you can for the Lord, yet things seem to get worse? A hot water heater breaks and needs to be fixed. New tires that aren’t in the budget need to be bought. You thought things were fine with that family member you talked with, but now they’re just talking about you behind your back. What? You’ve done what God has asked you to do. Shouldn’t life be much easier?

Time after time God asked Moses to simply lift his staff and then get out of the way. That’s when God acted in miraculous ways. God told Moses the reason why He hardened Pharaoh’s heart was so He could display His incredible signs among the Israelites, and they could tell their children and grandchildren of God’s great power.

We so often want to solve our own problems, especially if things seem to be getting worse. Maybe God wants us to simply obey what He’s telling us to do and then get out of the way. Perhaps He wants us to have stories of His great power to tell our children and grandchildren. He **always** leads with unfailing love and faithfulness.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

The Power of God

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.

Romans 1:16 NLT

I had a neighbor once who had a gruff, cynical personality. He was a good neighbor, but had an edge to him. If you were to ask me if I knew anyone who seemed unreachable by the Gospel, I would have thought of him. His heart seemed as hard as they come.

One day I was outside. He called me over.

“Hey, I want to tell you something.”

I walked over and we stood, with the hedge dividing our yards between us. He started grinning.

“I just wanted to tell you I got saved.”

Had I been trimming those bushes, I would have dropped my trimmer.

He explained that he and his wife had been attending church, and he received the Gospel. Over the next couple years, I was amazed at the change I saw in him. He became a different person. More friendly, thoughtful, and pleasant. The old gruffness gone.

What other message could do that?

As happy as I was for him, his news convicted me. I should have shared my faith with him, instead of writing him off. Talking to people about Jesus is hard because I get nervous. I forget verses I’ve known for years. I’m too . . . imperfect.

Here’s the point. The key to overcoming our fear of sharing Jesus isn’t to be more brave. There’s a better way.

Focus on the Gospel being the power of God.

And then share.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 21:1-22:20
 Luke 1:26-56
 Psalm 57:1-11
 Proverbs 11:9-11

Monday, March 16

“Untouchable”

He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights.

2 Samuel 22:34 NIV

When you think of the word “untouchable,” what comes to mind? Perhaps individuals may think they are, like some politicians, above the law. Perhaps they are so strong, so rich, or so powerful, that no one or nothing can make them fall. Perhaps further, they think that they are better than others and are filled with such a sense of self-importance that they don’t need anything or anyone.

Of course, if any or all of the above scenarios were the case, that person would be dead wrong. And that’s certainly not what the writer of this verse or God intended in this passage. No one is invincible or untouchable in this life. The old adage by Ben Franklin is true: “In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.” Death is the great equalizer—for great and small alike.

But in 2 Samuel David speaks of the victorious life he experienced while living under God in the Old Testament. He uses the image of a deer in the mountains, free, fearless, at the top of his game. This is how David felt after God led him through his wilderness years, and he was finally free from the deadly pursuit of King Saul, free to come back into life in community with the people of God. (This verse is also where the title of an old, well-loved Christian book comes from: *Hind’s Feet on High Places*.) We, as believers, now live in Christ Jesus. Emphatically, Paul pens this same sentiment of victorious freedom in his opening words to the church at Ephesus “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*” (Ephesians 1:3).

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

“Untouchable” – 2

He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights.

2 Samuel 22:34 NIV

Most commercial jets fly in a zone that’s between 28,000 and 35,000 feet above the Earth. There is less wind resistance and turbulence at those heights. In essence, the higher the altitude the plane flies, the smoother the ride. As Christians, God intends we should live our lives at a higher altitude—above life’s circumstances—joyous and victorious and with great purpose.

Because God is with us, because God goes before us, because God hems us in from behind, we are designed to stand on the heights, to live above life’s circumstances, to live for a higher cause and greater purpose than this world. We who are in Christ are this very moment standing on the mountain of God. We are already in possession of heaven and that makes us, in the end, “untouchable” by death and the grave and a lowly and purposeless life.

Are you flying high? Are you standing on the mountain of God’s heights? God desires for us to live above the ways of the world. The solution is to examine myself. Are my habits heavenly? Are my words heavenly? Are my thoughts heavenly? Are my deeds heavenly? Picture yourself this day and every day walking the streets of heaven and live accordingly.

Ask the Lord to help you live on a higher plane today—ask Him to help you soar. Ask Him to help you live an “untouchable” life.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

The Finest of the Wheat

But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you. Psalm 81:16

He makes peace in your borders; He satisfies you with the finest of the wheat. Psalm 147:14

But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?” Luke 12:20

As I carried my countertop wheat mill back to the basement today, I congratulated myself on the 250 pounds of wheat I had bought and brought into the house yesterday. (Well, John carried it in.) After a long search for a source, my friend and fellow baker of whole wheat bread, La Donna, and I had found a seller and the day before picked up ten 50-pound bags of white wheat berries to divide. We had been in fear that our decades-long lifestyle of baking bread from freshly ground flour was about to end. But now I had a goodly store, sufficient for a year or years to come . . . Wait, who was I reminding myself of? Oh no! The wealthy yet foolish man from the Lord’s story out of Luke 12.

I quickly reviewed my theology. I love the verse from Psalm 81, and I have thought for years how God’s favor has rested upon us as He provided “the finest of the wheat” for my family. It doesn’t get better than clean, white winter wheat berries from the state of Kansas, breadbasket of the USA. But, of course, God’s favor in material things is not what we live for. He gives and He takes away, as Job experienced. Our faith does not rest on our goods, but rather on God’s favor because we have believed in His Son. Jesus identified Himself as the bread of life and the bread of God that was to be given for the life of the world (John 6:33, 35).

So I repent of momentarily feeling my security lay in a good supply of wheat! I don’t want to be a fool. My true joy and security are in having received the Bread of Life. Jesus is truly “the finest of the wheat.”

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Meditation 101

The Lord favors those who fear Him, those who wait for His lovingkindness.

Psalm 147: 11

Psalm 147:10 says that the Lord does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. This is by comparison. The comparison is with a certain heart quality. There is a certain kind of heart quality that brings Him such delight that His favor is drawn towards that person.

We are drawn to the strength of the horse, in a horse race, for example. We are drawn to the display of human leg strength, in a race or a football game, for example. We are drawn towards those who display strength. We delight in them!

But do you know what is attractive to God? It is something that the weakest of us can muster; God delights in those who are willing to find their strength in Him. It draws Him to them in a special way. He is inclined to bless them, just because they have a heart that is trained to acknowledge and rely upon Him.

They may have a little delight in horse or human strength, but their heart has been trained to center on, to dwell on, to become confident of the reliability and superiority of God, relative to their daily needs. They have meditated on this: The Lord favors those who fear Him. The Lord *favors* those who fear Him. The Lord **favors** those who fear Him.

When we fail to meditate on the nature of God, revealed in His word, we tend to run on ahead of Him and experience leanness of soul. Maturing is about learning to wait for His lovingkindness—and meditating on His Word is the first step in “waiting.” May God bless your meditation!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Meditation 101 – 2

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving . . . Who covers . . . Who provides . . . Who makes . . . He gives . . . Psalm 147: 7-9

I know about chores. Growing up on a dairy farm, we had about three and a half hours of chores on every school day (and I am being very conservative in those hours!) But none can match the Lord in “chores.” He covers the heavens with clouds every day! The average cumulus cloud weighs about 1.1 million pounds! He sees to it that some water is evaporated into the sky, and then He makes sure that it stays in formation as a cloud and that it is blown to the place where it is needed. Then He makes sure that that moisture condenses and brings this 1.1 million pounds down in life-giving droplets, rather than as a crushing blanket of death. He provides rain for the earth. He *provides* rain. He **provides**.

He makes grass to grow on the mountains. He *makes* grass to grow. He **makes** grass to grow. The grass is for the beasts that He has put there on the mountains. He gives to the beasts their food. He *gives* to the beasts their food. He **gives**.

I have done chores, but never have I had such responsibilities as God faithfully undertakes every day. He is in a class all His own. Whether I meditate on His provision to His creation or not, He is faithfully providing for it. He covers, He provides, He makes, and He gives.

If we will meditate on these truths, we will convince ourselves of something that is true. And then our song will come from thanksgiving, not from obligation. Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving. Sing to the Lord with *thanksgiving*. Sing to the Lord with **thanksgiving!**

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Meditation 101–3

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Psalm 147: 3

Meditating on Psalm 147 will bring you wholeness of spirit. Verse 3 says He heals the brokenhearted. He *heals* the brokenhearted. He **heals** the brokenhearted. He doesn't just commiserate with the brokenhearted; He does something about it because, unlike anyone else we know, He is able to *do* something about the things that have broken our hearts.

"He . . . binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). The word "wounds" in this verse could also be translated, "hurt, pain, or sorrow." We probably all have sorrows in our lives—the things that are like hidden traps in our path, that when this or that topic or memory comes up, we feel the rug being pulled out from beneath us, and we are in the pit of uncertainty, weakness, cowardice, and fear.

How can we know that He is able to bring firmness to an area of weakness within us? Meditate on this: He is the God who counts the number of the stars! He is infinite in knowledge. Our pains are not too many for Him to take into account and to deal with. He has seen every injustice, and He is the One most experienced with bringing injustices to justice. He **heals** the brokenhearted. We finally have Someone we can rely on!

Not only does He count the number of the stars, but He gives names to them all (147:4). There is no star that is insignificant to Him. There is no star that He made to just fill space—nameless, purposeless, without a unique and glorious design. And there is no hurt that has come into our lives that proves that we have no purpose to go on. If He gives names to every star, we can be assured He has a unique and glorious purpose for our existence, and even for the pain that has come into our lives.

He heals the brokenhearted. He *heals* the brokenhearted. He **heals** the brokenhearted.

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Monday, March 23

Really . . . ?

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. Psalm 18:2 NLT

"Are we really going to do this . . .?"

That was what our executive pastor, Rob Busse asked. It was Friday, March 13th, and we were discussing cancelling our church gathering and going online only. Making the choice seemed unreal. Looking out the window, the world appeared so . . . normal.

But things aren't normal.

Our president asked us to avoid groups of ten or more. Restaurants and schools are shut down. We're told to keep a distance of six feet from each other. "Flattening the curve" is a common phrase. People are sticking their elbows out at each other.

Nothing's normal. Life is very different today than it was a week ago.

As we endure this, what is your primary emotion? Anxiety? Frustration? Fear? During my quiet time this morning, I examined my heart, asking myself what I felt. My answer: Mild shock.

Life feels like a weird dream. The world seems like it's made of sand, and the foundation is crumbling away. But not everything's crumbling.

Sometimes the Lord can use difficulties in our lives to get our attention. What happens when we give our attention to the Lord?

We can feel solid rock under our feet.

We can remember He is in control.

We can vent our fear and frustration.

And then rest in His love.

Really?

Yes, really.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Numbers 36:1-Deuteronomy 1:46
Luke 5:29-6:11
Psalm 66:1-20
Proverbs 11:24-2

Meditation 101–4

Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant and becoming. Psalm 147:1

Meditation has become a largely discarded practice. We are just too busy for it. It has become a casualty of the war of options. It has become less important than getting things done. Yet, for the lack of it, we have become more proud and self-reliant, and, therefore, frustrated and harried.

Meditation is easy! It is simply a matter of repeating something numerous times. Is there anyone who cannot do that? All it takes is time and the will to repeat something.

And the benefits of meditation on the Scriptures are many. Rather than listing the verses that would support that truth, let's put it in practice.

Repeating verse one of Psalm 147 gives us at least two reasons to praise the Lord. One is that it is pleasant. It is *pleasant*. It is **pleasant**. Need anything pleasant in your life? Need a respite from the constant drumbeat of evil in the news? Need something that will soothe the bitterness and retaliation that rises up within you when you hear of or experience injustices? Then praise the Lord. Review the reasons to praise Him listed in the twenty verses of this Psalm.

A second reason to praise the Lord is that it is becoming. It looks good on us! I have an employee who would not regard himself as a good singer, but when I hear him singing as we work together, it sounds good to me—not in audible quality, but in the sincerity of his heart. It looks good on him! It fits a heart working for the ultimate Boss .

Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant and becoming.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Tuesday, March 24

Courage

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 ESV

What is courage? How can we obtain courage, especially a courage to do and speak what is right and good? We can find answers to these questions in Daniel 3.

Nebuchadnezzar was king of the Babylonian empire that had conquered Israel because of its rebellion against God. He had taken the best and the brightest out of Israel to serve him in Babylon. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were three of those young men. Nebuchadnezzar made a golden idol that was 90 feet tall, and he commanded all in his kingdom to bow down and worship under threat of being thrown into a fiery furnace. The three Jews refused to bow down to that idol because they would only worship the one, true God as revealed in the Scriptures! These men had a firm belief that God was able to save them from the fiery furnace, but if He chose not to do that, that their souls would be saved and their bodies resurrected one day. The king was furious and followed through on his threat: they were thrown into a fire so hot that it killed the men who threw them in!

The courage of those Jews was born out a conviction that all God had spoken was true, combined with a willingness to die for His glory. If we are to have courage, godly courage, this is the only way we will get it! Jesus, while facing the cross where He would suffer and die for our sin so all who believe would be reconciled to God, expressed this godly courage: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42 ESV).

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Living In The Shadow of The Cross

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. Luke 9:23

Usually when we hear that someone is living in the shadow of another, it is not a good thing. It suggests that this person is living off another's convictions and doesn't have a mind of his own. However, in the Christian life this is a good thing if we are living in the shadow of the Cross.

The Cross defines our life. If we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ, then we follow in His footsteps, let Him define our convictions, and live for His purpose. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

Jesus, our Master, took up His cross, denied Himself, and followed the Father's will completely. He was not here to have His needs met or to do His own thing. He was here to serve and to give His life. You and I are called to live in this shadow.

The cross redefines our life. It affects the way we view everything. The cross redefines leadership. Instead of leadership being a position of lordship it over others, leadership is demonstrated through servanthood and humility. Instead of having a careless attitude toward sin, we take sin seriously. Instead of devaluing the marriage commitment, we esteem and honor the vows of marriage as lifelong promises. Instead of living to get rich, we are rich by living generously. Instead of seeking our own personal ambition, we seek the Kingdom of God.

It is the cross that makes the difference in our lives. It is the cross that defines what is valuable and important. It is at the cross where life really begins.

Are you living in the shadow of the cross?

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Friday, March 27

News from Italy

*Thus says the Lord who made you
 And formed you from the womb, who will help you:
 "Fear not, O Jacob My servant;
 And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.
 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty,
 And floods on the dry ground;
 I will pour My Spirit on your descendants,
 And My blessing on your offspring;
 They will spring up among the grass
 Like willows by the watercourses."
 Isaiah 44:2-4 New Spirit-Filled Life Bible*

I'm grateful to y'all for your love and prayer. We all need to be encouraged during this season.

Being one who has been in the trenches in Italy, I can say it really feels like a war zone. We know people who have been infected and even a few who are fighting for their lives. We know doctors and nurses who are serving on the battlefields and are now being quarantined from seeing their family members who have weakened immune systems. We know people around us who are terrified of going outside because of their health conditions.

Yet in all this, we are overjoyed to see new conversions, marriages 100% restored, and the churches we are serving beginning to grow rapidly like the spring buds arriving outside our windows.

Please pray for us to grow more rooted and bonded to our Father as sons and daughters and then to seed at an unprecedented rate, believing God is using this "tsunami" in Europe to draw hundreds of thousands to Himself.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 7:1-8:20
 Luke 7:36-8:3
 Psalm 69:1-18
 Proverbs 12:1

The Future is Here

Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me. Isaiah 46:9

In 1972 Hanna-Barbera produced a TV show for NBC called *Sealab 2020* that survived only one season. As you may guess, it was a cartoon show about complete families who were deep sea "Oceanauts," living in an underwater structure, studying the ocean, and having great adventures.

As a boy of nine years old I was fascinated by all sorts of science fiction, including the pictures and stories of what the future would look like. I specifically wondered if, in the future year of 2020, I would live in such a place: deep underwater, or in outer space, or some other fascinating world in that far off year. I calculated I would be in my mid-fifties by then, and would likely be too old to really enjoy it or have any fun being in the future. I was right!

The future is here, and I am not doing any of the cool things that young boys dream about. It is something so much better. I am a soldier on a planet created by a living God who has put me on an adventure that does not serve me, but serves others by introducing them to that Creator and Savior Jesus Christ. It is an adventurous race against time, and an epic battle for souls on the frontline of eternity.

How did I get here? As I look in the past years, I see specific turning points, hard choices, difficult trials, unexpected miracles, undaunted love, and gentle challenges that moved me to this place. I can see them for what they are now: the hand of the living God moving in my life. Only by looking at the things He has done over time can I see how He really is God over all time, in all places, and over all my heart.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Saturday, March 28

Mundane Miracles

"Now, look, the Lord's hand is against you. You are going to be blind, and will not see the sun for a time." Immediately a mist and darkness fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Acts 13:11 CSB

My nine-year-old and I read Acts 13 the other morning, and obviously this verse was what he remembered from the passage. "Paul told a guy that he was going to go blind," he told his mom an hour later. We are always impressed by the supernatural. The portions of the Bible filled with miracles are more exciting than the more mundane histories.

Life can be like that too. We can yearn for something thrilling to happen to break up the monotony of life. We want God to speak in a lightning strike, to provide water out of a rock, and to heal the sick in front of us.

God is able to do those things, but He doesn't seem to very often. Why is that? What is God's goal in our lives? *I think He's after faith.* He wants us to trust Him, follow Him, and keep going even when life is just the ordinary grind. If we saw miracles right and left, it would become ordinary for us and we'd settle into that being monotonous. The Israelites certainly did this when they were being led by a pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night! God knows that if we're constantly seeing the miraculous, then it won't help our faith. I believe He has engineered just the right amount of trials, blessings, and persecutions in order to trigger a decision in us. *"Will I continue in faith?" is the question that our circumstances put to us every day.* Obviously we can and should still ask God to work on our behalf. We should pour out our concerns and requests to Him because He cares about us and responds to our faith-filled prayers.

But we shouldn't pout when God doesn't reply to our prayers with a boom of thunder. He has spoken clearly through His Word. He has given us what we need to trust Him each day. Let's go after today in faith!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Prayer Hacks

Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. John 14:13-14 CSB

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23 CSB

Yesterday I talked about having faith for today but realizing that God wants us to continue living in faith even if we don't see the miraculous that we've been praying for.

We've got just enough blessing and trial to push us into trusting God.

So what do we do with Jesus' words in John 14?

Asking God in Jesus' name isn't a magic formula or a trite ending to every prayer. Instead it's asking God for what is on His own heart. It's like asking that God's will would be done as Jesus modeled in the Lord's Prayer.

I absolutely love pulling this trick! It's the best way to pray prayers that get answered. I pray for things that I know God wants to do, like give me the fruit of the Spirit in my life. When I pray for love, joy, peace, patience and all the rest, it's good for my heart, my humility, and my outlook on life. God goes to work in my life helping me to rely on Him for that fruit.

And as much as we shouldn't necessarily expect that thunder boom response to our prayers I talked about yesterday, I think that we can expect this sort of miracle.

Really, a miracle? Yep, when I am frustrated and tired, the Spirit can give me peace and patience. That is miraculous!

So let's pray. Let's ask God for what's on His heart. Let's ask Him to give us His Spirit and the fruit that comes with it.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

Tuesday, March 31

The Offense of the Cross

But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. Galatians 5:11 ESV

The Cross offends us. The Cross offends us because it kills pride. Pride and being a follower of Christ do not mix. They are incompatible. The Cross closes our mouth from boasting before God in saying, "Look at me!" "Look at what I have done!" The Cross will bear none of that. The only boasting the Cross will bear is boasting in the Cross.

We are afraid to embrace the Cross for fear of what others might think of us, so like these false teachers in Galatia, we too can "water down" the message of the Cross to try and take the offense out of it. But then it is no longer the message of the Cross, and no other Cross is able to save.

It is only when we are humbled by the Cross and humble ourselves that we see that there is a strange beauty here—the beauty of the Cross is that, although it offends me, it also heals me!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

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

The Cross – The Wisdom and Power of God

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:17-18

What do you see when you survey the Cross? At first glance, when I survey the Cross I see weakness, but the wisdom of God is displayed here. When I survey the Cross I see shame, but God uses it for our salvation. When I survey the Cross I see a mess, but it is God's masterpiece. When I survey the Cross I see death, but God uses it to put death to death. When I survey the Cross I see utter foolishness, but it is here we see the forgiveness of God. When I survey the Cross I see senselessness, but it is here we see how serious a sin really is. When I survey the Cross I see brutality, but it is here that the scandalous beauty of God is unveiled.

If we humble ourselves at the Cross, we see both the wisdom and the power of God—at the Cross, we see Jesus drinking the cup of the holy justice of God. At the Cross, we see Jesus pouring out the unfathomable, vast dimensions of God's love toward us. At the Cross, we see Jesus, the Son of God, who died for us to rescue us and bring us Home!

The Cross changes everything . . . even what we sing about. Listen to the words of Isaac Watts in "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

*When I survey the wondrous cross / On which the Prince of glory died,
 My richest gain I count but loss, / And pour contempt on all my pride.
 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, / Save in the death of Christ my God!
 All the vain things that charm me most, / I sacrifice them to His blood.*

When you survey the Cross, what do you see?

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One-Year Bible Reading

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