

Ask

As Jesus and the disciples left the town of Jericho, a large crowd followed behind. Two blind men were sitting beside the road. When they heard that Jesus was coming that way, they began shouting, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

"Be quiet!" the crowd yelled at them.

But they only shouted louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

When Jesus heard them, he stopped and called, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord," they said, "we want to see!" Jesus felt sorry for them and touched their eyes. Instantly they could see! Then they followed him. Matthew 20:29-34 NLT

One question. What would happen if these two men kept their mouths shut? What if they were silent as Jesus walked by? Would they receive their sight?

I don't think so.

What a wonderful reminder to pray. It reminds me of this verse: "Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it" (James 4:2b NLT). How many blessings do we miss because we neglect to ask God? Why do we do that?

Look at the blind men. They are shouting their requests. The crowd tells them to shut up, but they don't care. Being socially awkward doesn't matter to them. They shout louder. Why? Because they are sick of being blind. They want to see. And they are *convinced* Jesus can help them. They're not conflicted. Annoying the crowd is worth it. They persist.

What's that called? It's called faith.

Lack of prayer is a lack of faith. The more convinced we are that our Lord hears our prayer and can do anything, the more we'll pray.

So what should we do?

Ask.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 1:1-3:15
Hebrews 3:1-19
Psalm 104:1-23
Proverbs 26:24-26

When to Stop Persisting

Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Matthew 7:7 NLT

Walking across my living room at home, I felt a stinging sensation in my hand. I looked down and realized it was an attack.

An attack by my little white dog.

When Daisy, our dog, gets bored, she'll look for me and challenge me to a wrestling match. She'll jump up and nip my fingers when I'm walking by. I'll join her on the floor and grab at her as she play-bites. She'll tumble and roll, fending off the double team efforts of my right and left hands. It takes about two minutes before she's too exhausted to keep going.

When she asks, I'm rarely in the mood for combat, but her persistence wins. Hmmm . . . that reminds me of a verse: "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8 NLT).

Should we ever quit? Stop persisting?

Yes, there is a time. When? As soon as the door opens.

The key is to recognize what that looks like.

When Paul was struggling with his thorn in the flesh, he prayed three times for the Lord to remove it. He didn't pray four times. He stopped after three. Why? The door opened: *Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9a NLT).*

So what's the lesson? Stop praying when God either gives you what you're asking for, or reveals to you a deeper insight. Keep praying until God either changes your circumstance or . . .

Changes you.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 3:16-6:14
Hebrews 4:1-16
Psalm 104:24-35
Proverbs 26:27

Reminder

. . . just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love . . . Ephesians 1:4

Thanks to my iPhone, I am constantly reminded about what's going on in my life. My calendar reminds me about meetings I need to attend and bills that need to be paid. Facebook reminds me of memories from five years ago. Countless sports apps notify me on player injuries, game times, and the latest trade rumors. Better still is that I don't really have to think to be reminded; they just pop up on my phone. Instant reminder.

Today you are going to get lots of updates, notifications, and reminders as well. I'm going to assume not many of them will be God-focused. So I'd like to encourage you today by being your POP-UP reminder!

God loves you: Look at our opening verse. From before time began, God pronounced that He would express His grace, mercy, and love towards you by sending His Son into the world to save you. This is the truth for all who have come to trust in Jesus. What a wonderful reminder to know we have become eternally united to Jesus Christ!

God is trustworthy: "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You" (Psalm 9:10). From Genesis to Revelation, God has always been there for His people. When life feels like it has us up against the wall, we can remember that this promise is for us as well. We are His chosen people — His children by adoption. He promises not to forsake us.

God will bring you home: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV). This life and all its troubles will one day pass. There will be a day when Jesus returns to judge all the wrong in this world and restore all things to Himself. He will usher us safely home!

Submitted by:

Bryan D. Edwards
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 7:1-9:11
Hebrews 5:1-14
Psalm 105:1-15
Proverbs 26:28

Righteous Indignation or Self Righteousness?

"Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they journeyed to another village. Luke 9:54-56 NABRE

Ok! Let's get real here! When other people do not politically agree with us, have an anti-God, anti-Bible, anti-Christian view, and live by a double standard of nondiscrimination (only against Christians), do you secretly wish that God would just take 'em out? When an elected official abuses his or her power to commit heinous crimes, how do you feel about that? How do you pray? Once I prayed Psalm 109:8 over an elected official that I didn't agree with, "May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership." Hey! It's **in the Bible!** I'm just praying God's Word, right?

Jesus doesn't respond to rude, inconsiderate, and unrighteous people as I just described. Take a look at the verses in Luke 9:43-62 surrounding our opening verses.

Jesus rescues a demon-possessed boy at the request of his faith-weary father. "While they were all amazed at His every deed," Jesus tells His disciples: "Pay attention to what I am telling you. The Son of Man is to be handed over to men" (Luke 9:43-44 NABRE). The disciples don't understand. But instead of inquiring what He means, they begin arguing about who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven! Rewind. Replay.

Jesus: "I'm going to be turned over into the hands of men."

Disciples: "Okay, Jesus, then who is going to be the greatest in your kingdom? Oh please, please, please! Say it will be me!"

How does Jesus respond? He stands a child before them: "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me. . . the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest" (Luke 9:48 NABRE). Do you want to be great in God's kingdom? Imitate Jesus and dispense grace.

Submitted by:

Terry Putthoff
Open Range Fellowship
Lone Jack, Missouri

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 10:1-11:25
Hebrews 6:1-20
Psalm 105:16-36
Proverbs 27:1-2

A Wider Perspective — 2

Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow in our company. Luke 9:49 NABRE

The disciples found someone trying to infringe on their *miracle-of-casting-out-demons* turf? Who does this guy think he is? He's not one of us, I mean, he's not one of the privileged few to be **chosen by** Jesus to be in **The Twelve Club!** And this guy is using the name of *their* Master, Jesus, as if he were one of them! And why is he succeeding at it? (Remember? Just a few verses above this the disciples were not able to cast out the demon from a young man.)

Mark 9:14-29 sheds more light on the scenario. Jesus returns from His transfiguration experience and finds His disciples in a hot debate with the religious leaders. A father has brought his demon-possessed, tormented son to the disciples to heal him.

"I brought my boy to you, and these disciples of yours were not able to do the job. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Don't you love how Jesus responds to this faith-weary father? He doesn't rebuke him. I think Jesus smiled. "If you can?" This man doesn't know he is speaking to the one who set the planets in motion and created the DNA in his own body. "All things are possible to him who believes." The father's response? "Lord, I do believe! Help me in my unbelief!" And Jesus casts out the demon. (He has also helped the father in his unbelief!)

Back to the disciples: Adding insult to injury (a resentful spirit to their inability to cure the lad), they complain: "There is an outsider casting out demons in Your name. We tried to stop him! He is not one of us!" (NIV).

How does Jesus respond? Does He rebuke their spirit or scold their lack of faith? No. He says, "Do not stop him, for whoever is not against you is for you" (NIV). He gives them a wider perspective. Let's be like Jesus.

Submitted by:

Terry Putthoff
Open Range Fellowship
Lone Jack, Missouri

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 12:1-14:11
Hebrews 7:1-17
Psalm 105:37-45
Proverbs 27:3

Wednesday, November 7

Start With the End in Mind

Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . ."
Matthew 28:18-19

If any project, business, or mission is to succeed, it must be started with the end in mind. There will need to be constant reminders of what the goal (or purpose) is throughout the process if it is to stay on target and finish well. Finally, there will also need to be course corrections as we stray from the mark we aim for, or find better ways of reaching the goal.

In the same way, we must start with God's end in mind for us. What is His ultimate purpose for you and every person on the planet? God's purpose is to save us and then transform our lives to be like Christ. He wants to use every circumstance, hardship, difficult person, unexpected financial challenge, and responsibility to make us like Jesus Christ. Know this! His plan is for you to be a mature disciple and to make other disciples.

If every child of God is to be a mature disciple and to make disciples, how does one make a mature disciple? Have a discipleship class? Begin a discipleship program? God chose the church as His method of discipleship, "that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church" (Ephesians 3:10). A healthy body has healthy parts. God has chosen to equip and build His body, the church, by "the proper working of each part." How *do* Christians grow and mature? "The whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

Keep the end of making mature disciples in mind, and then every decision you make will reflect that purpose.

Submitted by:

Stephen Scott Nelson
Atlanta House Church
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 16:42-17:24
Hebrews 8:1-13
Psalm 106:13-31
Proverbs 27:7-9

Fire from Heaven? — 3

"Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Luke 9:54-55 CSB

Passover was coming. Jesus "resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51 NABRE). We know what that means, don't we? He was going to Jerusalem to be handed over to be falsely tried, mocked, beaten, and crucified. He was going to Jerusalem to **be** the Passover Lamb.

Of course, to His disciples it's just another Passover celebration. Where would be the best place to celebrate it? Jerusalem! The holy city of David, the designated place of worship where God Himself dwelt in the temple many years ago.

Jesus sends messengers ahead and on their way they enter a Samaritan village. Samaritans were considered "half-breeds" and were despised by the Jews. They had their own religious system, their own Torah, and most deplorably their own place of worship . . . and it was **not** Jerusalem.

Therefore, when the Samaritans heard that Jesus was only stopping through while on His way to Jerusalem, they would not welcome Him. That was enough to send James and John over the top!

"How dare these half-breeds treat us with such contempt! Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" Did Jesus, the One who hushed the wind and sea, *need them* to defend Him? If He wanted to call down fire from heaven, He could do that Himself! But how does Jesus respond? Jesus "turned and rebuked them." Why did He rebuke James and John? Because Jesus came to bring life, not death.

We live in a cultural climate that belittles conservative Christians. Do we self-righteously "send down fire from heaven" with our words on those opposing us? May we not lose sight of Jesus and His purpose that the "world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17).

Submitted by:

Terry Putthoff
Open Range Fellowship
Lone Jack, Missouri

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 14:12-16:41
Hebrews 7:18-28
Psalm 106:1-12
Proverbs 27:4-6

Thursday, November 8

Send Me

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6:8

God asks who will go, and Isaiah says, "Send me." But do you know what Isaiah was sent to do? He was sent to proclaim God's Word to people who will be "ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn and be healed" (Isaiah 6: 9-10).

Isaiah and most of the prophets spent their lives proclaiming God's Word to people who would not listen. But they proclaimed it anyway. They chose the hard road, the narrow path. They chose to speak for God even if none listened, because it is what God asked.

Lord, may I be willing, like Your prophets of old. May I be willing to speak and do what You want, even if no one listens—to do *for You*. Help me not to be worried about the end result, but rather to be glad that it's what You want. Let me be willing to say, "Here I am, send me," and actually go and do for You—even to those who have eyes but don't see or ears but don't hear.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 18:1-19:14
Hebrews 9:1-10
Psalm 106:32-48
Proverbs 27:10

In Ark We Trust

Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies. 1 Samuel 4:3 ESV

In preparation for a series on the life of David at our church, I was studying 1 and 2 Samuel, and a story in 1 Samuel caught my eye. The Israelites went out to battle their long-time enemy, the Philistines. They lost the first skirmish, and about 4,000 soldiers were killed. When the Israelites returned to camp that night, they were very discouraged. What was their solution? Did they cry out to God in prayer? Did they seek God's guidance? No! They sent for the ark of the covenant. Look at what they said in verse 4:3, "*Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.*"

In other words, "Why did we lose? Go get the ark! Maybe that'll help!" The ark of the covenant was a gold-covered wooden box that God had told the Israelites to make; it contained the Ten Commandments. No doubt the ark was special and filled with deep meaning. But it was just a religious symbol, pointing to God.

Did the ark help? How did the next battle go? Verses 10-11 tell us: "*So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. And the ark of God was captured.*" This story is a sober warning for us.

In times of trouble, do we turn to other things instead of turning to God? Do we read more? Go to church more? Give more? Do we turn to our money or friends? Or do we turn to our God in desperate prayer? We need to trust in God. I'm striving to trust Him.

Submitted by:

Josh Whitney
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 20:1-49
Hebrews 9:11-28
Psalm 107:1-43
Proverbs 27:11

Sunday, November 11

Turning the Other Cheek

But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Matthew 5:39 ESV

A young believer stands in the break room before an open fridge. He is taping a note to a bottle of Jalapeno Ranch salad dressing: "To whoever keeps using MY dressing: get your own! I spit in it just to make sure."

Meanwhile, deep in the jungle a man named Christian stirs restlessly on a concrete floor. Between the beads of sweat rolling off his face and the mosquitos swarming at his ears, sleep evades him. He listens to the guards pacing in front of the cells and occasionally picks up enough of their dialogue to have a foreshadowing of what may happen next. Today they are awaiting the commander. Several hours later, Christian hears keys rattling at the door, and he looks up to see a man dressed in camouflage. His face is badly scarred, and he has an assault rifle swung across his back.

"Get up!" the man barks. "This is your last chance. Deny Jesus!"

Christian struggles to his feet, looks the commander in the eye, and says calmly, "I will never deny Jesus."

The commander slaps Christian across the cheek—hard enough to knock a tooth across the cell. Christian gathers himself, turns his other cheek toward the commander and says, "You might as well slap me again. I will never deny my Lord."

I wonder which scenario Jesus had in mind when it comes to cheek-turning. Is it only in cases of religious persecution that we are to turn the other cheek? Or is it also with Ranch dressing? Is it something we are called to in once-in-a-lifetime scenarios, or is it a way of daily living?

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 23:1-49
Hebrews 10:18-39
Psalm 109:1-31
Proverbs 27:13

"I Spy" Something Old

I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread. Psalm 37:25

While running errands with my granddaughter, I started a rousing game of "I Spy." It was her turn. "Grandma, I spy something red."

Following her eyes, I guessed, "That car?"

"My turn. I spy something blue."

"That truck," she squealed.

"I got one, Grandma," my spunky granddaughter replied. "I spy something old!" Noticing the twinkle in her eyes, I guessed, "Me?"

"Right!" she exclaimed!

"Thanks," I replied. "Let's play something else."

As we continued running errands, I thought, "I am old." Don't deny it, Neva. You can't hide it. Social Security, Medicare, wrinkles, arthritis, aches and pains are all a normal part of my life.

The verse above is true. God has been faithful to me. And God has also blessed my husband, all my children, and all of their families.

Our life has not always been easy, but it has been good because God is a big, good part of our life.

Over the years, God has given me strength to survive tremendous sorrow, many tears, and trial upon trial. Through it all, God has taken care of me. That assures me that He will see me through my remaining years.

Don't be afraid of being young and then getting old because He promises to go with us: "*And lo, I am with you always [remaining with you perpetually—regardless of circumstance, and on every occasion], even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20 Amplified Bible).

I testify that I have staked my life on God and on His Word. He has been faithful. You can trust Him with your life also.

Submitted by:

Neva Whitney
Vintage Faith Church
Stillwater, Oklahoma

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 21:1-22:31
Hebrews 10:1-17
Psalm 108:1-13
Proverbs 27:12

Monday, November 12

A Soldier Never Forgets North Platte

Honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. 1 Peter 2:17

An article by Bob Greene appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* last July with the above title. This town in western Nebraska has a remarkable history: "During World War II, North Platte was a geographically isolated town of 12,000. Soldiers, sailors, and aviators on their way to fight the war rode troop trains across the nation. . . . The Union Pacific Railroad . . . always made 10-minute stops in North Platte to take on water. The townspeople made those 10 minutes count. Starting in December 1941, they met every train: up to 23 a day, beginning at 5 a.m. and ending after midnight. Those volunteers greeted between 3,000 and 5,000 soldiers a day. They presented them with sandwiches and gifts, played music for them, danced with them. . . . They fed six million soldiers by the end of the war."

Last summer 700 soldiers were on an emergency deployment readiness exercise in Wyoming for three weeks, roughing it. When this brigade of the Arkansas National Guard was to return home, the charter bus company checked with North Platte. Was there anywhere in town where a succession of 21 buses with 700 soldiers could stop for a quick snack?

Mayor Dwight Livingstone opened the events center, and hundreds of people in town helped out. The surprised soldiers were greeted by lines of cheering people holding signs of thanks. Inside they were served a full meal. The mayor "stood at the door for two days and shook every soldier's hand. Mr. Livingstone served in the Air Force in Vietnam and came home to no word of thanks. Now, he said, as he shook hands and welcomed the soldiers, 'I don't know whether those moments were more important for them, or for me. I knew I had to be there.'"

Let's honor our veterans today. Do you know anyone to thank?

Submitted by:

Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 24:1-26:21
Hebrews 11:1-16
Psalm 110:1-7
Proverbs 27:14

Joyful!

Always be joyful! 1 Thessalonians 5:16 NLT

Some days it seems like finding joy can be an illusion to me. I see others enjoying a dreamy kind of life (where nothing ever goes wrong and no one even seems to have a bad thought). I think to myself, "What a wonderful life they must have." Before long you may even hear me humming the lyrics to Louis Armstrong's song, "What a Wonderful World" (in an effort to fake it till I make it). Seriously, I think it is a daily fight to be joyful. But we must engage in that fight to truly live a joy-filled life.

I was recently reminded of some foundational truths to bring joy into my life. From Proverbs 8:34 I read, "Joyful are those who listen to me, watching for me daily at my gates, waiting for me outside my home!" (NLT). There it is, don't miss it! *Listening, watching, and waiting* on God. This is easy to say or write, but difficult to actually do. Listening is hard, watching takes concentration, and waiting is oftentimes just not my style. I'm often distracted even when I'm praising God or praying to Him.

I must make a conscious effort to silence the noise in my life and my mind and simply *listen* to God. It requires me to focus on His Word and take a *listening* position in my prayers. Not a "to-do" list for God, but a "get-to-do" list *for* me, *from* God. I need to *watch* daily for guidance, and *look* to see where God is at work in my life and in the lives of others around me, not simply to *observe* and be in awe of Him, but to *look* to join Him in what He is doing. And yes, this often includes *waiting*—maybe the most excruciatingly beautiful, sanctifying, and satisfying of all. Be persistent in *waiting* for God. Allow His perfect timing to take over your schedule, even when it hurts. Especially when it's not convenient.

God is very clear when He says: "Joyful are those who listen to me, by watching and waiting for me" (my paraphrase).

Submitted by:

Steve McInroy
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 27:1-28:26
Hebrews 11:17-31
Psalm 111:1-10
Proverbs 27:15-16

Thursday, November 15

The Dog Walk

I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. Ephesians 1:18 NLT

Late afternoon Lisa and I have an appointment. We walk our dog together. The other day we got the leash on Daisy and stepped outside. Lisa looked up and said the dreaded walk-killer.

"Looks like it's about to rain. Maybe we should go back in."

Our dog, pulling on the leash, looked back to see what the hold-up was. Grabbing my phone out of my front pocket, I looked at my weather app.

"Nope, it won't rain. 0% chance. Clouds, yes, rain, no."

Though it *looked* like it would rain.

And so we walked the dog under dark gray clouds, confident.

This reminds me of Paul's prayer. He prays that our hearts are filled with God's truth. We keep going, even when the world looks threatening. Even when it looks like a storm is imminent.

Notice this is Paul's prayer for *others*. My default requests for others are daily needs, safe travels and for stuff to go well.

A good target, but not the *best* target. Why?

I'm aiming at the exteriors. Paul aims at the interiors. The heart. Renewed thoughts. I'm asking God to make sure circumstances go well.

But God never promises circumstances will go well. And how can our faith grow if it's based on life going smoothly?

When our hope in God is confident, we can experience calm in the storm. Paul's prayer reminds me that the people I love need this. They need their hearts filled with God's light, so they have hope. No matter what.

Confident hope.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 31:1-32:32
Hebrews 12:14-29
Psalm 113:1-114:8
Proverbs 27:18-20

Is "Rejoicing Always" Possible?

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Philipians 4:4

One day I experienced a plethora of things.

My computer started acting up for no reason at all, at least as far as I could see.

The expensive adhesive sign I bought wrinkled up when I tried to lay it down, and I had to buy a new one.

The new one then stuck to the old adhesive and almost tore.

I took a colored document to the copy shop to be printed and then had to take it home to be redone because an old program was incompatible.

Stuff like this can happen any day, but some days bring more annoyances than most. So when things go wrong, and we read the instruction to "rejoice always," what are we supposed to do? Should I put a smile on my face and say, "Praise the Lord!" while I am in agony inside? I would feel like a hypocrite if I did that, and I know also that God doesn't like hypocrisy.

God brought the promise of Romans 8:37 to my attention. It says, "In all these things we are more than conquerors *through Him who loved us.*" Paul wrote this immediately after he mentioned some horrible things that had happened to him. Because he belonged to Christ, Paul knew that God was using these awful situations to accomplish *His* goal in and through Paul. (One of God's goals mentioned in Romans 8:29 is to work all things together for good in our lives so as to conform us to the image of His Son—He wants to make us "look like" our brother Jesus.)

In any and every situation I can rejoice "in the Lord" that He is using the situation to accomplish His good goals!

Submitted by:

Mike Bergen
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 29:1-30:26
Hebrews 11:32-12:13
Psalm 112:1-10
Proverbs 27:17

Friday, November 16

Land of the Living

I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord. Psalm 27: 13-14

Thinking about these verses, "the land of the living," my first thought is here on earth, this life, the here and the now. It's sweet and comforting. No matter what trial or hard time I am going through, God is in control. I will see His goodness. I can be confident. I can be strong. I can take heart, while waiting. At times these are words my weak flesh needs to hear.

Then I think about these verses again. "Land of the living"—could that be heaven? Truly, when I get to heaven I will be more alive than I can ever be here on earth. In heaven, I will indeed see God's goodness forever and ever. I can be confident of heaven.

This confidence will help me live this life now while I am waiting for Christ's return. While waiting, I do need to be strong and take heart, because life here isn't easy, and particularly the Christian life. But this life isn't what we are living for. Instead we are praying, meditating, memorizing, serving, and loving, all for the glory of God. We are living for the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Being confident of this, we take heart.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 33:1-34:31
Hebrews 13:1-25
Psalm 115:1-18
Proverbs 27:21-22

Out of the Overflow

For Christ's love compels us . . . 2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV

More and more I hear this refrain: "We should be sharing the gospel, giving, even reading our Bible, out of the overflow of our love for Christ." It's pretty hard to argue with that phrase until you ask the follow-up question: "So how is all of that going?" And the answer is something like this: "Right now I am not feeling like it, so I will wait until this overflow of love comes over me."

Obviously, we don't have to do anything to get God to love us more. Romans 5:8—"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"—indicates that He can't love you anymore than He already does (NKJV). So when is it appropriate to just obey even if you don't feel Christ's love exuding out of your pores?

Consider this verse: "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands" (1 John 2:3 NIV). Christ's love is not a feeling that comes over us; it is a fact that we receive and live in. And as we battle the inertia of the flesh and this fallen world, sometimes we just need to do what God commands, challenges, and exhorts us to do, and trust that the "feelings" will follow.

There is certainly a balance. If you have to "muscle up" in your own will power month after month, you are probably not believing the truths of God adequately either. This is one of the reasons it is so important to preach the gospel to yourself daily. As you reflect on the sacrifice made on your behalf, the love poured out on the cross, it helps you—and me!—to want to obey His commands in response to that love.

Keep your heart right and the actions will follow, but if your heart gets off track, obey out of respect and appreciation until your heart recovers.

Submitted by:

Tony Pierson
Blacksburg Ablaze
Blacksburg, Virginia

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 35:1-36:38
James 1:1-18
Psalm 116:1-19
Proverbs 27:23-27

Monday, November 19

White-Knuckling It or Sowing Generously?

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 2 Corinthians 9:6 NIV

As I've been praying through this verse for the last few months the Lord has impressed on my heart how He'd like it to be lived out. It's an intentionality with my people that God is after: with my husband, my children, and my church family.

We as a family have so many things that come across our plates as ways to fill our time. And none of them are bad things: the differences are between "good, better, and best." I'm not wasting my time on TV, social media, and running all over the place. But my days are full, so full. Full of my husband, our five kids, our church family, laundry, cooking, training kids, shaping character, teaching school, discipling women, leading meetings. These are all good things, really good things.

But I can do every one of these good things without "sowing generously." I can be white-knuckling it through my days, just trying to get it all done, not having time to listen to my boy tell me his six thousandth story of the day, resenting my teen daughter's bad attitude, snappy with Rich when he needs me, telling a friend that I can't watch her kids for a doctor's appointment, not answering a phone call from someone who I know is really struggling. I can be doing all the "right things," checking all the right boxes, but I may be sowing sparingly with my humans.

God has been asking me to continue to do all the right things but to take the time to realize that my people are what He cares about. He wants me to sow generously with them with my heart and mind, my time and attention. You know what's funny? The list is still getting done, but on the days that it doesn't, I go to bed knowing that I did what mattered that day. And it wasn't the laundry.

Submitted by:

Morgan Thatcher
Parker Firehouse Church
Parker, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 39:1-40:27
James 2:18-3:18
Psalm 118:1-18
Proverbs 28:2

Direct Your Hearts into God's Love

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are. 1 John 3:1 NIV

I was preaching on the amazing love of God, and it made me think about and dwell on how much God loves me. It says in 2 Thessalonians 3:5, "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance" (NIV). God gave me two thoughts regarding this verse.

First, my heart can be directed. And second, it should be aimed toward the fact that God loves me. Seems simple, doesn't it? But, somehow, it was profound for me. I've tried to lead my heart into this amazing truth. One way I've found to do this is to take time to review Bible verses on God's love. Even singing hymns and songs about His love during my morning quiet times has been so good.

Here are some of the verses I've been meditating upon. In the Psalms I find: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him" (103:8,11 NIV). In the gospels I read, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13 NIV). From Paul's letters I review: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) and "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:16-19 NIV). May God reveal His love to you in a special way this week!

Submitted by:

Bill Young
The Rock Church
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 37:1-38:23
James 1:19-2:17
Psalm 117:1-2
Proverbs 28:1

Tuesday, November 20

Waiting on Jesus

Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength;

They will mount up with wings like eagles,

They will run and not get tired,

They will walk and not become weary. Isaiah 40:31

Here's what waiting looks like for me: reading the Bible and praying every day, going to church every Sunday, attending and participating in Life Group, teaching Sunday School, helping in VBS, volunteering, and looking for ways to share Jesus in my everyday life. This is what I do while waiting to see what Jesus wants me to do!

My point isn't all the things I do, but that I am doing this while waiting. I am not sitting at home doing nothing, hoping that God drops His Will right in my lap. I am laboring, honing my skills, toning my muscles (spiritually, that is) while waiting. I am going through any doors God opens, helping where needed. I am waiting.

What am I waiting for? I'm not really sure. I feel like God has something out there for me to do. I'm hoping it's missions—something with kids. Or maybe writing a book that will draw people to Him, that will speak to their souls. I don't know. Maybe I'm right where God will keep me, filling in and serving wherever needed. In that case, I'm waiting for heaven.

How about you? How are you waiting? Are you idling away the hours, wondering how God is going to use you? Missing all His open doors? Or are you diligently seeking God? Looking with eyes wide open for those God opportunities? All while waiting for God.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson
Oakridge Community Church
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 40:28-41:26
James 4:1-17
Psalm 118:19-29
Proverbs 28:3-5

Full Plates and Busy Lives

Watch out! Don't let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don't let that day catch you unaware, like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. Keep alert at all times. And pray.

Luke 21:34-36 NLT

This verse is a sober reminder to us all that we need to keep alert and always watching for the return of the Lord Jesus. Two observations really stand out to me. The first is to beware of growing dull, or calloused, to the signs Jesus warned about related to His return. Last week, I took a look at the mower blades on my lawn tractor—they were so dull that I couldn't tell which side was supposed to be the sharp side! I'm not sure how they were even cutting grass, besides maybe just blunt force. Unfortunately, many of us are like that toward the signs of Christ's return—pretty dull. So like *The Message* Bible puts this part of the verse, "*Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled!*"

The second observation is that Jesus specifically mentions three things that can dull our edge: carousing (or living in careless ease), drunkenness, and the worries of life (common cares and anxieties). Drunkenness seems like a pretty obvious pitfall to avoid, and so does living in careless ease, though that describes the life of many in our country. But this one surprises me: we can also lose our edge from being absorbed by the everyday cares of life. William MacDonald put it simply like this, "*His disciples should guard against becoming so occupied with eating, drinking and mundane cares that His coming might happen unexpectedly.*"

We all have full plates and busy lives, so let's make sure to keep sharp, praying and eagerly watching for His return!

Submitted by:

Rich Thatcher
Parker Firehouse Church
Parker, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 42:1-43:27
James 5:1-20
Psalm 119:1-16
Proverbs 28:6-7

We Put Fun in DysFUNctional

Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. 1 Peter 2:17 NIV

Every family has its own level of dysfunction. Maybe your uncle belches loudly during the Thanksgiving meal or your brother always gives away tacky gifts at Christmas. Some relatives always fight. Others always get along—as long they never speak to one another. Your family could be completely and utterly broken, or it could be at a more humorous variety of dysfunction. At whatever level it exists, hopefully there is at least some warmth, love, and fun.

A church family is very similar. Each church has its dysfunction. Always. Hopefully we are growing and maturing, but there is plenty of room for change! The longer we are in a church family, the closer we get, and the more we see one another's idiosyncrasies. There is the man who sings too loud (and a little off key), the woman who always walks in late, or the little kid who licks all the cookies. Maybe you have the pastor who is really excited to preach on ramifications of how the optative mood rather than the subjunctive mood totally changes the meaning of a particular verse in Greek—Part 5.

Our church family has some weaknesses. We all know that, but do we also remember the strengths? We hold precious truths that not everyone holds. We have history that no one else shares. We have dreams that are unique to our own church. We are a family—a dysfunctional family, but a family nonetheless. Our family is something special—even precious. Don't forget that! Love your spiritual brothers and sisters. Enjoy your family. Have some fun.

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson
The Rio Church
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 44:1-45:12
1 Peter 1:1-12
Psalm 119:17-32
Proverbs 28:8-10

Friday, November 23

Wait

But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. Isaiah 40:31 NLT

As I write this, it's April 9th, and I just finished scrapping ice and snow off my car. It took ten minutes with the defrost blowing on high.

Did I say it's April 9th? Did I mention *ten minutes* of scraping?

Thankfully, every spring the snow eventually melts. In fact, it's supposed to warm up later today. I have faith that the season will change soon.

And with this faith, something unexpected happens. I had fun scrapping. "Enjoy this, it may be the last time for a while," I told myself. I didn't rush. A little weird? Hang in there. There's a point.

A similar thing happens when we wait for God. Maybe you have an unanswered prayer. Check this out: "*But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31 NLT).*"

When God makes you wait, don't limit your thinking to "This is hard and I don't like it." There's a blessing for you in the process. What's the blessing?

Strength. New strength.

Not just a little boost, but something more dramatic. We will "soar high on wings like eagles." Sounds supernatural, doesn't it? In the middle of waiting, we can soar. What's the key to experiencing this?

The passage says "*those who trust in the Lord.*" In other words, faith.

That means settle in your mind that if God is making you wait, there's good reason. His timing differs from ours. His plan is bigger than we expect. Maybe it's better for you if you wait.

So wait. With faith.

And soar.

Submitted by:

Spencer Bernard
Evergreen Churches
Bloomington, Minnesota

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 45:13-46:24
1 Peter 1:13-2:10
Psalm 119:33-48
Proverbs 28:11

Lessons from Hopscotch #1: "Your Feet Were Correct"

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7 NKJV

Last spring I was glad to spend three weeks in Romania with our daughter Amy when her new baby was expected. I focused on David and Amy's other three kids while they were busy with their new son Martin Paul Cato. One game the children and I played on the pavement outside their front door was hopscotch! I wasn't sure if I was remembering the rules or inventing them, but we had a great time.

Coen (at nine) beat me almost every game, as I had trouble getting my rock in the right box. Elena (at almost seven) hopped for me, and four-year-old Lewis drove his bike or scooter through the middle of our squares. A new rule Elena invented was one I particularly liked. If Coen or I had our feet planted straight before square 1, not touching the line at all, and missed our first toss with our rock, Elena would always say, "Your feet were correct." That meant we got a second chance to throw our rock into the right square. A second attempt gave me much more of a fighting chance to beat Coen!

Long games of hopscotch gave me time to think. The repetition of "Your feet were correct" in exactly the same pleasant intonation by Elena was encouraging. It made me think of how God gives us multiple chances to "get it right" every day because, forgiven and walking in the light with Christ, our feet are correct. We enjoy the status of sons and daughters, and a loving Father tells us, "Try again, little one. You are standing in My Son. Your feet are correct." As the blood of His Son cleanses us from all sin, we are empowered to keep trying in all our ways to please our Father. And that's better than winning at hopscotch!

Submitted by:

Dotty Vanderhorst
Cornerstone Community Church
Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

Ezekiel 47:1-48:35
1 Peter 2:11-3:7
Psalm 119:49-64
Proverbs 28:12-13

Saturday, November 24

Lessons from Hopscotch #2: A Rock You Can Depend On

"I love You, O Lord, my strength."

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,

My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge;

My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Psalm 18:1-2

Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come;

You have given commandment to save me,

For You are my rock and my fortress. Psalm 71:3

I am happy to be writing these thoughts because I get to use some of my favorite rock verses. "A rock of habitation to which I may continually come" has long been my favorite translation of Psalm 71:3 because of the image it conjures up. I picture a strong rock tower. What do you picture?

But back to hopscotch. One key to winning at hopscotch is the proper rock (in hopscotch parlance, "your marker"). Your rock marks which square you skip on the way down the game board (drawn, of course, in chalk), and you have to stop and balance on one leg to retrieve it on the way back, then hop into the square you picked it out of. (Or skip that square, depending on which rules you play by.)

Coen, our nine-year-old grandson, did much better with his rock choices than did I. He tended to use large, broken pieces of concrete, which had the advantage of being flat. My last night in Romania I found the perfect small piece of concrete, and six-year-old Elena (who hopped for me) and I won our final round of hopscotch! We were triumphant!

Here is my analogy: Find a rock you can depend on. Jesus spoke of Himself as a stone which people would be broken on or crushed by (Matthew 21:44). Let's choose to humble ourselves and take refuge in God, our Rock. Let's come to Him continually and abide in Him. He is trustworthy. God is the one who gives us our victories, as in 2 Corinthians 2:14—"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ!"

Submitted by:

Dotty Vanderhorst

Cornerstone Community Church

Lenexa, Kansas

One-Year Bible Reading

Daniel 1:1-2:23

1 Peter 3:8-4:6

Psalm 119:65-80

Proverbs 28:14

Grasp the Hidden

But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. Luke 18:34 ESV

Jesus often spoke in parables to confound those who were "ever seeing but never perceiving" (Matthew 13:13 NIV). But in Luke 18 He told the twelve disciples exactly what would happen to Him in Jerusalem: imprisonment, torture, death, and then resurrection. However, despite the plain and direct speech, complete understanding was not immediate. The disciples did not know how the story would play out, and so the meaning of Jesus' words was "hidden."

I confess that I so often want to know the entirety of what God is teaching me in the moment. I want immediate understanding: "Such-and-such happened this morning; it's now evening, so I should understand God's full purpose for it." But if Christ's simple, direct words were not grasped in the moment by His ever-present and closest companions, I ought to expect that my own understanding of the intended purpose of my life's happenings will grow over time. It will not be instantaneous.

As I look back 20 years, I recall events that in the immediate aftermath left me questioning their purpose for my faith journey. But new layers of meaning have been revealed progressively by the Spirit since then: sometimes in momentary bursts of revelation, and sometimes as they gradually weave together with new events and knowledge into the rich tapestry of life. God has graciously given richer, broader, and fuller understanding through the passage of time and the unfolding of my story.

If this desire for immediacy resonates with you, take heart! If you do not understand fully the meaning of an event, be encouraged that—as with the disciples—God will help you grasp the hidden meaning as you walk with Him into the future.

Submitted by:

Greg Miller

The Firehouse Church

Denver, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading

Daniel 2:24-3:30

1 Peter 4:7-5:14

Psalm 119:81-96

Proverbs 28:15-16

Tuesday, November 27

Dormant Sprouters

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the fall and spring rains. James 5:7 NIV

Growing up on a farm afforded me many opportunities to work hard. One of them was "walking beans." Every July we kids would head out to the soy bean fields to walk up and down the rows, pulling culprit weeds that left unchecked would dirty the crop at the end of the season. On top of our pre-determined pay for this task, we were given a bonus 10¢ for every button weed we found and pulled. My dad hated button weeds!

Button weeds are notorious for being vigorous sprouters. My dad claimed that button weed seeds could lie dormant for years, but when given the right conditions of water and warmth would germinate, sprout, and grow! Thus, he wanted every last one removed from our farm!

Dormant sprouters: this concept encouraged me lately when I was thinking about people I know and love who have had "gospel seeds" planted in their hearts. Although they have not yet responded to Jesus, I need not lose hope. For a seed and, in many cases, lots of seeds have been planted.

And these aren't just any old seeds—they are seeds of truth that, when united with the Holy Spirit's working, are extremely viable. Like the button weed, whether planted yesterday or decades ago, given the right circumstances, they can germinate, sprout, take root, and grow, bearing good fruit for God's kingdom.

So don't despair if you are waiting for a good crop to emerge from seeds planted perhaps years ago. Long time or short, God is neither apathetic nor removed. He is patiently at work, promoting germination and growth. Remember the button weed!

Submitted by:

Dawn Bovenmyer

Stonebrook Community Church

Ames, Iowa

One-Year Bible Reading

Daniel 4:1-37

2 Peter 1:1-21

Psalm 119:97-112

Proverbs 28:17-18

Wednesday, November 28

Peace in Patience

I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Psalm 40:1 NLT

Waiting is super difficult, isn't it? In The Information Age we live in, having patience is often no longer required. Whether it is online searches, internet shopping, or convenient access to a nearby superstore, we can usually get most things we want right away. Naturally, we apply this *immediacy mindset* to just about every aspect of our lives. This has become one of the greatest lies of our day.

Patience is a virtue. Isn't that what we all learned in elementary school? And we all have different ways of trying to be patient and "pass the time" while we wait. I remember my wife and I trying to wait patiently for Abel, our first son, to be born. We took daily walks around our neighborhood. However, on the inside, I was screaming, "**Let's get this show on the road!**" Now I daily try to teach my sons the importance of practicing patience. All the while I am trying to teach myself that same truth.

For me waiting can produce a lot of fear and anxiety. When we struggle with this, we must bring our minds and hearts to the truth of what the Bible has to say about waiting. In Luke 12:25 Jesus asks the million-dollar question, "*And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*" (ESV). If we are getting anxious, we are not remembering (or truly believing) Who is ultimately in control of our circumstances. David tells us to "Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD" (Psalm 27:14 NLT). God doesn't want our waiting to be just sitting on our hands. He wants us to walk in peace and faith and His power as we wait on His timing. Finally, Peter advises "casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

What's the old saying? "The joy is in the journey." His peace to you.

Submitted by:

Caleb Yetton

The Rock Church

Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Daniel 5:1-31

2 Peter 2:1-22

Psalm 119:113-128

Proverbs 28:19-20

I Brought You to Myself

You yourself have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Exodus 19:4 NIV

I must have read and heard the story of Israel's exodus out of Egypt a hundred times. I took comfort that at the end of their 40-year wanderings, God finally brought them to the promised land. They had arrived! Phew! Then, upon re-reading the story recently, the Holy Spirit gave me a little, spiritual chiropractic adjustment.

The goal was not a destination, but a Person.

The prize wasn't the promised land, but God's very presence.

Our trials, blessings, and disciplines are to bring us to Him, closer and deeper every time. So now when I do well or horribly, I'm not riding the waves of pride or discouragement. Instead I ask, "How is God bringing me to Himself?" In living out His presence, we experience joy and peace because He always fulfills His promise: "In Your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). God is our best goal.

Submitted by:

Gisela Liu
Awaken Church
Jacksonville, Florida

One-Year Bible Reading

Daniel 6:1-28
2 Peter 3:1-18
Psalm 119:129-152
Proverbs 28:21-22

Presents or Presence – Which Do You Prefer?

Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Isaiah 55:6

The plan was to arrive at our son and daughter-in-law's house early Saturday morning and leave around noon on Sunday so that we could see them and spend some much-needed time with our three precious grandchildren. We were so looking forward to the time; it had been a month since we had last seen them. I had even collected a few sticker books, outfits, and other odds and ends to make our visit more special. The plans changed quickly when on Thursday our three-year-old granddaughter came down with the stomach bug. That bug quickly passed to our daughter-in-law and then, by Friday afternoon, on to our five-year-old granddaughter. Needless to say, our plans to visit flew out the window as quickly as the virus flew through their family.

However, my husband Berk and I were able to stop by our grandchildren's house long enough to leave our gifts for them on their porch. We literally drove into their driveway, put everything on their porch, and started to drive away. That's when we saw our daughter-in-law, who was feeling better, come back from a walk. We backed up and talked with her. Shortly thereafter, our five-year-old granddaughter came out of the house, quickly followed by the three-year-old. They could only stand on the sidewalk and talk with us, but we relished the moments nonetheless.

After driving away, we rejoiced and felt honored that our grandchildren ran past the presents on the porch to enjoy our presence first. God gives us great presents each day. We pray for them and look for them. But do we honor Him by seeking His presence before the presents? I sure hope so!!

Submitted by:

Barbara Wilson
Grace Community Church
Raleigh, North Carolina

One-Year Bible Reading

Daniel 7:1-28
1 John 1:1-10
Psalm 119:153-176
Proverbs 28:23-24