

Live Coram Deo

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

God is bigger than our choices, and He can use the good, the bad, and the ugly in our lives to accomplish His sovereign purposes in and through us. But the moral choices we make today help determine the course of our tomorrow.

Joseph was just one young guy, and yet he changed his world. He made many choices in his life. Not all of them were good, but let's look at a really good choice he made. Joseph chose to live "coram Deo." RC Sproul said this: "To live *coram Deo* is to live one's entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God."

Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery to the Midianites, and he became a slave in Potiphar's house. He took over the household chores, was falsely accused, and then he went into prison. This was 13 years of his life. He experienced trouble!

Here's the perspective he had after he went through it. He said, "God has made me forget all my troubles" (Genesis 41:51 NLT). In Genesis 42:18 Joseph says, "I am a God-fearing man" (NLT). He's a man who lived in the presence of God, before the face of God, as a God-fearing man. This was a choice he made. He could've been in prison with self-pity. He could've just moped for the rest of his life, but instead he chose to make the most of his life while in the worst of circumstances. He did it because he lived "coram Deo"—he lived before the face of God.

Today's verse is about living "coram Deo." Let's make this verse our prayer and live that way every single day.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Job 40:1-42:17
 2 Corinthians 5:11-21
 Psalm 45:1-17
 Proverbs 22:14

All In – 2

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life.

Proverbs 4:23

Give me your heart my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways. Proverbs 23:26

Guard your heart. Today God is going to speak to you! He's speaking to you now; He spoke to you last night. He's saying, "Sons and daughters, give me your hearts! Live before my face. Choose this every day." Keep your heart "moist" before God. It should be soft and sensitive to the leading, the prompting, the guiding, and the directing of the Holy Spirit in your life. Choose to live before the face of God ("coram Deo") on a day-by-day basis.

There's a hero I read about in a biography, a man named William Borden. He lived in the early 1900s. In 1904 he graduated from high school when 16 years old; he came from a very wealthy family. His parents gave him a trip around the world for his high school graduation present. None of you have probably ever received that gift!

Borden went around the world, seeing all the people, especially in the world of Asia, and he felt the call of God on his life. William Borden said, "I want to be a missionary." So he directed the course of the rest of his life to be on the mission field. One of his friends said, "A missionary? He's wasting his life. Living for God, you're wasting your life. Making Him first in your life, you're wasting your life." Borden took his Bible and, on the back leaf of his Bible, he took his pen and wrote these words: "No Reserves."

I, too, am all in. No reserves. I am going to live my life before the face of God. Will you do the same?

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One-Year Bible Reading

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3:22
 2 Corinthians 6:1-13
 Psalm 46:1-11
 Proverbs 22:15

Tuesday, September 3

Wednesday, September 4

What Will They Remember?

Bury me with my fathers in the cave . . . in . . . Canaan. Genesis 49:29-30
"You shall carry up my bones from here." . . . They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. Genesis 50:25-26 ESV

I recently studied the life of Joseph, which of course included his father and brothers. In the above verses we see Jacob and then Joseph giving instructions about their funerals. This was very important to them, Jacob "commanding his sons" (mentioned twice), and Joseph making "the sons of Israel swear" to do his instructions.

Each was sending a very important message to his posterity, in fact the same message. What was it? They each gave a strong reminder to their posterity that Egypt, which is a picture of the world, was not to be their home. Joseph told his brothers, "God will surely visit you." Aren't we waiting for a visit from our Lord and Savior? Jacob's family made a huge deal of taking his body to the cave at Machpelah, where he was buried with Leah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Abraham and Sarah. Even Egyptian officials joined in the expedition. Joseph's body waited in a coffin in Egypt 300 and some years (he lived 110 years) before being carried to Canaan in the exodus, serving as a reminder all those years that this was not to be the final place for the nation of Israel to settle down. Tribulations in Egypt sent the same message to the Jewish nation.

"Moses took the bones of Joseph with him . . ." (Exodus 13:19); "As for the bones of Joseph . . . they buried them at Shechem in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor" (Joshua 24:32 ESV). What will our life and death cause our children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren to remember? Peter wrote, "Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13 ESV). May that be the legacy we pass down to them.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Ecclesiastes 4:1-6:12
 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:7
 Psalm 47:1-9
 Proverbs 22:16

Little Versus Much

Better is a dish of vegetables where love is than a fattened ox served with hatred. Proverbs 15:17

A year after we got married, my husband and I moved back to our roots in Clemson, South Carolina. We had so little, but we loved the church and the people in it. Berk worked at the painting company owned by one of the brothers in the church. The pay was fine for us, but certainly did not boost our IRA a great deal. However, he was able to work daily with brothers in the church and came home each day quite encouraged.

Our home was small, only one bedroom. We finished the upstairs attic enough to put in an extra bed, but any guests who spent the night had to come all the way down the stairs, through the living room, and through our bedroom to use the bathroom. We didn't have central heating. We provided our own heat with space heaters in each room. And the kitchen sink wasn't even in the kitchen; it was in the room next to the kitchen!

Why did we live there? Because within thirty yards of our front door lived six other households of singles and couples who went to the same church. We didn't even lock our doors during the day so that we could visit freely between the homes.

We didn't just sit around and talk; we took walks together, we cooked together, we shopped together, we read the Bible together. We loved each other. We knew what was going on in each other's lives, and we were able to sharpen and challenge each other to grow in our faith. None of us was rich in the eyes of the world, but our fellowship was truly rich and sweet.

Do you have that kind of fellowship? If so, no matter what your bank account says, you are rich!!

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One-Year Bible Reading

Ecclesiastes 7:1-9:18
 2 Corinthians 7:8-16
 Psalm 48:1-14
 Proverbs 22:17-19

New Carpet

After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy. 2 Thessalonians 2:19-20 NLT

We have new carpet in our living room. It's pretty nice.

The old carpet was . . . old. Worn. The new carpet was on sale. We were hosting a bridal shower in a couple weeks. If we ever sold the house, we would need to put in new carpet anyway. We had to, we simply had to get new carpet.

Plus, it was on sale. Did I already mention that?

Was it a sin to buy carpet? No. Was it wise? Maybe. Should I devote myself to making our home nice?

Nope. It's not smart.

Why?

When we stand before our Lord, some things will matter and some won't. Our new flooring won't be a big deal when I stand before Jesus. I won't hear:

"Hey, nice deal on the carpet. Here's an extra crown."

But everything I do to disciple, bless, and help people in the name of Jesus will be a big deal. That's what will matter. If we spend ourselves lavishly, that's the better place.

People. Not my house. Though it is nice carpet.

I guess it comes down to emphasis. Am I consumed with material things? Or does my heart beat for people? For God's Kingdom? Do His priorities have emphasis over my stuff?

When I look at my life, what am I giving myself to? Am I living for today, or *that* day?

These are tough balances, I know. It's worth thinking about, though.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Ecclesiastes 10:1-12:14

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Psalms 49:1-20

Proverbs 22:20-21

God is Present

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted . . . Psalms 34:18

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Philippians 4:5 ESV

While studying the Bible recently, I ran across something that boggled my mind. If you will journey with me, I will describe what I found over the next few days.

Basically, I was looking at how God interacts with people. Specifically, I wanted a clearer understanding about the Lord's presence in our circumstances. In the verses above, **near** in Hebrew is *qarowb* and in Greek *eggys*. Both of these words have a potential double meaning for "near." Both can mean *near in place* and *near in time*. And, of course, there are many other words used in the Bible for *near* when it is only meant in terms of physical proximity.

This was a fascinating discovery because I was studying events in the Bible where God interfaced with people. And to discover that God was present, right there in both place and time, tells me something about the closeness with which God regards us.

These and the verses that will follow in the coming days prove to me beyond a doubt that God is not distant, but rather totally present. First, I hope this impacts the way you interact with God. Second, I hope it will cause you to consider how you interact with others.

Will you determine to be fully present when you are with people God has called you to love? That might mean putting down your cell phone or even improving your listening skills. But give it a try—you might be pleasantly surprised with the results.

Tomorrow we look at the verses that got me headed down this path . . .

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One-Year Bible Reading

Song of Solomon 1:1-4:16

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Psalms 50:1-23

Proverbs 22:22-23

God is Emotional

Jesus wept. John 11:35

Yesterday we discussed the fact that God is present, right here, right now. The verses I was reading that boggled my mind were the following: The "Lord was grieved . . . and His heart was filled with pain" (Genesis 6:6 NIV); "Leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them" (Exodus 32:10 ESV); the Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom (1 Kings 3:10); "He will take great delight in you . . . he will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17 NIV); "He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless" (Matthew 9:36 ESV); "Jesus wept" (above).

What do all of these stories have in common? They, and many others, talk about God's emotions. And notice that His emotions are all over the map. They range from anger, to sadness, to elation. The Bible is actually filled with stories of God's emotions.

But note one more thing, what affects God's emotions? Our actions. The God of the universe has chosen to allow Himself to be affected by us! In other words, God has made Himself vulnerable to us. What is the significance of this? Well, who has the most influence over your emotions? Typically, we give the most influence over our emotions intentionally or not to the ones we love the most. I believe that this vulnerability demonstrates God's immense affection for and closeness to us.

Have you historically thought of God as stoic, aloof or distant? How does it make you feel to understand how emotional God is about you? Will you get closer to God because He has opened Himself up to you in ways that you have yet to fully experience? I hope you will.

Tomorrow I have one more cool observation along these lines.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Song of Solomon 5:1-8:14

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Psalms 51:1-19

Proverbs 22:24-25

Changing Your Stars

And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 2 Kings 20:3

Over the last couple of days we have learned that God is present, and He is emotional. Your actions affect how God feels. Mind boggling, right? Today we discuss one more aspect of God we can learn from His interactions with people in the Bible.

It started in Exodus 32 when God was going to wipe all Israel out, and Moses pleaded with Him not to. Guess what happened in verse 14? "Then the Lord relented . . ." (NIV). God threatened, Moses prayed, and the Lord changed His mind. Is this an isolated case?

I remembered another story, so I quickly flipped to 2 Kings 20:1-6. God sent Isaiah to tell Hezekiah, "This is what the Lord says . . . you are going to die; you will not recover" (ESV). Hezekiah prayed and "wept bitterly." God sent Isaiah back to say, "This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you" (NIV). God reacted to Hezekiah's prayers.

This reminded me of James 5:17 which states that though "Elijah was a man just like us," he prayed and God responded. And I thought of Hebrews 4:15-16 where we are told to boldly approach the throne because we have a High Priest who can empathize with us in every way. And finally there's the wicked judge and persistent widow parable in Luke 18 where we are encouraged to "always pray and not give up."

So we have learned that God is present, we impact His feelings, **and** we can impact His actions. These stories make God feel so much closer, more intimate when I read them. It sure encourages me that our prayers are not falling on the deaf ears of a far off, distant, stoic deity. Our God is a close emotional friend, who is going through this life right here with us. Does this motivate you to speak to Him more?

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 1:1-2:22

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Psalms 52:1-9

Proverbs 22:26-27

God Is Super Complex

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! Romans 11:33

Over the past few days, we have talked about God's presence and emotions along with His attentiveness to our prayers. This process started when I was asked to preach about "Who God Is." As I prepared, I found so many lists of the attributes of God. But as I reflected on what I personally knew about God, those lists seemed sterile and insufficient in so many ways.

In some way, the lists were a human attempt to simplify God so that we can get our minds around Him. In retrospect, even the concept of that seems laughable. While I was wrestling with that sermon prep, I remember asking my wife about something she said that I was not understanding properly. She laughed and said, "You want to understand God, and you can't even understand women." She was correct, and the more I thought of it, the more I realized that God is more complex than even women. That was a lot to get my male mind around, and, honestly, that is probably just the tip of the iceberg. So God is Incomprehensibly Complex!

But as I uncovered His emotional, even vulnerable side, I found God to be even more relatable. I am made in His image; that means something. I love Him deeply, He speaks to me, I feel His presence—I know Him! And fortunately for me, I am known by Him.

So while God is Incomprehensibly Complex, He is Intimately Knowable.

The amazing thing is that this incomprehensibly complex being wants me to get to know Him even more. Will you open yourself up to experience God more deeply, not just in your head, but in your heart?

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 3:1-5:30
 2 Corinthians 11:1-15
 Psalm 53:1-6
 Proverbs 22:28-29

YouTube, God's Word, and That Girl

For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. 1 Corinthians 1:25 NIV

God, even at His hypothetical simplest level of thinking, is smarter than Albert Einstein at his best. This is important to understand when it comes to our pursuit of advice.

When I was a teacher, I had one student who at face value appeared intellectually normal. However, on tests she performed atrociously. If I gave the answer to a test question immediately before the test, she would still miss it. Sometimes she guaranteed the incorrectness of her answers on multiple choice tests by marking several of the options. She even left some questions blank rather than guessing. Sadly, she often scored just slightly higher than what would be expected if a person had randomly guessed on every question.

One day I caught one of my students cheating, and he was copying answers from *that girl*. Who would do that? Kids tend to know who scores well and who doesn't. Why would anyone copy from the worst of all of my students?

Think about the problems that we often face: strife, discouragement, parenting, marriage, decision-making, and others. Where do we search for answers to these age-old struggles? Magazines? Books? Blogs? What we need to understand is that in comparison to God, the magazine editors are *that girl*. The authors are *that girl*. Even the people with degrees and accolades are *that girl*.

If you want to learn how to do things like make an iPhone stand out of a Kleenex box, look on YouTube. However, if you want help with the struggles of human life, look first in God's Word. Human wisdom is worth seeking out and weighing, but God's wisdom is superior and trustworthy.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 8:1-9:21
 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
 Psalm 55:1-23
 Proverbs 23:4-5

He Knew Me

But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. 1 Corinthians 8:3 ESV

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? Galatians 4:9 ESV

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His" 2 Timothy 2:19

Last spring my older brother Jim and I went together to visit our dad and stepmother in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Dad had recently moved to a retreat for people suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Here he could receive more help with his daily needs and schedule than his wife Carol could give by herself. When Jim and I arrived with Carol, Dad was unexpectedly missing from his room. The residents have freedom to walk around where they like, so it was no emergency. But very soon Dad emerged from the room next to his, just as we three were coming down the hall toward him, I slightly in front. Dad immediately pointed at me! I walked up and gave him a big hug. What a relief! What a comfort! My dad still knew who I was. That meant the world to me.

And so it is with God. Our greatest comfort is that *God knows us*. He has personally written our names in the Book of Life. Jesus told the seventy short-term missionaries about their success, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:20). We are known. Our salvation and entrance into Heaven depend on Jesus, and He says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them" (John 10:27). We spend our lives getting to know God, but our anchor is that we have been chosen by Him and are known by Him.

Sometime soon my father may not recognize me. But my Heavenly Father will always know me.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 6:1-7:25
 2 Corinthians 11:16-33
 Psalm 54:1-7
 Proverbs 23:1-3

A Social Deviant?

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 ESV

On my first overseas trip I had an eight-hour layover at the airport in Singapore. I was definitely out of my comfort zone. I was scared! Why am I here? I asked myself. What am I doing here? What will I be eating where I'm going? A lot of questions hung in my mind. But the primary question was: Why do it? And my answer was: There's something that's got to be more important than who I am. There has to be a bigger reason, a bigger "Yes" that outweighs all the "No's" I can think of. The answer was "Love."

In the Incarnation we see the love of God. Jesus took on a human body, and He still has it. In my understanding He has a body now forever. The scars on His hands and feet that show His love for us? I think they are still there. Why would anyone do it but for love? God wanted relationship with us, so He came here in human form.

If you want to be heroic, you have to be willing to step out of the pack, out of the crowd. The crowd is rarely right. You have to be willing to be different. In researching heroes, I went online and saw a definition by *Psychology Today*: "Heroes are social deviants." They stand out.

God the Son was willing to leave Heaven where He had the praise of throngs of angels and was in constant communion with the Father and Spirit. He came to earth as a baby. The one who had all knowledge had to learn how to speak. The perfect one had to live in a place of temptation.

A pale reflection of this would be if Bill Gates went to live with homeless people under a bridge because of love.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 10:1-11:16
 2 Corinthians 12:11-21
 Psalm 56:1-13
 Proverbs 23:6-8

A Heroic Savior – 2

... Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done. Luke 22:42

In the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His death Jesus knew what was coming. He knew He was about to die. He knew it was going to be painful. He knew His death would be by crucifixion, the most horrible death invented by men. He knew He would be accused by the religious rulers. He knew He would be beaten and spit upon. He knew He would suffer for things He never did, things He never would have done. He knew He would be separated from His Father for the first time in all eternity. He knew He would be punished by His Father for sins not His own.

This is where we see the faith of our Savior. We are told He cried to the Father with loud cries. He asked, "Please—No! If there is any way to avoid this, please let this cup pass by Me!" (paraphrased—see Luke 22:42 above).

Jesus had already told His disciples He would be betrayed. But they just didn't get it. They didn't believe it could happen. In the garden they fell asleep, "exhausted from sorrow," as compassionate Luke puts it (22:45 NIV). Jesus was completely alone in the Garden. And he knew His own Father would forsake Him soon. His question was: Is there any other way for humanity to be saved? In the silence His response was: If not, I am going to the cross.

It is hard to do the will of another. A heroic Christian is one who gives his or her will to God: not my will, but Yours, Father. Our reward is not here; we are not living for our will. We have to die to self. Why? *The world needs love.* We die to self because of a grateful heart of love for the One who died for us, our Hero Jesus.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 12:1-14:32
 2 Corinthians 13:1-14
 Psalm 57:1-11
 Proverbs 23:9-11

Sunday, September 15

A Clear Conscience

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 2 Corinthians 4:1-3

The ministry of reconciliation—though it is a stiff and stout challenge, the believer goes about it with a steadfastness of heart. Perhaps the greatest challenge is resisting the "secret and shameful ways" of our old sinful nature. As Paul states to Timothy in his epistle, keep watch over your life and doctrine closely (1 Timothy 4:16).

I have taught leadership development for 25 years with a course I wrote titled, "Heart and Character of a Leader." In the course, we examine many issues of character but number one is: "Dealing Thoroughly with Sin." Good leaders always keep a vigilant watch over their lives, in particular the sins that so easily and not so easily entangle them. We all know great and small leaders alike who have fallen morally.

There is much at stake in this matter: our witness to the world. Paul exhorts the believer to be steadfast to renounce the secret and shameful ways of sin. And sin will always have with it both an inevitable temptation to live *deceived*—the double life of hypocrisy—or worse, distort the truth of God's Word. That is simply to deny the sovereignty of God, and the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, leading to justification, rationalization, and the minimization of man's sin nature and God's holy nature, leaving God veiled in darkness.

A clear conscience before God and man is the best way to a steadfast heart to both live and proclaim the Gospel.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 19:1-21:17
 Galatians 2:1-16
 Psalm 59:1-17
 Proverbs 23:13-14

The Gift of Limits

For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:5

Satan tempted Eve to become like God, to break free from her God-given boundaries, to exceed the limits that God had given her—in this case the limit of her knowledge. So, today, he tempts us to exceed our God-given limits in various ways

How might the Devil most easily tempt a zealous, dedicated, devoted Christian, one who is on guard against the temptations of the flesh—temptations like sensuality, greed, selfishness, and laziness. He often tempts such a person to exceed his God-given limits in areas that, at first, seem to be areas of virtue. The temptation might be to view himself as everyone's savior—to take upon himself everyone's problems and own them as his own. He might be tempted believe the myth that he can do anything he desires to do for God, if he has enough faith or works long and hard enough.

Most of us resent limits, both in ourselves and others. We expect far too much from ourselves and others and live angry and frustrated lives. Those who yield to the temptation to be all and do all eventually find themselves harried, exhausted, anxious, angry, burned out. It is then that the traditional temptations of the flesh seem overwhelmingly appealing.

God has given each of us limits. We are limited by our personality, our gifting, our season of life, our life situation (whether married, how many children, sickness, etc.), our emotional, physical and intellectual capacities, and our scars and wounds from our past.

Can you allow yourself today to be a weak, limited human being? Or do you really have to be God? God has given you limits. Can you accept them today as a gift from Him?

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 15:1-18:7
 Galatians 1:1-24
 Psalm 58:1-11
 Proverbs 23:12

Monday, September 16

Doubting God's Love

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Psalm 136:1 ESV

I've often wished we had the music to the Psalms to go along with the words. I'll bet Psalm 136 was a powerful, boisterous song, every other line repeating the phrase "His love endures forever." Evidently, God wanted His people not to forget the unshakable fact of His everlasting love.

Yet I find myself forgetting God's love all the time. I find myself doubting that He is truly good. The truth is that every time I disobey Him or fail to trust Him I have concluded in my heart either that He is stupid and doesn't know what is good for me or that He is bad and wishes harm upon me.

Why do we so easily doubt God's goodness and love? I think of a couple reasons. One is that we have never met anyone who is truly good in heart. Jesus said, "No one is good—except God alone" (Mark 10:18 ESV). Even the most loving parent, sibling, or spouse is not truly good in heart. An honest look at our own heart reveals all kinds of evil, corrupt thoughts and motives that we constantly have to battle. All of us have been taken advantage of, exploited, betrayed, and let down innumerable times, even by those who love us most. So it's difficult for us to accept that there could ever be anyone who is purely and eternally good and loving.

Another reason we tend to doubt God's love is that the world around us is so full of pain and calamity. It just doesn't feel true that a loving God would allow such tribulation in His world. We forget that this world is out of whack, under a curse, but that there is a new world coming.

I'm sure there are many other reasons we doubt the love of God. In Ephesians 3:18-19 Paul writes that a deep comprehension of His love is what will transform our lives to become like Him.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 22:1-24:23
 Galatians 2:17-3:9
 Psalm 60:1-12
 Proverbs 23:15-16

Diabolical Tools

Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. John 17:17

In an interview with me at Faithwalkers East one year, John Hopler asked, "What is a lie Satan would want you to believe? What is the primary lie to guys? To girls?"

The primary lie to guys is "Pornography is so enjoyable." If the current statistics are at all accurate, 50% or more of Christian men regularly watch pornography. This is one of the most diabolical tools today.

Pornography is a destroyer. It destroys a man's spirituality; it destroys his mental abilities; it destroys a healthy sexual life; it destroys marriages. It is also one of the hardest things for guys to win victory over permanently. If enmeshed in it, go to a pastor or counselor for help.

The lie behind the addiction of pornography is pride. This addiction de-means women in a horrible way, using them only for personal sexual gratification. No woman wants to be a piece of meat. If a man could see how God looks at a woman, he would never look at porn again. When God looks at a woman, He sees her true beauty, her potential, her abilities, her gifts. When a pornography victim looks at a woman, he says, "Take off your clothes. I'll love you for a few minutes. Then I'll hate you."

The chief lie to women is: "Your physical beauty is the primary thing of value in your life." I remember in my senior year of high school a plain girl sat behind me in one class. Over the course of the semester I got to know her—her character, her inner beauty—until I came to consider her one of the prettiest girls in the senior class. You can live with a person like that the rest of your life. Physical beauty does not last very long.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 25:1-28:13
 Galatians 3:10-22
 Psalm 61:1-8
 Proverbs 23:17-18

Without Stain

*... that you keep the commandment **without stain** or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ 1 Timothy 6:14*

Stain is an agent that colors a material. On wood, stain soaks in and changes its nature. In clothing, it makes a noticeable blot that distracts people from our overall appearance. My favorite Super Bowl commercial from the past year was for Tide laundry soap. The commercial starts with a man in a job interview making a hiring pitch to a prospective employer. As the man seeks to make a good impression, a stain on his shirt starts talking loudly and drowns out his words. Every time he speaks, the stain shouts louder. Next time you see a stain on a shirt, notice how it distracts you.

Sin is like a stain on the front of our shirt. It negatively draws attention away from the working of the gospel in our lives. We are living examples of the grace of God to the people around us by our actions, attitudes, and words. Sin distracts like a stain. In Colossians 3:12-14, we are told to put on like freshly laundered clothes the new nature that God put within us: love, holiness, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. These qualities attract people to our Savior.

We spend a lot of time in front of a mirror making sure that nothing is out of place in our appearance. How much time do we spend in front of the mirror of God's Word to make sure there is not a spot of sin in our life that will distract others from seeing the beauty of the Lord reflected through our life? If you see something, confess and repent. Then put on the Holy Spirit and the beautiful, holy dress that He has clothed you with. People will admire His and your beauty.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 30:12-33:9
 Galatians 5:1-12
 Psalm 63:1-11
 Proverbs 23:22

And That ... You Were

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NIV

When I read this list of wrongdoers, I have a mixed response. First, I think, "Yeah! It serves those people right. They shouldn't be in heaven." Then I think, I sure hope that I'm not one of those people! By God's holy standard, I am easily guilty of several of those sins. Just as I'm reading along and starting to get concerned about my standing with God, a beautiful phrase is introduced: "And that is what some of you were."

So much is packed into that little phrase! If that is what we "were," then that is not what we "are" anymore. We were labeled by God as wicked and unrighteous sinners, but no longer! Our change in status is not because we have rehabilitated ourselves, but because God has washed, sanctified, and justified us. *We are no longer shamed by the stain of our sin, but we have been washed whiter than snow. We have been sanctified—made holy in the eyes of God. And we have been justified—cleared of our record of wrongs and granted the righteousness of Christ.*

We no longer need to live cowering in fear of what judgment may await us, because by the power and grace of God we are not now what we once were.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 28:14-30:11
 Galatians 3:23-4:31
 Psalm 62:1-12
 Proverbs 23:19-21

Diaper Denial

... and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:7-8

True story. A toddler boy, old enough to talk but not yet potty-trained, wanted to be with his mommy all the time except for one daily occurrence—the diaper cleanup after a messy one. This little boy deplored it so much that if his mother smelled a stench and asked, "Is your diaper messy?" the boy would declare, "NO!" His toddler-level reasoning convinced him that if he denied his condition, then it didn't exist.

His mommy might have played along except for one huge problem. Dirty diapers lead to diaper rash (fairly quickly!), and the loving mama could not ignore pain-waiting-to-happen. So whenever she smelled that telltale odor, she would jump into action to provide a fresh cleanup for her boy, all the while reminding her crying son that she loved him and that her diapering plan was for his good.

Sometimes we live in a similar denial. "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." But God has a fatherly understanding of our problems, and He is faithful to reveal them and provide solutions. Don't live in denial about the need to have your deceptions unmasked, and don't deceive yourself about the pain your problems will create. Agreed?

As you grow, let God do His work of showing you the truth about your messes. Then *thank* Him for the cleanup He has already accomplished in Christ. For you!

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 33:10-36:22
 Galatians 5:13-26
 Psalm 64:1-10
 Proverbs 23:23

Comparing

Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else. For we are each responsible for our own conduct. Galatians 6:4-5 NLT

I play electric guitar in the worship band at our church. Over the last few years, worship music has gone through changes, and the way I learn my music has changed. I used to learn songs off a basic chord sheet and by listening to the recording. Today, there's YouTube. Often the same guy who played on the recording has a tutorial showing exactly how the part goes.

So there I am, learning songs. From a guy less than half my age. That guy's playing a guitar I can't afford. Using amps and other gear I can't afford. Showing me parts that are cooler than anything I could have thought of. He's from a church 50 times the size of my church. Plus he looks cool. Why can't I grow a beard?

Not that I'm comparing, mind you.

Comparison is the devil's trap. A no-win. If we see ourselves as better than others, we're prideful. If we rate ourselves as worse, we get frustrated or discouraged. Prideful, discouraged, prideful, frustrated . . . What's the answer?

Paul tells us to pay close attention to our work. Keep yourself busy doing your best job. Sweat the details. Be as excellent as you can. Remember, the Lord sees what we do and will reward us. The goal isn't to "win." The goal is to offer God our best, as an act of worship and love.

Love.

If you catch yourself comparing, remember this. Focus on what really matters. It's about loving and serving the Lord, not competing with "that person."

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 37:1-38:22

Galatians 6:1-18

Psalms 65:1-13

Proverbs 23:24

Following the Maestro's Baton

Use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.

Romans 6:13 NLT

One of my favorite hobbies is playing bass guitar on our church worship team and with a local band around town. As a musician, the above verse was very intriguing to me. I work hard to create something beautiful on my instrument, so it was an amazing thought that I can do the same thing with my life. As I align my heart, mind, and actions with God's will, my life can bring Him glory. I have been considering some practical applications of this analogy.

First, I take good care of my bass, cleaning it and changing the strings. Similarly, I need to take good care of my body by eating well, exercising, and taking time to rest. First Corinthians 6:20 says, "God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body" (NLT).

Next, I am always trying to improve my bass playing. I practice regularly, and I learn from more proficient musicians. In my spiritual life, I also need to put in the time to study God's word and to learn from other believers. Paul instructs us in Philippians 4:9, "Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing" (NLT).

Finally, I don't just keep my bass playing to myself. I find so much joy in playing with and for others. I need to do the same as I share what I am learning with others, as I talk about my faith with friends at work, and as I gather with believers to study God's Word together.

May our instruments be in tune with God's leading today, and may we honor Him as our lives become a beautiful song.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 39:1-41:16

Ephesians 1:1-23

Psalms 66:1-20

Proverbs 23:25-28

Monday, September 23

Thoughts about Weakness and Power

Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 CSB

One Sunday I spoke about hypocrisy and how easy it is to perform for the opinion of others. I believe that everyone struggles from time to time with hypocrisy, but I also think that we can struggle with just feeling like a weak failure of a Christian. This can accompany hypocrisy in that we try to cover our weakness with bravado and extra serving. Or it can attack us on its own, beating us down into inaction by telling us that we're not fit for service.

Surprisingly enough, the Apostle Paul also felt weak, and he pleaded with God to take away his weakness.

A huge "Jesus juke" when I feel weak and ineffective at ministry is simply to lean into the power of God. Anything that I do actually accomplish is a glory to God as He takes a weak vessel and makes use of it.

So the next time the devil whispers to you that "you're no good . . . you're a failure . . . you've got nothing to offer anyone . . . you're ineffective . . ." or whatever, whisper back to him, "That means that God can use me."

All praise to our awe-inspiring God!

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 41:17-43:13

Ephesians 2:1-22

Psalms 67:1-7

Proverbs 23:29-35

Tuesday, September 24

A Hairy Situation

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Luke 12:6-7 NIV

Our daughter recently made a discovery—she has curly hair! Now you would think that she and we her parents would have figured that out by now. (She is over thirty years old!) But upon learning that some shampoos can affect hair texture and curl, she began an experiment that ended with producing lots of wave and curl in her hair—perm free!

Doing a little research, I discovered that all hair has two key parts: shaft and follicle. The shaft is the hair that we see; the follicle is the root of the shaft below the skin surface. Depending on the shape of our follicle, round or oval in various degrees, the hair shaft will grow accordingly. Round follicles produce straight hair; oval follicles, curly to kinky hair.

Curly or straight, our hair is part of who we are. And who we are all starts with our Creator. The verse above brings out what really makes us valuable, and that boils down to what God thinks about us. As his children, He assigns us a lot of worth.

In a world that is so efficient at beating you down, it's good to remember that there is One who notices you all the time, cares deeply about what you're going through, and pays so much attention to details, that He's got you covered down to how many hairs (curly or straight!) you have on your head at any given moment! Now that is something to tuck under your scalp and celebrate!

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 43:14-45:10

Ephesians 3:1-21

Psalms 68:1-18

Proverbs 24:1-2

The Winning Blow

*"Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit," says the Lord.
Zechariah 4:6*

J.O. Fraser was a missionary who ministered to the unreached tribes of the Lisus in China. Upon reaching China he discovered that there were two groups of Lisus, one in the north and one in the south. He asked the Lord how he should use his time in ministry, to which the Lord impressed upon him to pray for the southern Lisus from sunup to noon, and then witness to the northern Lisus from noon to sundown. Fraser followed this pattern for many years.

One day Fraser was in a village and heard a Lisu speak who had a different dialect. He discovered that this man was a member of the southern Lisus. Fraser invited him to his home and shared the gospel of Jesus Christ, leading the man to salvation. For several weeks Fraser disciplined the man and prayed for him. The man went back home, urged by Fraser to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ.

Years passed. Fraser continued to pray for the southern Lisus in the morning and continued to witness to the northern Lisus during the day. One day a delegation of southern Lisus arrived in the village. They reported that thousands of southern Lisus had turned to Christ and were in need of someone to travel to their villages and teach the scriptures to them. At that moment Fraser realized that God had accomplished more in response to his simple prayers from sunup to noon than he had in his evangelism from noon to sundown (from *The Shepherd's Guidebook* by Ralph Neighbor, Jr., page 48).

Someone once said, "Prayer strikes the winning blow. Service picks up the pieces."

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 45:11-48:11
Ephesians 4:1-16
Psalm 68:19-35
Proverbs 24:3-4

Friday, September 27

Powerful Prayer

For this reason, also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Colossians 1:9

Want to know a powerful prayer? Check out Colossians 1:9: "Asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (NIV). So what makes this prayer powerful? When Paul prayed this sentence prayer, he was expecting to see the following happen.

The Christians would live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing God in every way (verse 10).

The Christians would have fruit in every good work (verse 10).

They would grow in the knowledge of God (verse 10).

Those in the church would be strengthened with **all** power according to God's glorious might so they could have endurance and patience (verse 11).

They would be joyfully thanking God (verses 11-12).

When I first read this passage in Colossians, I thought the entire set of verses 9-12 was one prayer. But I have come to realize that verse 9 is the prayer, and verse 10 "so that you will..." shows the results of the prayer. Paul is praying verse 9 so that the results of verses 10-12 will happen in our lives. A simple yet powerful prayer.

So next time you sit down to pray for someone, consider joining Paul in praying Colossians 1:9, believing that verses 10-12 will come about in that person's life.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 51:1-53:12
Ephesians 5:1-33
Psalm 69:19-36
Proverbs 24:7

Tragedy to Triumph

I will build my church. Matthew 16:18

In 1992 a group of Baptists in Russia was given permission to dismantle an abandoned missile silo in order to use the bricks and other materials to build a church building. In going through the process of tearing down the silo, the workers discovered a World War II artillery shell nestled in a brick wall. Within the shell there was a letter written in 1950 by some Christians who had been part of the construction crew of the missile silo. Evidently the materials used to construct the silo had been taken from churches in the area that had been torn down during Stalin's reign. The writers of the letter appealed to those in the future to use the bricks and materials to reconstruct those churches that had been torn down.

What must it have been like for those Russian Christians in 1950! Certainly they were shocked and horrified by the destruction of their buildings where they had been worshipping God. But one can't help but think that they were led to pray that God would eventually take the victory, turning this tragedy into another triumph in Christ. They waited. And prayed. And waited some more. Finally, forty years later, He led a group of believers to dismantle a missile silo that would be used for the reconstruction of a place of worship.

Nothing can stand in the way of our prayer-answering God. No king, no ruler, no ideology, no political party, no power known to man. Jesus Christ is the Lord, and He will build His church. And He builds His church in unity with Christians who believe in Him, praying that His victory will be demonstrated to the whole world for His glory.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 48:12-50:11
Ephesians 4:17-32
Psalm 69:1-18
Proverbs 24:5-6

Saturday, September 28

The Jew First

But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Matthew 15:24

It's one thing to deny a woman based on her ethnicity His miraculous healing powers, but it's another thing to compare her to a "dog" (Matthew 15:26). Why did Jesus appear to give Jews priority over other races? Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to **everyone** who believes (Romans 1:16, bold added). However, the verse continues, "... to *the Jew first* and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16, italics added). Why are the Jews given priority?

God planned to pick one ethnicity to reveal Himself to (Romans 9:4) and through whom the rest of the earth could be blessed (Nehemiah 9:7; Deuteronomy 14:2; Amos 3:2). The Jews of Jesus' day had a special place through the promise God gave Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3). They did nothing to deserve this role (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). God blessed them so they could, in turn, bless others.

Jews were chosen, not for their sake, but for the sake of the Gentiles. God's priority structure humbled Jews by underscoring that their salvation is from God, not themselves. It humbled the Gentiles by underscoring that salvation is not from themselves or from their own culture or wisdom but from the Jews. The Jews had a priority in some respects (not in terms of salvation) but they also had a great responsibility with that priority (Amos 3:2). Jews were blessed by God to be a blessing to all nations (Psalm 67:1-2). God chose Abraham to bless all nations. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is for **all** nations.

Jesus decided to bless the woman for her humility and faith; and He never blessed the Jews as an end in itself, but as the means to the end of blessing *everyone* of *all* nations.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 54:1-57:14
Ephesians 6:1-24
Psalm 70:1-5
Proverbs 24:8

Legal Alien

There, in a foreign land, you will worship idols made from wood and stone . . . But from there you will search again for the LORD your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him. Deuteronomy 4:28-29 NLT

Daniel was a diplomat in exile in Persia, but to really understand what powered him, what was at the center of Daniel, I believe we need to start in Deuteronomy.

The book of Deuteronomy is a series of three speeches given by Moses to the Israelites as they are standing on the east bank of the Jordan River, getting ready to cross to the Promised Land. In the middle of the first speech, Moses predicts the future: "In the future, when you have children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time, do not corrupt yourselves by making idols of any kind." Moses goes on: "Today I call on heaven and earth as witnesses against you. If you break my covenant, you will quickly disappear from the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. You will live there only a short time; then you will be utterly destroyed. For the LORD will scatter you among the nations, where only a few of you will survive . . ." (Deuteronomy 4:25-27 NLT).

Then Moses issues the amazing promise above about the true seeker finding Him, even in a foreign land. What is Moses doing? He is asking the Israelites to imagine a future of drifting from God. In essence he is saying: "It may be hundreds, or even thousands of years from now, but when you let your hearts drift to other desires, then things will fall apart. Your life will hit the wall. Pain and emptiness will enter your life." Have any of you experienced that? Is that where your life is right now? God is waiting for you.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 57:15-59:21
 Philippians 1:1-26
 Psalm 71:1-24
 Proverbs 24:9-10

Legal Alien – 2

There, in a foreign land, you will worship idols made from wood and stone. ... But from there you will search again for the LORD your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him. Deuteronomy 4:28-29 NLT

Daniel was a man faithful to God in exile. I am convinced that Daniel knew the promise Moses made to God's people in the verses above. He was a man of the Book. He believed in God and in God's promises. He believed that God was bigger than Babylon. And he believed in God's unflinching covenantal love—that God would turn back to those who sought Him.

But let's apply Moses' promise to ourselves! What he was saying was: "Even though your own sin has brought you this low, even though you have been indifferent to God, even though you have ignored him for years—if you turn back to God, if you decide to search for the Lord, and search for Him with all of your heart and soul—you will find Him. What an amazing promise!

Have you ever been dumped by someone? The first girlfriend I ever had dumped me! Maybe I was just boring. Even though I sought her out and pleaded, she kept her distance and wanted nothing to do with me. Our God is not like that! He cannot resist a person who seeks Him freshly and sincerely with all of his heart and soul. Our God is so merciful! He is so forgiving! Our God is the God of the second chance—and the third and the fourth . . .

Whoever you are, no matter what your situation is, no matter what you have done, any of us can find God—if we search for Him with all of our heart.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 60:1-62:5
 Philippians 1:27-2:18
 Psalm 72:1-20
 Proverbs 24:11-12