

IN TOUCH

DAILY READINGS FOR DEVOTED LIVING

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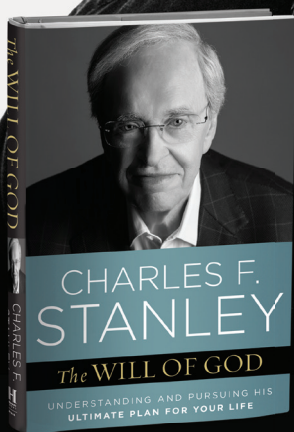
“ IN HIS WILL,
THERE ARE
ANSWERS.

—Shane

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05/20

A Word From Dr. Stanley



Living right each day is a basic challenge of Christian life; we often wonder where the strength for obedience will come from. All people have weaknesses they must guard against, and the struggle can be fierce. But as a believer, you have a new heart—one designed to reach for good things. Yet it takes effort to live according to those desires. That is, we must “lay aside the old self [and] ... put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness” (Eph. 4:22, 24). Then, the closer you draw to Jesus, the more you’ll want to be like Him. As you read this month’s devotions, imagine gazing at Him in all His perfection. Allow hunger for His righteousness to fill you. That’s a desire He has promised to satisfy (Matt. 5:6).

IN TOUCH

FOUNDER/PUBLISHER Charles F. Stanley
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER C. Phillip Bowen
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
AND COMMUNICATIONS** Tom Sabonis-Chafee
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Cameron Lawrence
CREATIVE DIRECTION & DESIGN Metaleap Creative

IN TOUCH MINISTRIES® INC.

Box 4900, Atlanta, GA 30357
1-800-333-5849
partnerrelations@intouch.org

IN TOUCH MINISTRIES OF CANADA

Box 4900, Markham, Ontario L3R 6G9
1-800-323-3747 (when dialing in Canada)
info@intouchcanada.org

IN TOUCH MINISTRIES LIMITED

P.O. Box 35525, Browns Bay, Auckland 0753
0800 44 68 68
intouch@intouch.org.nz

IN TOUCH MINISTRIES OF THE UK

P.O. Box 214, Chessington KT9 9DP, United Kingdom
0800 098 8529
uk@intouch.org

IN TOUCH MINISTRIES OF AUSTRALIA LTD

P.O. Box 704, PENRITH NSW 2751
1800 765 615
au@intouch.org

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05/
20

In This Issue

3

**A WORD FROM
DR. STANLEY**

6

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Meditations from
the Sermons of
Charles F. Stanley

17

BIBLE STUDY
Blown Away

29

SPOTLIGHT
Get Busy Living

SUNDAY REFLECTIONS

Blessed to be Hungry

IMAGINE you're incredibly hungry—perhaps on your way to a celebratory meal, fasting before surgery, or sitting in a long meeting at work, past your usual lunchtime. This anticipation is a mere glimpse of the hunger God wants us to have for righteousness—the desire to urgently move toward His will with everything we have. In May, we'll contemplate:

- The pursuit of righteousness.
- The blessing of perspective.
- Our longing for eternity.
- The transformation of our desires.
- God's promise to satisfy us.

Subscribe to our free ministry guide, *Blessed to Be*, at intouch.org/blessed.

FRI
1

Right Relationships

PROVERBS 27:17

→ **BECOMING A GODLY PERSON** is a worthy goal for every believer. We know prayer and Bible study are essential in achieving this objective, but did you know that having right relationships is also a critical element in our journey toward godliness?

Since this world is filled with people who don't share our values, we need relationships that inspire and challenge us to become the people God wants us to be. We'd like to think that all our Christian acquaintances help us achieve this goal, but sadly, many believers interact with each other only on a trivial level.

We need friends who give wise counsel based on God's Word. Even when their advice isn't comfortable, it's always beneficial. They're not afraid to speak the truth, even if it is painful to hear. When we've gotten off track, they lovingly confront us and point us in the right direction. And if we encounter times of suffering, they are by our side, encouraging us as we walk through fiery trials.

What kinds of relationships do you have? Can you name someone who helped you become more like Jesus? If you don't have anyone like this in your life, ask the Lord to provide someone. We were not created to walk alone.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 1-3

Unshakeable Faith

SAT

2

JOHN 15:1-7

→ **FAITH OFTEN MATURES IN HARDSHIP**, because trials remind us how dependent we are on the Lord. And as we allow ourselves to trust Him more deeply, we will increasingly find that with Him, we can endure anything.

The key to such rock-solid faith is an intimate relationship with God. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Upon salvation, we are grafted into the vine of Christ, which means that His Spirit lives and works in us and provides a constant connection between Father and child. Abiding in God gets us through hard times.

However, we have to choose to tap into that power. Trying to keep things from God’s control could interfere with His plans and cause our relationship with Him to grow distant. But when we commit to knowing God through prayer, meditation, and obedience, His power flows through us, like sap through a branch, bringing new growth.

Intimacy helps us trust the Lord when life gets difficult. And the more we abide—especially during hard times—the more we grow into unshakeable “oaks of righteousness” (Isa. 61:3).

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 4-6

SUN

3

SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Pursuit of Righteousness

To get the most out of this devotion, set aside time to read the Scripture referenced throughout.

→ **JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS** many times in the Sermon on the Mount—from pursuing it to being persecuted because of it (Matt. 5:6, 10, 20). We can easily think of pursuing righteousness in terms of following rules or abiding by the law. But it's much more than that. To pursue righteousness is to live with an unrelenting desire for justice and holiness. It's like selling all our possessions in order to buy the field where we know treasure is buried (13:44-46).

But we don't engage in this pursuit out of obligation or anxiety. Jesus taught that the man who sold everything to buy the field did it out of joy (v. 44). You would be joyful, too, if you believed you were gaining something worth more than all your possessions combined. And this is how we should understand God's love for us: Nothing on earth can compare to the riches we have in Him.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Is there a difference between those who seek righteousness and those who are righteous?
- What does a hunger and thirst for holiness and justice look like in today's world? How would you describe what it means to be satisfied in that pursuit?

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 7-9

Advancing Through Adversity

MON

4

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

→ ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS FOR CHRISTIANS to understand is how to find joy in suffering. Yet we know it can be done, because James tells us, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (1:2). And Peter says, “To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing” (1 Pet. 4:13). What’s more, with regard to persecution, Jesus said, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great” (Matt. 5:12). But how is this possible?

Paul offers a clue in Philippians, where he talks about “the fellowship of [Jesus’] sufferings” (3:10). In this part of the letter, the apostle’s objective is to know Christ and know Him thoroughly. If the Lord is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, then can we truly know Him while ignoring these attributes?

When we view hardships as windows into the heart of our Savior, our perspective changes: Suffering begins to feel more like an opportunity than a curse. It gives us access to intimate fellowship with Jesus that comes only through shared suffering.

Are you struggling in a trial today? I pray for your strength to endure so that you might discover more of who Jesus truly is.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 10-12

TUE
5

Getting Our Attention Through Adversity

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

→ WHEN FACING ADVERSITY OR HARDSHIP, some Christians ask, “Why is this happening to me?” Others think they are being really spiritual when they suffer in silence or say things like, “God knows what He is doing. He doesn’t have to explain anything to me.”

It is true that our heavenly Father knows what He is doing and does not owe us any explanations, but that doesn’t mean we should dismiss our hardship or avoid thinking about what He might want to accomplish through it. On the contrary, the Bible tells us to remember that God is sovereign, even over our adversities (Eccl. 7:14). This was the case in today’s reading, where Paul says God sent an affliction—which he describes as a “messenger of Satan”—to keep him from exalting himself (2 Cor. 12:7). The apostle admits pride is a problem for him and acknowledges that God is justified in dealing with him to correct it.

Such a truthful confession does not eliminate suffering but sweetens it until we can say with Paul, “Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (v. 10).

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 13-15

Jesus, the Faithful Witness

WED

6

REVELATION 1:4-8

→ JOHN WROTE THE BOOK OF REVELATION to encourage Christians being heavily persecuted by the Roman emperor Domitian. Approximately 25 years earlier Rome had destroyed Jerusalem and taken away Christians' rights. Many believers were beginning to wonder, *Where is Jesus? Is He still Lord?* So John's main purpose in writing this book was to remind believers that Jesus Christ was alive, and He was and would continue to be the same loving, all-powerful Son of God.

We also can be encouraged by remembering who Jesus is. Revelation 1:5 reminds us that He is the faithful witness, which means we can rely on every single thing He says. And not only are His words true, but according to John 14:6, He Himself *is* the truth. In other words, if He says He will do something, we can trust that it will happen. And that includes not only His statement that life on earth isn't all there is, but also that He will be with us forever (1 Thess. 4:17).

We know Jesus' words are trustworthy because He conquered death through the cross and His resurrection, preparing the way for all who trust Him. If you're unsure whether Jesus is alive and active in your life, remember what lengths He went to in order to keep His word.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 16-18

THU
7

Worthy of Our Praise

REVELATION 5

→ IN JOHN'S VISION, angels surround the throne in heaven and sing, "Worthy is the Lamb!" From the apostle's glimpse into the heavenly realm, it was clear that the Lord rules over earthly kings—even over the emperor Domitian, who at the time was set on destroying followers of Christ. Like other Roman emperors, he wanted to be worshipped as god and felt threatened by the believers' faith. Understandably, early Christians needed to be reminded that Jesus, the Lamb, reigns over all.

Throughout Scripture, the Lord has established that He alone is God. Consider King Nebuchadnezzar, who was warned that he would be humbled in order to recognize that "the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind" (Dan. 4:17). Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar, who had vast power, in time learned that the King of heaven is worthy, "for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride" (v. 37).

One day, all creation will bow before Jesus and confess that He alone is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). But we don't have to wait; we can worship Him now. We can also pray that, like Nebuchadnezzar, those who have been given great power will receive revelation of who Jesus truly is.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 19-21

Spreading the Good News

FRI
8

ACTS 14:19-23

→ SAUL OF TARSUS, the zealous persecutor of Christians, underwent a radical transformation and became a passionate follower of Christ. Later known as Paul, he dedicated his time, energy, and talent to spreading the gospel message. What motivated him to surrender his life wholeheartedly to Jesus?

JESUS' SACRIFICE OF LOVE. Paul realized that Jesus left His heavenly home, suffered, and died so we might be reconciled to God. This sacrifice moved the apostle to tell others about the Savior's all-encompassing love (Eph. 3:18).

GRATITUDE FOR SALVATION. Calling himself the worst of sinners, Paul acknowledged that he was unworthy of salvation and undeserving of mercy or favor (1 Tim. 1:15-16). It was gratitude for salvation that fueled his devotion and dedication to the cause of Christ.

POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO TRANSFORM LIVES. The apostle's own experience made him long to see others rescued from slavery to sin so they might experience God's grace. He wanted many to benefit from the saving and transforming power of the gospel.

When inadequacy or doubt keeps us silent, let's remember what motivated Paul to share the gospel. Then imagine a day when loved ones will experience the peace of God, the love of Christ, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 22-24

SAT
9

Does Prayer Influence God?

JAMES 5:13-18

→ OUR HEAVENLY FATHER chooses to involve the prayers of His children in the outworking of His plan (2 Kings 20:1-6). But what about a circumstance like a friend's serious illness? Perhaps you wonder, *Why should I pray about it if God already knows how the situation will turn out?*

When you pray, God works in your heart so that you are in harmony with His will. Prayer lets us in on what He is doing. In the event that God calls your friend home, He also prepares you with awareness of His presence—that way, when you walk through the valley, you have peace. And in some situations, your prayer may be the very instrument God plans to use in bringing about a result He desires.

No farmer can control the yield of his crops. He can till the soil and plant the seed in the best way he knows, but it is the Lord who causes growth. Of course, God could produce crops without help, but no farmer reaps a fantastic harvest sitting at home. In a similar way, the heavenly Father chooses to work through us because He is a God of relationship. He wants to involve us in His work, and that includes our prayers.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 25-27

The Blessing of Perspective

To get the most out of this devotion, set aside time to read the Scripture referenced throughout.

→ IT'S EASY TO GET WRAPPED UP in the rhythms of daily life—jobs, family and social commitments, homes, to-do lists, and even time-consuming distractions. We go from one thing to the next, usually focused on earthly demands and pleasures. It can feel like a difficult tension sometimes, to get through each day with appropriate attention on godly priorities.

Thankfully, we're not the first to navigate this, and Scripture offers direction. Paul reminded the Colossians to take an eternal perspective, setting their mind on "the things above" (3:1-2). And just a few verses after the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us of precisely that: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21).

THINK ABOUT IT

→ Consider what it looks like to have an eternal perspective. How can your job, chores, or commute help you focus on "things above," as Paul encouraged? What else could you include?

→ Contemplate habits or practices that help you redirect your attention to God's promises such as worship, prayer, or fasting. How often do you participate in these things?

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Chronicles 28-29

MON
11

Searching for Unforgiveness

LUKE 17:3-4

→ UNFORGIVENESS IS LIKE FERTILE SOIL for a crop of noxious weeds. It is the source of much that can go sour in personal relationships and, therefore, impacts our relationship with God. Sometimes it's disguised—for instance, if people say in an angry tone that they have forgiven past offenses, their obvious bitterness betrays them. Unforgiveness can sink into your heart and hide from you; then it can hurt relationships without you ever being aware of it.

Consider these following questions to see if you need to forgive someone:

→ Have you been hoping that a certain person will get what he or she deserves?

→ Do you talk negatively about this individual to others?

→ Do you indulge in fantasies of revenge—even mild ones?

→ Do you mull over what someone did to you?

→ How do you feel if a good thing happens to that individual?

→ Do you blame him or her for how your life turned out?

→ Do you find it hard to be open and trusting with people?

→ Are you frequently angry, depressed, or bitter?

→ Do you find it difficult or impossible to thank God for your offender?

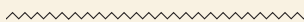
Take a moment to let God examine your heart. Will He find any unforgiveness there?

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 1-4



Blown Away

Though resisting God might seem to work for a while, giving in is infinitely better.



→ **THE WALLS OF JERICHO** were once blown down at the sounding of trumpets. When Jesus entered that same city some 1,500 years later, His presence blew one man's walls down and conquered his soul for heaven. This month, we read the story of Zaccheus, a dishonest first-century tax collector. Cheating builds walls between us and others, but Jesus makes us hunger for good.

Continued on pg 18



READ Matthew 5:6 and Luke 19:1-10

BACKGROUND Jesus had become known in Israel and was welcomed by crowds as He passed through the towns, teaching about the kingdom of God.

REFLECT When our hunger for righteousness is strong enough, we might do things that seem silly in the world's eyes. But a "fool for Christ" (1 Cor. 4:10) will be blessed. → Luke 19 identifies Zaccheus as "a chief tax collector," "rich," and "a sinner" (vv. 2, 7). He was a man of influence and authority, known for his immoral ways. Yet he was so eager to see Jesus that he ran ahead of the crowds and, though a grown man, actually climbed a tree. Do you find his actions surprising? Does the invitation of Jesus (v. 5), who sees into our hearts, give you any clues about what Zaccheus may have been thinking at the time? → King David once wrote that he was "crushed with longing" and wept with grief (Ps. 119:20, 28) from an intense desire for God's ways. Do you see evidence of a similar desire in Zaccheus's story? In your own life?

→ Not everyone living a "bad" life is happy about it. Perhaps you recall a time when you were trapped in sin but hungered for truth or right living. Did your situation resolve? How has your experience helped you minister

**TO ENCOUNTER
JESUS IS A RADICAL
EXPERIENCE,
AND IT DEMANDS
FROM US A
RADICAL RESPONSE.**

mercifully to those who, like Zaccheus, appear to be enjoying a life of sin?

CONTINUING THE STORY

To encounter Jesus is a radical experience, and it always demands from us a radical response.

→ Luke 19 implies Zaccheus had been living an unrighteous life for many years. (Tax collectors, of whom he was chief, were widely believed to amass their wealth through theft.) But verses 8-9 indicate a stunning change of heart. Have you ever been affected by Jesus this way? If you feel trapped at this moment, would you like to ask Him to “break down your walls” right now?

→ When the Lord acknowledged Zaccheus and called him down from the tree, the tax collector rejoiced (v. 6), though onlookers complained about Jesus’ selection. Being confronted with Christ always involves a choice: shame and retreat, or humility and embrace. When we hold on to our sin, we’ll always choose retreat. But the heart that’s willing to repent can freely embrace Jesus. How do Zaccheus’s words (v. 8) explain his eagerness to dine with the Lord, no matter what the crowd said?

→ *Xaíro*, Greek for “rejoice” or “be glad” (v. 6), is related to *xáris*, meaning “grace.” What does that tell you about the reason for Zaccheus’s joy? About the power of Jesus’ presence to destroy our resistance and draw us into righteousness?

→ In Matthew 5:6, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” How would you describe Zaccheus’s satisfaction in this story?

**BEING CONFRONTED
WITH CHRIST
ALWAYS INVOLVES A
CHOICE: SHAME AND
RETREAT, OR HUMILITY
AND EMBRACE.**

Continued on pg 20



REFLECT Our initial conversion changes life forever, yet hunger for righteousness continues as we grow.

→ Paradoxically, Jesus both satisfies and increases the Christian's desire for purity. Why do you think that is?

→ David pleaded with God, "Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name" (Ps. 86:11 NIV). When we can't trust ourselves to walk right, we can trust Him to break down our resistance and reshape our heart.

GOING FURTHER *Consider how this study applies to your life.*

It is a blessing to have a heart that hungers for righteousness. And when we place our faith in Jesus Christ, God fulfills that longing in two ways: He forgives our sins, granting us the righteousness of His Son (2 Cor. 5:21), and He gives us a new heart that inclines to right living (v. 17). But this doesn't mean "right living" will no longer be a struggle. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, the apostle Paul even used beating his body into submission as a metaphor of the strenuous fight to continue in Christlikeness. Thankfully, our heavenly Father gives us strength for the battle, and His compassions never fail—even when we ourselves do.

→ Prayer, Scripture reading, and church fellowship are some of the ways we can enjoy Jesus'

presence today. What could you do this week to draw near to the Lord and increase your hunger for Him?

→ To approach Jesus is to be exposed to the light. That can lead to both joy at His loveliness and alarm as we see our own faults. Each is a natural part of our journey with Him. Do you have a strong enough sense of His mercy to abide in His light? A great enough hunger to seek His goodness? What are some of the challenges related to these ideas?

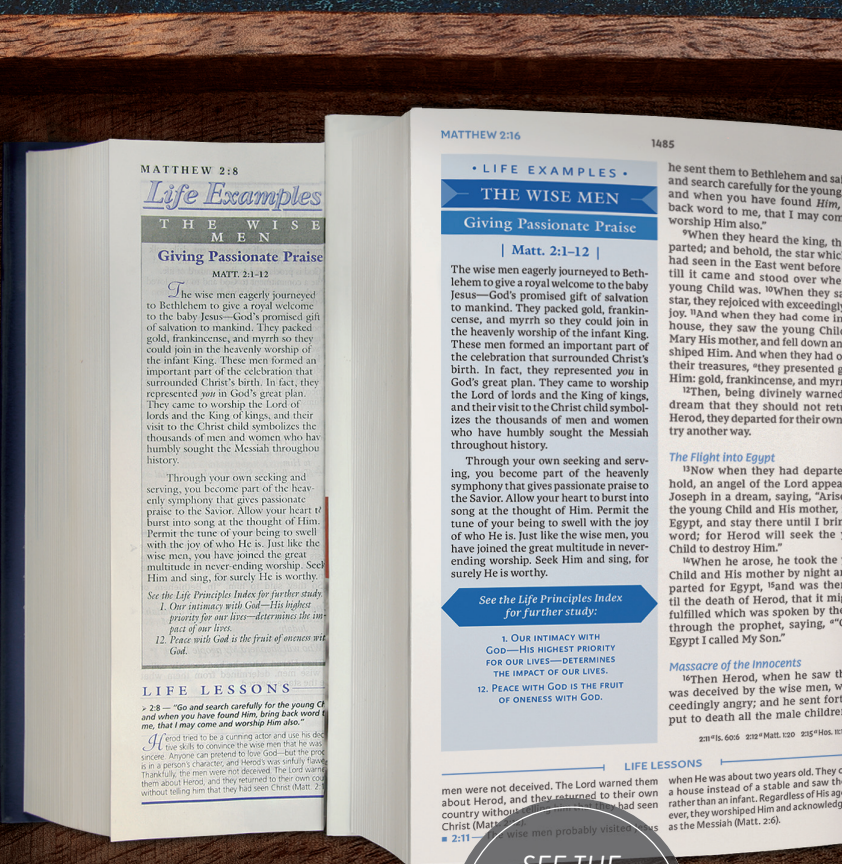
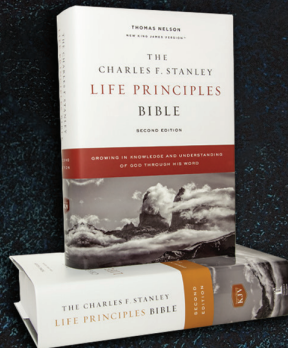
→ To some people, the fragrance of Christ is life, and to others, death (2 Cor. 2:14-16). A fuller understanding of Jesus will help ensure that we always allow our walls to be blown away by His righteousness and grace—which leads to profound joy.

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MATTHEW 2:8

Life Examples

THE WISE MEN

Giving Passionate Praise

MATT. 2:1-12

The wise men eagerly journeyed to Bethlehem to give a royal welcome to the baby Jesus—God's promised gift of salvation to mankind. They packed gold, frankincense, and myrrh so they could join in the heavenly worship of the infant King. These men formed an important part of the celebration that surrounded Christ's birth. In fact, they represented war in God's great plan. They came to worship the Lord of lords and the King of kings, and their visit to the Christ child symbolizes the thousands of men and women who have humbly sought the Messiah throughout history.

Through your own seeking and serving, you become part of the heavenly symphony that gives passionate praise to the Savior. Allow your heart to burst into song at the thought of Him. Permit the tune of your being to swell with the joy of who He is. Just like the wise men, you have joined the great multitude in never-ending worship. See! Him and sing, for surely He is worthy.

See the Life Principles Index for further study.

1. Our intimacy with God—His highest priority for sinners—determines the impact of our lives.
2. Peace with God is the fruit of oneness with God.

LIFE LESSONS

2:8 — "Go and search carefully for the young child and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

If you tried to be a cunning actor and use his disguise to use skills to convince the wise men that he was sincere, anyone can pretend to love God—but the proof is a person's character, and Herod was certainly faked them about Herod, and they returned to their own country without telling him that they had seen Christ (Matt. 2:12).

MATTHEW 2:16

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• LIFE EXAMPLES •

THE WISE MEN

Giving Passionate Praise

| Matt. 2:1-12 |

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See the Life Principles Index for further study:

1. OUR INTIMACY WITH GOD—HIS HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR OUR LIVES—DETERMINES THE IMPACT OF OUR LIVES.
2. PEACE WITH GOD IS THE FRUIT OF ONENESS WITH GOD.

he sent them to Bethlehem and said and search carefully for the young child and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

"When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which had been seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child and Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

"Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."

The Flight into Egypt

"Now when they had departed and held, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.'

"When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there till the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'O Egypt I called My Son.'

Massacre of the Innocents

"Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth word to death all the male children

23rd Ex. 6:6-8 23rd Matt. 1:20 23rd Hos. 11:1

LIFE LESSONS

men were not deceived. The Lord warned them about Herod, and they returned to their own country without telling him that they had seen Christ (Matt. 2:12).

These men probably visited Herod's court.

when He was about two years old. They came to a house instead of a stable and saw the young Child rather than an infant. Regardless of His age, they worshiped Him and acknowledged Him as the Messiah (Matt. 2:6).

SEE THE DIFFERENCE COMFORT PRINT® MAKES

TUE
12

The Gift of Forgiveness

MATTHEW 18:21-35

→ HOW CAN YOU LIFT THE DEBT from your debtors if you don't comprehend your own indebtedness? How can you offer that freedom if you yourself have never received it? One of the biggest obstacles to forgiving others is our failure to understand the depth of God's forgiveness for us. Not until you accept that God has paid the penalty on your account will you cease your efforts to collect from others.

When you take God at His word, this glorious freedom can start to sink in. Then you can then begin the process of offering your offenders full forgiveness. You must choose to leave all punishment or retaliation up to the Lord. It is essential that you surrender your so-called "rights," whether it is your right to get even or to get justice. Remember, we can totally trust God to handle our injustices appropriately because He is the ultimate judge.

It may be helpful to write out a list of all the offenses against you that you can think of. Then bring them one by one before God and leave them at His feet. By doing this—and by asking for His help—you can release your offender to the One who says, "Vengeance is Mine" (Heb. 10:30).

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 5-7

When a Fellow Christian Stumbles

WED
13

GALATIANS 6:1-5

→ ONE OF OUR RESPONSIBILITIES as part of God’s household is to come alongside a brother or sister who has stumbled. Paul specifies that those “who are spiritual” should restore the fallen, but the word *spiritual* doesn’t mean some elite group of pious leaders. It refers to Christians who are living under the Holy Spirit’s control and who have an attitude of ...

GENTLENESS. Restoration of a fellow believer doesn’t call for harshness, anger, judgment, or condemnation. Our goal is not to heap pain and guilt upon a hurting brother or sister but rather to show mercy and forgiveness (2 Cor. 2:5-8).

HUMILITY. Those who have a superior attitude look down on a fallen brother and think, *I would never make those mistakes.* But the humble know their own vulnerability and can easily put themselves in the other person’s shoes.

LOVE. When we love others, we will willingly share their burden. This requires an unselfish investment of our time, energy, and prayer on their behalf.

How do you react when a fellow Christian stumbles? One of the ugliest human traits is the tendency to feel better about ourselves when another person misses the mark. Let’s pray that our heart will be filled with compassion instead, and that we’ll come alongside to love and help believers who are distanced from the Lord.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 8-10

THU
14

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

JOHN 14:16-18

→ SOME CHRISTIANS DON'T REALIZE the Holy Spirit came at the moment of salvation to live permanently within them. And some who do realize this don't understand who the Spirit is, how He works, or why His indwelling presence is so significant.

The Holy Spirit is a person—not simply a power or force—and He, along with the other two members of the Trinity, was involved in creation. We know this because when God created mankind, He said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). The plural pronouns in this passage refer to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

On the night before the crucifixion, Jesus told the disciples that the Father would send them a Helper who would be with them and in them forever (John 14:16-17). Even though the Lord would no longer be physically present, He wasn't going to leave them to fend for themselves like orphans. Instead, He promised to come to them through the presence of His Spirit (v. 18).

Because of the crucifixion, today the Spirit is our leader, guide, teacher, and comforter. His presence in us means that we are God's children and that God has upheld His promise to always be with us.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 11-14

The Need for Spiritual Discernment

FRI
15

2 CORINTHIANS 11:13-15

→ JOHN TELLS US THAT THE WHOLE WORLD lies in the power of the Evil One (1 John 5:19). For this reason, spiritual discernment is of utmost importance. Thankfully, Hebrews 5:11-14 reminds us of believers “who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong” (NLT). In other words, we can get better at distinguishing between truth and error through practice.

In today’s passage, Paul mentions he was dealing with false apostles disguising themselves as servants of righteousness. The same thing happens today: Such servants are all around, “peddling their wares.” It’s their attempt to carry away those who are always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7).

We may find it challenging to match wits with false apostles, but we can subject them to the obedience test found in 1 John 2:4: “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” However, this test works only if we ourselves know the truth. Dive into Scripture today so that you can “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). Knowing God’s Word is what will help our quest for godly wisdom.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 15-17

SAT
16

God Is Always In Control

ISAIAH 45:1-7

→ **WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN?** Honestly, it's a question I can't answer, but I believe God has a purpose for everything. My faith is in the fact that the Lord is sovereign (Ps. 22:28).

When we're in the middle of a trial, it's hard to resist crying out, "God, why is this happening?" Sometimes we get an answer and sometimes we don't. But we can be sure nothing happens by accident. We have His promise that He'll cause "all things to work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28).

Seeing in advance how God will work all things for our benefit can be very difficult, if not impossible. Our limited human perspective often doesn't allow us to grasp His greater plan. However, the Father's good handiwork is in everything—even our pain, hardships, and losses. He turns mourning into gladness and provides bountiful blessings and benefits from our darkest hours.

As believers, we must accept that things won't always make sense to us. Isaiah teaches that God's ways and thoughts are higher than our own (Isa. 55:9). He sees the beautifully completed big picture. We can rely on the fact that God is in control, no matter how wildly off-kilter our world seems to be.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 18-20

Our Longing for Eternity

To get the most out of this devotion, set aside time to read the Scripture referenced throughout.

→ **THINK OF A TIME** when you've deeply longed for something. Maybe you wished to live somewhere else or felt restless in your job or schoolwork. Or perhaps you were deeply anxious to grow your family, as so many in the Bible were. (See Gen. 11:30; 25:21.) How did you respond? Did you pray for change, escape through temporary satisfaction, or seek support from your friends and loved ones?

As you contemplate your deep yearnings, remember that one longing God has put on your heart transcends all earthly desires: the longing for eternity. Keep in mind His words to the prophet Isaiah: "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you" (55:3). The Lord calls each of us to everlasting life in Him.

THINK ABOUT IT

→ Looking ahead to that eternal promise of redemption, what can you do today—in addition to deepening your prayer life—in order to draw closer to God? Consider things you could start doing as well as things you could give up.

→ What would it take to have all your longing and restlessness satisfied?

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 21-23



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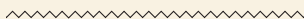
05 / 20

Spotlight



Get Busy Living

BY JOSEPH E. MILLER



→ **AFTER A HARD DAY OF WORK**, Jess Kerley had plopped down on the couch with his wife Anne to watch a movie in their home outside of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Kerley thought about little more than unwinding until a line from the film struck him deeply: **Continued on pg 30**



HE WAS ABLE TO BLESS HIS AGING FATHER-IN-LAW WITH A MESSENGER. GIVING THE DEVICE WAS A SIMPLE ACT, BUT ONE THAT CARRIED ETERNAL WEIGHT.

“I guess it comes down to a simple choice, really: Get busy living, or get busy dying.” Kerley had recently survived a rare form of leukemia, upending his expectations for life and sending him on a journey for renewed purpose. He had always “kept busy,” but now he

asked himself, “To what purpose?”

Through missionary friends, the Kerleys learned to love the mission field but weren’t sure what it meant for them personally. Jess had labored to build a successful HVAC company with plans to sell it and fund an early retirement. Anne, a former stay-at-home mom, started working outside the house to increase their savings. But during this season, a friend issued a challenge, suggesting they should equip missionaries carrying the gospel to remote locations worldwide. And eventually, they did.

In 2007 the couple kept a small stockpile of useful materials on hand to ship out to people in the field: Messenger audio Bibles, DVDs of the *JESUS* film, solar-powered battery packs, and water filtration devices. Jess and Anne even had the chance to carry devices into Peru and Panama themselves—as they met people transformed by the gospel, they saw first-hand the effects of their supportive role.

But then in 2019, several years into retirement, Kerley started feeling sick when he ate. Also concerned about a rapid weight loss, he went to the hospital, where a scan revealed that cancer had returned, this time in his colon. After undergoing surgery to remove as much of the cancer as possible, he began seeing a counselor for help processing the events mentally and emotionally. He felt frustrated that the disease had derailed his plans to serve God in a greater way. The therapist diagnosed him with one additional malady: “workaholism.”

Approved for a trial drug, Kerley now spends hours each day tending to his health and little else. It’s painful to sit still and wait, but in the quiet moments, he’s reminded of God’s faithfulness—like the time he was able to loan his aging father-in-law a Messenger. The 90-year-old had lost his sight and with it, the joy of reading Scripture, and the audio Bible helped him get into the Word again. Giving the device was a simple act, but one that carried eternal weight.

As he regains strength, Kerley looks forward to being fully active again. And though he’s unable to travel the way he wants to, he’s still sending supplies into the field. For now, his mission is to get busy living—this time letting God do the work inside him.



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MON
18

The Cross: The Heart of Christianity

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

→ THE CROSS HAS BECOME THE SYMBOL OF CHRISTIANITY, but it's so much more than a mere piece of jewelry worn around the neck. The crucifixion of Christ is a central doctrine of our faith, and understanding it correctly is essential for eternal life. In fact, Paul was convinced the cross was the most vital subject he could address.

It's important for us as believers to understand what happened on the cross. Then we too can be thoroughly convinced of its supreme significance. Far more than simply the site of a Jewish man's execution, the cross was the solution to mankind's biggest problem: sin and our resulting alienation from God. The crucifixion is the divine transaction that saves us. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse us from sin and reconcile us to the Father. Although the Jews and the Romans viewed the crucifixion as the execution of a criminal, God saw the death of His Son as the perfect atoning sacrifice, which allowed for the justification of sinful mankind.

Nothing else is required to pay for our salvation. To be saved, all we must do is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for our sins.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 24-25

God's Plan of Crucifixion

TUE
19

ACTS 2:22-36

→ **WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR JESUS' CRUCIFIXION?** Though both the Jews and the Romans played a role in putting Him on the cross, God was the one who had already planned His Son's death as atonement for mankind's sin.

Peter made this very clear in his first sermon, and he also affirmed it many years later in his first epistle, saying of Christ, "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God" (1:20-21). Even before creation and the entrance of sin into the world, God already had a plan in place for the redemption of those who would believe in Him.

The Father's plan for the crucifixion of His Son was motivated by the sinful, hopeless condition of mankind, His love for us, and His justice. God could neither ignore our sin nor simply decide to forgive us, because those options would be unjust, and He cannot act contrary to His nature. The cross was God's way of fulfilling His predestined plan of salvation. Now all who trust in Christ can be forgiven and receive eternal life. Have you done this?

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 26-28

WED
20

Where Love and Justice Meet

ROMANS 3:21-26

→ **THE LORD CAN'T HAVE A DILEMMA**, but if He could, it would be this: How can a loving God justly forgive sinners? Although God loves the people He created, He can't ignore, excuse, or arbitrarily forgive their transgressions, since His justice demands that sin's penalty be paid.

The solution was the cross, where divine love and justice met. Because God loves us, He sent His Son to earth to shed His precious blood on the cross in payment for our sin debt (Rom. 6:23). Since only a sacrifice without defect was acceptable (Lev. 22:20), Jesus alone qualified: As God in human flesh, He was the only person who ever lived a sinless life. At the cross, our sin was laid on Him, and He died in our place. This satisfied the Father's justice "so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

From our perspective, salvation is a free gift offered to everyone who confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord. However, for the Son and the heavenly Father, it was a very costly transaction. Therefore, we should never take our salvation for granted or think lightly of it. This gift is our most precious possession.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 29-31

Momentary Pleasure

THU
21

GENESIS 25:19-34

→ **DECISIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES.** That can be a good thing, but at times we end up dealing with lifelong repercussions. Then we look back and wish our decision had been wiser.

For example, in exchange for a bowl of stew, Esau sacrificed his birthright. In other words, he gave up not only his wealth, inheritance, position, and prominence but also power and the right to lead the entire family.

Is there a “bowl of stew” in your life—something you want badly that’s right in front of you, there for the taking? At the moment, it may seem like the right decision, but later you could find you’ve traded something valuable for something with little or no worth.

Whenever we’re ruled by anything besides the Holy Spirit, we are more prone to sacrifice our future for immediate gratification. Appetites are God-given, but they aren’t designed to dominate us. That’s what caused Esau to lose his future. He wanted to satisfy his appetite right then and, at the time, was willing to pay the price.

We can endanger our future when we focus on the temporary instead of the eternal. What are you doing right now that could have lifelong consequences? Is it worth it? Ask God to help you see your situation from His perspective.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 32-34

FRI
22

How to Reach Your Goals

1 KINGS 5:1-12, 6:38

→ **WHEN SETTING GOALS**, here are five things to consider:

COOPERATION IS NEEDED. First, we cooperate with God by agreeing to His plan. Second, we enlist the cooperation of others, starting with prayer support.

REACHING A GOAL REQUIRES CONSISTENCY. Since God is involved in establishing our goals, we can remain fixed on accomplishing them. Even if others discourage us, we stay the course as the Lord has asked.

CLEAR FOCUS MEANS STAYING FIXED ON OUR PURPOSE. By remembering that God set the goal for us, we will not allow others to change our direction.

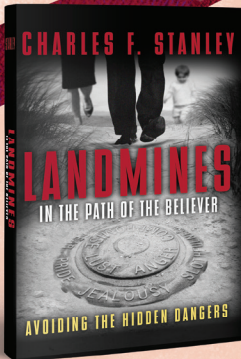
COURAGE IS OFTEN NECESSARY TO REACH A GOD-GIVEN GOAL. Being courageous involves a willingness to take action without knowing the outcome—and we can do that because it is God who asks. As we deepen our trust in Him, boldness will come.

DEVELOPING A LIFESTYLE OF DEPENDENCE ON GOD IS IMPORTANT. When aiming for a goal, it's easy to rely on our own strength and forget about leaning on God. True success requires dependence.

These items aren't a standard by which to measure ourselves; they're pointers to help us move in the right direction. If you're not sure how best to set and reach goals, seek out someone with experience and be open what God might teach you through him or her.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 2 Chronicles 35-36

pride
worldliness
idolatry
Anger
bitterness
jealousy
fear
contentment
selfishness
slothfulness
compromise



YOUR PATH TO PEACE

It's easy to forget how things like pride, envy, unforgiveness, and other negative attitudes can derail your Christian walk. In *Landmines in the Path of the Believer*, Dr. Stanley outlines the biblical principles for defusing these spiritual landmines so you can clear a path to God's peace.

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SAT
23

When We Ignore God

JAMES 4:17

→ **HAVE YOU EVER FELT IGNORED?** We all long for love, acceptance, and attention, but perhaps an important person in your life has shown little interest in you or what you have to say.

There's something even worse, though, than ignoring others: disregarding God. But we've all done it. One way we ignore Him is by failing to obey His instructions. Or maybe we sense His leading but don't follow. And unless we seek time with our Father—whether in His Word, prayer, or worship—we are neglecting Him again.

The consequences are painful. For one thing, neglect grieves God because He is our heavenly Father, who desires closeness with each of His children. We also miss out on the best for our life. Ignoring our connection with the Lord and choosing not to abide in Him would mean missing out on His plan and the fruit of the Spirit. As a result, we shortchange ourselves out of fulfilling the purpose for which He created us—glorifying Him. And remember, we eventually will be held accountable for our actions.

How are you choosing to live—do you pay attention to what God says, or are you living with your own set of standards? Your conscious choices affect your walk with Jesus. If you tune your spirit to listen and discipline yourself to obey, you'll enjoy great intimacy with the Lord.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Ezra 1-4

The Transformation of Our Desires

SUN
24

To get the most out of this devotion, set aside time to read the Scripture referenced throughout.

→ IN JOHN 6, a massive crowd has been following Jesus, and He miraculously feeds them by turning a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish into food for 5,000 people (vv. 9-13). The crowd recognizes that a prophet like Moses has been raised (v. 14; Deut. 18:15), and the next day they continue to seek after Him—perhaps hoping to see more miracles or be fed in abundance yet again.

He challenges them, saying, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst” (John 6:35). They are excited that He can take away their hunger and free them from starvation, but they haven’t thought about the promise of salvation—of everlasting life in Him. Let us remember, then, that Jesus wants to do more than just fill us with food and offer us earthly comfort; He wants to transform our desires.

THINK ABOUT IT

→ Throughout this chapter, Jesus uses eating and drinking to speak about belief in Him. How can these ordinary practices remind us of our faith in Christ?

→ What does it mean to pursue the “food” of eternal life?

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Ezra 5-7

MON
25

Turning Our Back on God

2 CHRONICLES 33

→ HEZEKIAH WAS A GOD-FEARING KING who brought about reformation. His son Manasseh, however, was an evil ruler. He had watched his father walk with God and live according to Scripture. Yet he chose to ignore the Lord. Manasseh worshipped false gods, even to the point of sacrificing his sons. He practiced evil—including witchcraft and sorcery—and led the people astray, thereby provoking the Lord to anger. This story illustrates that God doesn't tolerate an attitude of indifference toward Him.

Now consider our country. We, too, are a nation that largely disregards the Lord—one that has turned away from Him and embraced idols. Maybe ours aren't statues of stone, but we worship money, athletic ability, fame, politics, and reputation. Over time, we've removed the Lord from many aspects of public life. What was once a nation founded on godly principles has become a country that tolerates a variety of sins.

When Israel turned its back on the Lord, God's wrath was inevitable unless the people repented and made Him Lord once again. As believers, we have responsibility to pray that God will draw our heart—and the heart of our country—back to Himself, and that He will help the gospel and truth spread through our land.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Ezra 8-10

Don't Neglect Your Spiritual Gift

TUE
26

1 TIMOTHY 4:12-16

→ EVERY CHRISTIAN IS GIVEN A SPIRITUAL GIFT with which to serve and build up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7). Sadly, though, many believers neglect theirs. Timothy actually had some good reasons to forsake his calling, but Paul urged him not to “neglect [his] spiritual gift” (1 Tim. 4:14). We can learn from Timothy’s situation by asking ourselves if the following situations might be hindering us from fully serving God.

AGE: Whatever our age, the Lord wants us to use our spiritual gifts. Because of his youth, Timothy could’ve been intimidated by those with more experience. Others think they’re too old to serve God, but we’re never called into spiritual retirement.

INADEQUACY: Have you ever avoided a service opportunity simply because you felt totally unqualified? That’s probably how Timothy felt about leading the church at Ephesus. Our spiritual gifts rarely come to us fully developed. God often requires that we step out in faith and trust Him to work in and through us. Over time, as we obey and learn how to use our gifts, they become more effective for God’s kingdom.

Is anything keeping you from using your spiritual gifts? Though given *to us*, these abilities aren’t *for us*; they’re for the church. To neglect them not only deprives fellow believers; we ourselves are also robbed. We’ll find both joy and blessing by serving others and doing the work God has designated for us.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Nehemiah 1-3

WED
27

Life's Passing Storms

PSALM 107:23-32

→ EVERYONE EXPERIENCES STORMS IN LIFE—occasions that bring pain, suffering, or loss. It's in turbulent times that all sorts of questions come to mind: *Where is God? Why has this happened? Was it something I did? Did God cause it, and if so, why?* When we find ourselves in tumultuous times, the safest place to go for answers is God's Word.

The literal tempest described in today's passage provides insight regarding the Lord's role in the various upheavals we face. According to verse 25, God was responsible for this storm, as He was the one who raised the winds and waves that frightened the sailors.

Sometimes the Lord interrupts our life by sending turbulence so we will do what those sailors did—in their misery and helplessness, they cried for God's help. He then brought them out of their distress by calming the storm and guiding them to a safe haven. In response, they thanked the Lord for His lovingkindness and wondrous deliverance and praised Him to other people.

There's nothing like the sense of relief that comes when a storm is past. But let's not forget to respond like those grateful sailors.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Nehemiah 4-7

Why Does God Allow Storms in Our Life?

THU
28

JONAH 1

→ NO ONE LIKES TURBULENT TIMES, but until we reach heaven, they will be a part of our life. The underlying foundation for understanding the storms we encounter is found in Psalm 103:19. No matter what the apparent source is, God ultimately directs every situation, because His sovereignty rules over all.

He uses storms to ...

BRING US TO REPENTANCE. Sometimes we create chaotic conditions with our own sinful choices. Yet like Jonah, we'll discover that the Lord is always with us—even in our disobedience—drawing us back to Himself.

GROW US SPIRITUALLY. Trials force us to rely on God's strength rather than our own. We learn to endure, persevere, and submit to the Father so He can make us more like Christ.

REVEAL HIMSELF TO US. Turbulent times give us a more accurate perspective of God and the way He works. Sometimes this understanding comes when we look back on a storm and see how He brought us through. Then we realize His strength was sufficient and His purpose was good.

Take comfort in knowing that God controls your storms, and His mighty power and unfailing love govern whatever comes your way.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Nehemiah 8-10

FRI
29

The Storms of Life

1 PETER 4:12-19

→ **WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?** We've probably all asked that question at some point in our life. Perhaps our world was turned upside down by a medical diagnosis, a seemingly insurmountable financial crisis, a relationship that fell apart after starting out well, or a loss of some kind.

It's natural to want to know why a storm has occurred, but how we choose to handle it is also important. Will our trust in the Lord increase as we watch Him use our suffering to make us more Christlike, or will we become bitter and resentful toward Him? In other words, will we rage against God or humbly submit?

Sometimes we bring trouble on ourselves with willful disobedience; other times, storms come through no fault of our own. In either case, difficulties are common to all of us. And Peter tells us not to be surprised at fiery ordeals as if something strange is happening to us. Whatever the cause, God uses trials to purify and refine us. Therefore, as we aim to continually do what is right in the Creator's eyes, let's keep on rejoicing in the Lord, with our hope firmly set on Christ's return.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Nehemiah 11-13

The Word of Our Salvation

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-4

SAT
30

→ **TRY TO IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT BIBLES.** The reality is that there are places on earth where Scripture is unknown, and the people who live in those cultures don't know anything about Jesus Christ. This truth should stir us to pray not only that God's Word will reach them, but also that they will realize how valuable the Bible is. Without it, none of us would have any idea how to be saved—or even that we needed salvation.

→ The Bible reveals God's holiness and exposes mankind's sinful, hopeless condition (Rom. 3:23). Our sin makes us His enemies, and we can't do anything to remedy this situation.

→ Scripture explains what God did through Jesus Christ to provide a means of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19-21). The Father sent His Son to earth to become a substitute sacrifice to pay the penalty we deserved for our sin.

→ God's Word explains that we can receive Christ's gift of salvation by repenting of our sin and trusting in Him (Mark 1:15).

The next time you pick up your Bible, stop and thank God for giving you such a precious gift. And praise Him for making His wonderful plan of salvation known to you.

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Esther 1-5

SUN
31

SUNDAY REFLECTION

God's Promise to Satisfy Us

To get the most out of this devotion, set aside time to read the Scripture referenced throughout.

→ AS WE REFLECT on satisfying our hunger, thirst, and longing with a view to eternity, it becomes clear that God's intention isn't for us to disregard earthly pleasures. The things that bring us joy and satisfaction in our everyday lives are gifts from the Lord—given to enjoy, of course, but also to serve as important reminders of the satisfaction He promises.

In His love and mercy, God promises much: to faithfully stay with us (Deut. 31:6, Matt. 28:20), give us wisdom (James 1:5), fulfill every need we have (Phil. 4:19), meet us where we are (James 4:8), and reveal what we're to say in hard situations (Matt. 10:19), to name a few. We can look to these promises as we wait for His return, knowing that each earthly joy is but a glimpse of what is to come.

THINK ABOUT IT

→ Think of something you genuinely enjoy or find satisfying. Is it easy to see this as a reminder of the joy God offers?
→ When Christ's promises are realized, our souls will be satisfied. How does reflecting on His promises help you in your pursuit of righteousness and, ultimately, eternal satisfaction?

BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: Esther 6-10



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