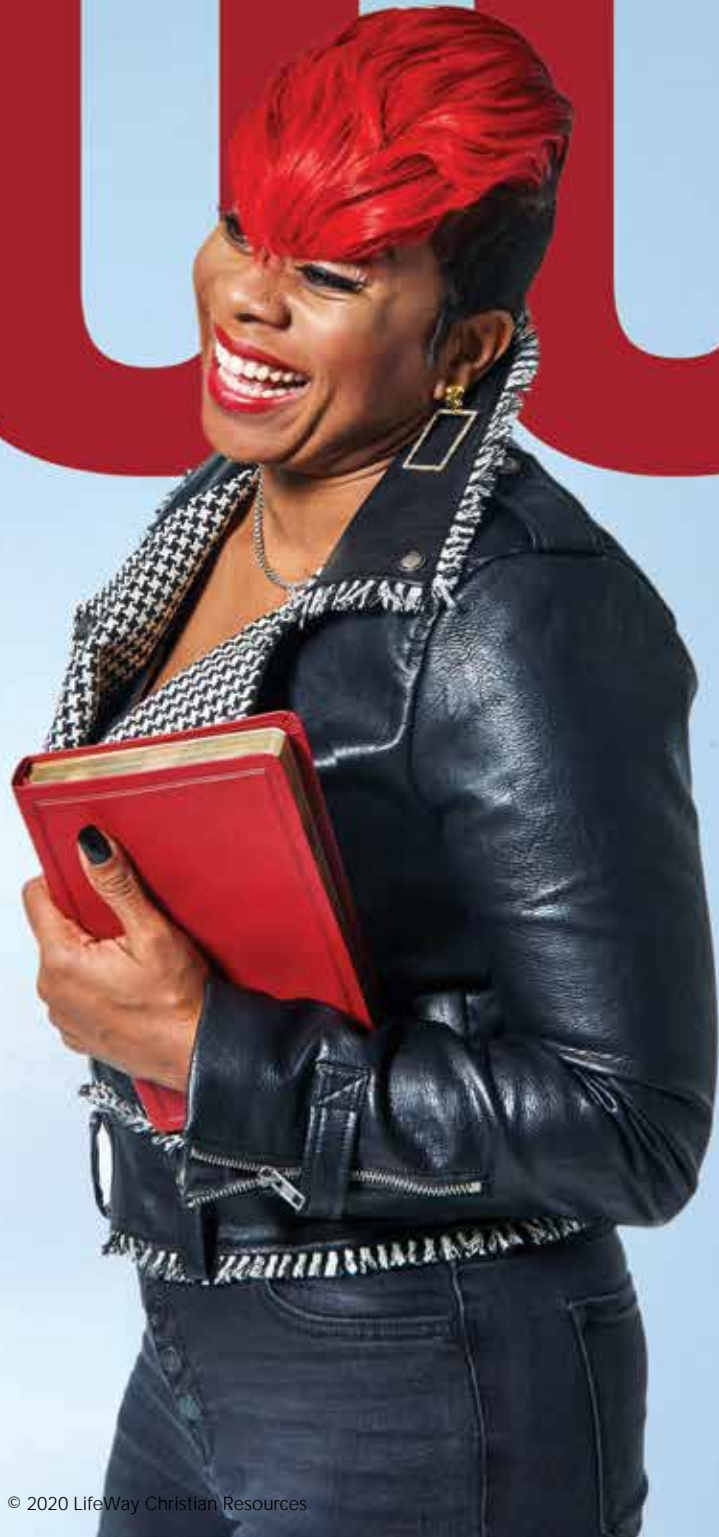


FALL 2020

LifeWay

# YOU



**AFTER GOD'S  
OWN HEART:**

A FRESH LOOK AT THE  
TEN COMMANDMENTS

+ + +

**ALL IN:**

A LIFE OF  
COMMITMENT

# STUDY 1 AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART:

## A FRESH LOOK AT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

---

### OVERVIEW

---

+ + +

People want to live life on their own terms, but God has given us a succinct and clear path to follow through the Ten Commandments. Obedience to these Commandments leads to a rich and full life. King David knew this. Through David's life and psalms, he gave us good examples of what happens when we follow the Ten Commandments and bad examples of what happens when we don't.

**Tony Evans** is senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and president of *The Urban Alternative*.

# STUDY 2 ALL IN:

## A LIFE OF COMMITMENT

---

### OVERVIEW

---

+ + +

Commitment is a rather loose word in our culture, but we have no greater idea of what commitment means than when we look at the commitment Christ made for us. Our response to Christ calls for nothing less than a full, all-in commitment to Him. In this study, we will dig into what that commitment entails, and in the process, we will discover there is no greater place to be than "all in" for Christ.

**Matt Carter** is the pastor of preaching and vision at The Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas.

# A New YOU



+ + + The curriculum you love and trust has been given a new look with new and updated features to better serve your Bible study needs. Here's what's new within the pages of YOU:

## **ON THE COVER**

Real people will grace each issue of YOU with a brief bio on page 4.

## **DISCIPLESHIP PLAN**

YOU learners will study topics in eight areas of Christian growth every year (see p. 8). These areas will result in increasing growth toward Christlikeness.

The areas are:

- Engage with Scripture
- Obey God and Deny Self
- Serve God and Others
- Share Christ
- Exercise Faith
- Seek God
- Build Relationships
- Live Unashamed

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

This feature now provides historical facts and current trends related to African-Americans.

## **DAILY READINGS**

YOU learners will be blessed with five, rather than four devotionals that will help to increase intimacy with and obedience to God.

## **LEADER PAGES**

With teaching that leads to spiritual transformation as its goal, the leader pages guide teachers with sequential directives and a complete commentary. (See p. 6 for help on how to use.)

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Along with Biblical Illustrator, now Advanced Bible Study and Herschel Hobbs Commentary can be used as resources that support scriptural passages of each session. (See p. 7)

# GOD'S UNFAILING PROMISE

+ + +

We've messed up. You have. I have. We all have. And no matter how good our intentions or efforts are, we can't make up for the wrong we've done.

The Bible uses a much stronger word—sin—to describe how we have failed to live according to God's perfect standard (Rom. 3:23). The result of our sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

Thankfully, we do not have to stay in this condemned state. In spite of our sin and rebellion against God, He loves us and made a way for us to be forgiven and receive a new, eternal life, freed from the consequences of our sin. That way is Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty of our sin and brokenness with His own death (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). When we turn away from our sin in repentance and turn to Christ in faith, He gives us a new life, freed from the penalty of sin. We are made new in Him (2 Cor. 5:17).

God's unfailing promise—His commitment to us—is the best guarantee we can be offered. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

To receive a new life in Christ, you can pray a prayer like this:

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins and rose from the dead to give me new life. I'm sorry for all the wrong I've done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Be baptized as an expression of your faith. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith.

+ + +

# CONTENTS

- 5 A WORD FROM MARK CROSTON
- 6 GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOU
- 7 FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER
- 8 DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

## STUDY 1 SESSIONS

AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART: A FRESH LOOK AT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

9	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
11	<b>SESSION ONE // PLACE GOD FIRST</b> Exodus 20:1-6; Psalm 16:1-4a,9-11
17	<b>SESSION TWO // HONOR GOD</b> Exodus 20:7-11; Psalm 145:1-7
23	<b>SESSION THREE // HONOR PARENTS</b> Exodus 20:12; 2 Samuel 15:7-14
31	<b>SESSION FOUR // HONOR LIFE</b> Exodus 20:13; 1 Samuel 26:7-11,22-25
37	<b>SESSION FIVE // HONOR MARRIAGE</b> Exodus 20:14; 2 Samuel 11:1-5
43	<b>SESSION SIX // HONOR ALL RELATIONSHIPS</b> Exodus 20:15-17; Psalm 37:1-6

## STUDY 2 SESSIONS

ALL IN: A LIFE OF COMMITMENT

51	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
53	<b>SESSION ONE // CHRIST'S COMMITMENT TO US</b> Romans 5:6-12,18-21
59	<b>SESSION TWO // OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST</b> Mark 10:13-22
67	<b>SESSION THREE // COMMITTED TO HIS WORD</b> Psalm 119:1-11
73	<b>SESSION FOUR // COMMITTED TO HIS CHURCH</b> Romans 12:3-16
79	<b>SESSION FIVE // COMMITTED TO PRAY</b> Colossians 1:3-12
85	<b>SESSION SIX // COMMITTED TO HIS WORSHIP</b> Psalm 99:1-9
91	<b>SESSION SEVEN // COMMITTED TO HIS MISSION</b> Romans 10:9-17

## ARTICLES

29	AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART
49	TEACHING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TO THE NEXT GENERATION
65	LEAVES ARE FALLING, CHRIST IS CALLING
98	PSALM 119: A HYMN TO GOD'S LAW
142	RECLAIMING GROUP MEMBERS
160	THREE WAYS TO TAKE THE TEMPERATURE OF YOUR GROUP

## LEADER PAGES

101	STUDY ONE LEADER PAGES
129	STUDY TWO LEADER PAGES
162	COMING NEXT QUARTER

# ON THE COVER

Singer-songwriter, Keesha, graces the cover of this issue of *YOU*. In her career, Keesha has shared the stage with top gospel artists on BET's *Bobby Jones Gospel*, The Word Network, and Impact Network. Baptized at an early age because of the influence of her God-loving family, Keesha has been in church all of her life. She affirms that her parents had a huge impact on her Christian walk. "They were spiritual guides that kept me on the straight and narrow," she says. Keesha grew up singing in the church choir, and recently embraced a calling into church leadership as minister of music. In addition, she and her brother are the sole caregivers for their mother who in recent years was diagnosed with dementia. Despite a demanding schedule, Keesha enjoys working out and playing volleyball. Currently, she sings both the United States and Canadian national anthems for the Nashville Predators ice hockey team. Her music is available digitally worldwide.



FALL 2020 + + + Vol. 13 No. 1

**Christina Zimmerman** Content Editor  
**Lynn Pryor** Team Leader  
**Ken Braddy** Director of Sunday School  
**Brandon Hiltibidal** Director, Groups Ministry  
**Mark Croston** Director of Black Church Partnerships

**Send questions/comments to:**

Content Editor by email to [christina.zimmerman@lifeway.com](mailto:christina.zimmerman@lifeway.com);  
or mail to Content Editor, *YOU*, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234; or make comments on the web at [lifeway.com](http://lifeway.com).

Printed in the United States of America

**YOU** (ISSN 1943-6230, Item 005030553) is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Ben Mandrell, President. © 2020 LifeWay Christian Resources. For ordering or inquiries, visit [lifeway.com](http://lifeway.com), or write LifeWay Resources Customer Service, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234. For bulk shipments mailed quarterly to one address, email [orderentry@lifeway.com](mailto:orderentry@lifeway.com) or write to the above address. We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit [www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline](http://www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline). Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. NOTE: Some Internet addresses given in this periodical are outside the LifeWay Internet domain. At the time of this posting, the specific pages mentioned were viewed and approved by LifeWay editorial staff. Because information on these pages may have changed by the time of your viewing, the LifeWay editorial staff cannot be held responsible for content on pages outside their control. Specific page addresses referenced in this periodical possibly may link to inappropriate material.



## EDITORIAL

### MARK CROSTON

It is always so exciting to receive something new. The new must be tried out, tried on, and explored—new clothes, a new gift, a new job, or even a new love. How about a new *YOU*? In 2 Corinthians 5:17 God lets us know He wants to make you new! “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” In fact, God is working to make everything new. Revelation 21:5 says, “Then the one seated on the throne said, ‘Look, I am making everything new.’” He also said, “Write, because these words are faithful and true.”

This quarter we are giving you a new *YOU*! We have a new style, a new pace, and a new look, but most of the same features that caused you to love *YOU* are still here. *YOU* is still a three-in-one resource: a Learner Guide; Daily Readings (now with five); and a Leader Guide. This quarter we are “All In” to be “After God’s Own Heart”! Try us out this quarter and please send me your feedback directly at [mark.croston@lifeway.com](mailto:mark.croston@lifeway.com).

Plan to join me at our Black Church Leadership and Family Conference, July 19-23, 2021, in Ridgecrest, North Carolina. Each year we plan something new to keep it fresh and to make it better every time. There is a full program for every member of the family! This is the place to bring your church leaders and their families to be edified, encouraged, and energized. Get all the details at [LifeWay.com/BlackChurchLife](http://LifeWay.com/BlackChurchLife). Now, grab your Bible and allow God to speak through *YOU*!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Mark A. Croston Sr.

National Director of Black Church Partnerships

[www.lifeway.com/BlackChurchLife](http://www.lifeway.com/BlackChurchLife)

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOU

*YOU* is a three-in-one learner and leader resource with inspirational and educational features to enhance Bible study that leads to spiritual maturity and life change. Here is information to help you get the most out of *YOU*.

## LEARNER PAGES

The first half of *YOU* includes pages for personal study. These should be read by the learner and leader prior to group time. Included in each session:

**Memory Verses** encourage filling the mind with the Word of God to strengthen every aspect of spiritual life.

**Digging Deeper** provides a deeper look at a word, character, or other aspect from the session.

**Did You Know?** provides an African-American or urban historical fact or update connected to the session.

## DAILY READINGS

Included with each session are five devotionals to be read by the learner and leader. The benefits of a daily devotion are innumerable. Their primary purpose in this resource is to focus attention on the biblical content of each session for application of and conformity to the Word of God.

## LEADER PAGES

The second half of *YOU* includes pages to guide teaching each session. Leaders can use the leader pages to guide learners through the passage and its key emphases as detailed on the learner pages. Here are suggestions on how to teach:

**Prior to the session, read and study the Bible passage, keywords, and learner pages.**

**Plan teaching using the leader pages. Keep in mind that because of time, it may not be possible to use every teaching suggestion. Also the teaching suggestions are in sequential order for easy use.**

**Features to use when teaching include: The Point, which is readily recognizable on the learner and leader pages; the question at the top of the first page of each learner session; Keywords on the Scripture pages; “Object Lessons”; “Digging Deeper”; “Did You Know?”; Pack Items\*; and Commentary at the end of each session on leader pages.**

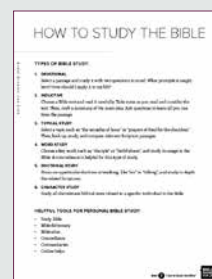
**Refine your teaching plans when necessary.**

## PRAY

Because the Holy Spirit is the guide for your study, invite Him to show you how to “rightly divide the word of truth” as you teach your group. Read the Bible passage several times, asking the Holy Spirit to show you its meaning and application.

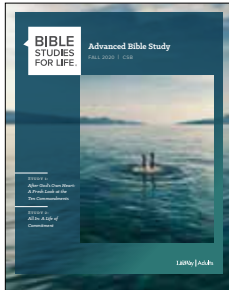
## \* PACK ITEMS

These are posters, charts, and handouts that can provide another layer to your teaching and add needed variety that makes learning more interesting. The *YOU* Leader Pack is located at [lifeway.com](http://lifeway.com).





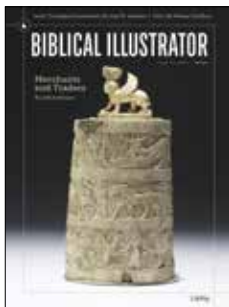
# FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER



The **Advanced Bible Study** is written for group members who desire more extensive commentary. It includes exposition of each session's Scripture passage, an examination of keywords, an introduction to the setting of the passage and biblical life and times, questions to guide the study, and interactive responses to help readers apply God's truths to their lives today.



The **Herschel Hobbs Commentary** is designed specifically for leaders and provides a comprehensive exposition of each session's Scripture passage. Specific attention is called to items in the biblical text that readers would miss without a commentary. This commentary is based on the King James Version but interacts with all major English translations.



Each quarter, **Biblical Illustrator** offers in-depth background information on Bible customs, history, culture, archaeology, and word studies through vivid photography, engaging maps and graphics, and lesson-targeted articles. You can subscribe to *Biblical Illustrator* by going to [lifeway.com/biblical-illustrator](http://lifeway.com/biblical-illustrator) or by calling 1-800-458-2772. Forty additional articles (in PDF form) that support this quarter's Bible studies are available at [lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator).

# YOU DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

## THE PATHWAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? LifeWay’s research reveals eight signposts that indicate believers are on the discipleship pathway that leads to spiritual maturity. Each year, *YOU* engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ.

Visit [BibleStudiesforLife.com](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com) for a fuller picture of this discipleship plan through 2022.

8 Signposts	Fall 2020	Winter 2020-21	Spring 2021	Summer 2021
<b>Build Relationships</b>	After God's Own Heart			
<b>Seek God</b>	All In: A Life of Commitment			
<b>Obey God and Deny Self</b>		When Emotions Rise		
<b>Engage with Scripture</b>		Spiritual Disciplines: Becoming More Like Jesus		
<b>Exercise Faith</b>			The Essentials of Christianity	
<b>Share Christ</b>			How to Share Christ	
<b>Live Unashamed</b>				Walking in Confidence
<b>Serve God and Others</b>				Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts

# STUDY 1 AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART: A FRESH LOOK AT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

---

## HOW THIS STUDY FITS YOUR'S DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

---

+ + +

### **Build Relationships.**

We have no greater way to build good relationships than what we find in the Ten Commandments God provided. In the briefest and clearest of statements, God has revealed the way to relate to Him and others.

---

## **Writer Bio**

---

### **Tony Evans**

wrote the learner pages. He is senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and president of *The Urban Alternative*. He's been preaching for more than fifty years and can be heard on the radio broadcast, *The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans*. Learn more about Dr. Evans at [tonyevans.org](http://tonyevans.org).

### **Marshelle Jackson Wilburn**

adapted the learner pages for the *YOU* audience. She is an inspirational speaker, author, leadership trainer, and urban missionary to the San Francisco Bay Area. She also partners in ministry with her husband, Port, in church planting and associational missions. They have five children.



## A BIBLE STUDY ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

+ + +

Morals and beliefs have become slanted in today's world. People want to live life on their own terms in a "YOLO" (you only live once) culture; therefore, we are encouraged to "do you," "get yours," and so much more that focuses on self-satisfaction and instant gratification. This way of life runs counter to God's desire for us.

Because God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us, He made sure that we have a direct and clear path to follow through the Ten Commandments. These commandments show us that God is intensely concerned with how we live. Unfortunately, too many people see these commandments as outdated or a negative list of don'ts, but obeying them leads to a rich and full life. Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments in two brief and powerful statements: (1) love God and (2) love others (Matt. 22:37-40). When our

lives are Christ-centered in love, we live out God's moral expectation for us. We live out the Ten Commandments.

King David knew this. He was identified as a "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22), and he loved and valued the commands of God. This study encourages us to take a fresh look at the Ten Commandments through the life of David and his psalms. He gave us good examples of what happens when we follow the Ten Commandments, and examples of bad things that can happen when we don't.

God will never leave us on our own, trying to guess how to live life. Instead, He wants us to have a full understanding of His expectations and plans for our lives. Our well-being has always been one of His greatest concerns. That's important to know in this world in which we live.

# PLACE GOD FIRST

**THE POINT:**  
GOD IS TO HAVE FIRST  
PLACE IN EVERY  
ASPECT OF LIFE.

**EXODUS /// 20:1-6;  
PSALM /// 16:1-4A,9-11**

Ex. 20:1 Then God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. <sup>3</sup> Do not have other gods besides me. <sup>4</sup> Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. <sup>5</sup> Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

Ps. 16:1 Protect me, God, for I take refuge in you. <sup>2</sup> I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have nothing good besides you." <sup>3</sup> As for the holy people who are in the land, they are the noble ones. All my delight is in them. <sup>4a</sup> The sorrows of those who take another god for themselves will multiply.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my body also rests securely. <sup>10</sup> **For you will not abandon me to Sheol; you will not allow your faithful one to see decay.** <sup>11</sup> **You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures.**

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

**a: Sheol (Ps. 16:10)** – This is the abode of the dead (the underworld, "the pit," "the grave"), where it was believed everyone went after death. Even so, God is there (Ps. 139:8).

# HOW CAN I PUT GOD FIRST IN MY LIFE?

Have you ever felt disappointed? Frustrated? Hurt? Confused? We all have. Life comes with issues—and these issues can show up in so many ways. When enough issues arise, life begins to feel like one big mess.

A man visited a doctor because his entire body hurt. From the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, he felt pain. Every single place he touched brought great pain to him. The doctor examined him and said, “I don’t see anything wrong.” He asked the man to touch different places on his body. But each time, he cried out in pain.

After a few minutes of this, the doctor diagnosed the problem. “Sir,” the doctor said, “You have a dislocated finger.”

While it felt like everything was wrong, it was only one thing. This can be true for our lives as well. Even though it may seem like everything in life is a mess, the solution comes down to three words: Put God first. This one action affects everything.

## God Alone Is God // Exodus 20:1-6

We put God first because He alone is God. This statement covers more than we realize. Some of us would say, “God is first,” but is He? For some people, what’s “first” in their lives is money, careers, pleasure, social media, sports, a person, or a special possession. When we give to anyone or anything the devotion, authority, and worship God alone deserves, the Bible describes that with one word: *idolatry*.

True, in our culture, we don’t bow down to wooden idols or statues. We don’t declare our devotion through rituals or sacrifice. Even though we don’t, it can be deceiving. Because we don’t physically bow to a person or a possession, we can blindly think they aren’t idols. The reality is, there are idols in our culture, and yet we mistakenly believe God is first in our lives.

God calls us to devote ourselves to Him first because He alone is God. In Him we find true life, both in this world and in eternity. As King,



## THE POINT: GOD IS TO HAVE FIRST PLACE IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE.

He sits over all. He rules over all. He governs all. God's rules are rooted in love, and He calls us to love Him. Jesus summed up what our devotion to God looks like: Love God and love others (Mark 12:29-31).

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO PLACE GOD "FIRST" IN TODAY'S CULTURE?

To put God first means to live a life punctuated by a love which stems from a spirit of gratitude. Many who study the Ten Commandments skip the important opening verses of Exodus 20, when God first reminded the Israelites what He had done for them. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery" (v. 2). He reminded the Israelites of the redemption and freedom He had provided. Their gratitude to God for what He had done would serve as their foundation for putting Him first. Their gratitude displayed what was in their hearts and their desire to put God first.

It is the same today. When God asks us to put Him first, He's asking for our hearts. If we give Him our hearts, He knows our actions will follow.

### WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF PUTTING OTHER THINGS BEFORE GOD?

## God Alone Is Good

// Psalm 16:1-4a

When David said he had "nothing good besides" God, he wasn't making a blanket statement that everything was terrible. Instead, he was focusing on an important truth: God alone is good and He is the originator of all that is good. Based on this truth, we know two things: Good has one source: God. And if something is not good, it doesn't come from God.

This doesn't mean that if something doesn't "seem" good, it doesn't come from God. A lot of things may not "seem" good to us, but God uses them to create good (Gen. 50:20). Yet Satan seeks different ways to use these seemingly bad things to plant doubt in our hearts concerning God's goodness.

**1. In trials or difficulties, Satan wants us to focus on the pain rather than the purpose.** Satan sought to confuse Paul by giving him a "thorn in the flesh" to torment him. Paul could have blamed God for the difficulty rather than looking to God in the midst of the difficulty. He could have turned His back on God, but Paul chose to look to God for wisdom in his



## DIGGING DEEPER THE DECALOGUE

Apart from Moses' citation of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) in Deuteronomy 5, the Old Testament gives little if any evidence of giving the Decalogue greater authority than any of the other Sinai laws. This does not mean these tablets were not treated as special. On the contrary, Moses notes the Decalogue contained the only revelation that was communicated by God directly to the people (Deut. 4:12-13; 5:22) and committed to writing on tablets of stone by God's own hand (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 34:1; Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 10:1-4). All subsequent revelation at Sinai was communicated indirectly through Moses, the covenant mediator.<sup>1</sup>

**Why do you believe there was and is such a strong emphasis on teaching and learning the Ten Commandments?**



suffering. Paul received the good that God intended: the perfecting of his strength in weakness (2 Cor. 12:6-10).

**2. Satan causes doubts about the goodness of God by tempting us to develop a “victim mentality.”** Satan attempted this with Job by striking down and destroying all the people and things Job loved and cherished, and then wreaking havoc on his health. Yet Job remained firm, trusting in the goodness of God (42:1-6).

Like Paul and Job, our experiences may not always feel or seem good. But we’re assured all things will be used for good when we love God and put Him first (Rom. 8:28-29). This promise in Romans 8:28-29 is for those “who love God” and live “according to

His purpose.” Translation: It’s for those who put God first.

**WHAT EXPERIENCES IN YOUR LIFE REFLECT THE TRUTH THAT GOD IS GOOD?**

**God Alone Is the Way to Eternal Life**

// Psalm 16:9-11

Most of us go through life feeling little need to know how to get where we’re going. Instead, we spend money on fancy apps to help us navigate through life like pros. Have you ever tried using your GPS in a area where road construction is taking place? You’ll quickly discover how important it truly is to know the way to where you are going. This also applies to where we’re going in our lives and for eternity. It’s important to know the way.

David knew “the path of life” was God Himself. God

showed him (and still shows us) the path of life on earth through His guidance, teachings, and directions.

God’s way is the only way which leads to both “abundant joy” in the present and “eternal pleasures” beyond time. Jesus described the importance of knowing the way and choosing God’s way when He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He is our GPS.

When we remain in Jesus and align ourselves under Him (John 15:1-8), He takes us where we need to go. He calms the difficult seas in our lives. Eternal life is a gift we receive by placing faith alone in Christ alone for the payment of our sins. The good news of the gospel is that we don’t have to pay for any of it. Jesus is the way. He is the gift.



## THE POINT: GOD IS TO HAVE FIRST PLACE IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE.

Too many people think God should let them in heaven because they've kept the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were never given as an entry point for eternity. While it's true God expects us to obey His commands, the ultimate purpose of the law is to show us our inability to keep those laws. In other words, it reveals our need for a Savior (Rom. 7:7).

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THIS CLASS HAS HELPED YOU DISCOVER GOD'S PATH FOR YOUR LIFE?

God has allowed a permanent sacrifice—Jesus Christ—to substitute for the punishment each of us deserves. “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Does this mean we ignore and shun righteous living, as well as the commands of God? “Absolutely not!” (Romans 6:2). But it does mean we have been set free from legalism and condemnation through the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. This allows us to willingly and gratefully pursue a life pleasing to God by placing Him first over everything else.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The idea of God was at one time problematic in the African-American experience. The God who is Jesus was the God white Westerners introduced to the Gikuyu, Masai, and Wakamba people of East Africa. The problem? This God was believed to be responsible for the suffering of slavery. Also, He was not Ngai, who was the god of the African. They believed Ngai was god alone. When Ngai was stripped from the African culture, it left a terrifying darkness and void. But that was a long time ago. African-Americans have overcome this troubling experience, because many accepted the presentation of Christ and believe the one true God has delivered them from much suffering. According to Pew Research, today 83% of African-Americans are more likely to say they believe in God than other cultures.<sup>2</sup>

### WHAT IMPACT DOES THE HURTS OF OUR PAST HAVE ON OUR ABILITY TO PUT GOD FIRST?

## LIVE IT

### How will you actively seek to put God first in your life?

The starting point for any personal change begins with honestly acknowledging what needs to change. If there is any area in your life where you do not put God first, confess that to God. Then make a commitment to begin each day by putting God first. This will look different for each person, but it could mean simply saying a prayer or reading your Bible when you first wake up.

+ + +

- Make a new habit by listing one action you will replace to demonstrate your recommitment to put God first in your life.
- Identify three personal characteristics or habits which could lead someone observing your lifestyle to conclude that you place God first.
- Consider keeping a notepad or journal this week where you write down every time you sought to put God's perspective and His guidance first in your life.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. DEVOTED TO YOU // EXODUS 20:1-2

What's your response to someone who displays devotion to you? Gratitude and appreciation are common responses. God displays His devotion to His people when He identifies Himself as belonging to them. Our acceptance of His devotion becomes apparent through our expressions of appreciation and obedience to Him. He deserves it. In many instances throughout Scripture, God displays faithfulness as our Protector, Provider, Healer, and so much more. We can trust a God who is devoted to us like that.

**Let us commit our hearts in sincere obedience to the ways of the one God who is devoted to us.**

## 2. NOTHING BUT GOODNESS // PSALM 16:2

It's challenging to find goodness with so much evil in the world. Daily news is filled with crime, death, terror, and hatred. So, where can we find goodness among so much distress? The answer is clearly God. There is no one good but God (Luke 18:19). The goodness of God is one of His attributes. This means God will always do what is true and what is right. Therefore, we can have confidence that none of the evils of the world is caused by Him. He will uphold us when those distresses encroach upon our lives.

**As you walk with God, look for His goodness to show up in your life every single minute of the day.**

## 3. FULL-NESS OF JOY // PSALM 16:11

Got Joy? It's easy to confuse joy with feeling happy because joy is often defined as happiness. The suffix "-ness" means a state of being. While it's OK to be in a state of happiness, it can be fleeting

because being happy is based entirely on circumstances. This verse provides another option. It reminds us that the abundance or full-NESS of joy is lasting and found only in the Lord.

**Therefore, focus on getting your joy from the One who provides it completely. God's joy is eternal.**

## 4. LAW AND ORDER // ROMANS 7:7

Have you ever been pulled over for a traffic stop? When we run a stop sign, the traffic laws convey we have disobeyed the local authorities. God's law acts the same way. Paul said, "I would not have known sin if it were not for the law." Without God's instructions, we would wander aimlessly through life, living as we please, with no regard for sin, for God, and His laws. Just as we avoid traffic infractions, even more so, we must avoid breaking God's law because He is the highest and greatest authority.

**Need help? Store God's laws in your heart so you can follow them and avoid sin (Ps. 119:11).**

## 5. FIRST THINGS FIRST // DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5

God made His desire for His people clear. He commanded that He be first in our lives. Jesus repeated this truth with more details in Mark 12:30. We are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Loving God is exemplified when we make His kingdom more important than anything else in our lives. This kind of love does not happen all at once. It's a day-to-day learning process.

**We must seek it, think about it, and learn about it on a daily basis. Soon His love will encompass everything we say and do.**

SESSION 2

# HONOR GOD

**THE POINT:**  
OUR RELATIONSHIP  
WITH GOD IS SEEN IN  
HOW WE HONOR HIM.

## EXODUS /// 20:7-11; PSALM /// 145:1-7

Ex. 20:7 Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name. <sup>8</sup>Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: <sup>9</sup>You are to labor six days and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates. <sup>11</sup>For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

Ps. 145:1 I exalt you, my God the King, and bless your name forever and ever.

<sup>2</sup> I will bless you every day; I will praise your name forever and ever

**<sup>3</sup> The LORD is great and is highly praised; his greatness is unsearchable.**

<sup>4</sup> One generation will declare your works to the next and will proclaim your mighty acts. <sup>5</sup> I will speak of your splendor and glorious majesty and your wondrous works. <sup>6</sup> They will proclaim the power of your awe-inspiring acts, and I will declare your greatness. <sup>7</sup> They will give a testimony of your great goodness and will joyfully sing of your righteousness.

MEMORY VERSE

+  
+  
+

KEYWORDS

**a: Misuse the name of the LORD (Ex. 20:7)** – Literally, “rise up Yahweh’s name for no good.” Promising someone something by the name of God.

## WHAT ARE SPECIFIC WAYS TO HONOR GOD?

Most people know about honor and worship because we do it all the time.

Football fans show honor and worship through their conduct and commitment. A football game involves roughly seventeen minutes of actual action. When you remove huddles, getting back to the line of scrimmage, and other things that take place during the game, you're left with around seventeen minutes of actual plays.

Yet football fans willingly spend up to three hours watching a game that provides only seventeen minutes of action. If you actually go to the game, you need to add drive time, parking, and sitting in traffic gridlock. But have you ever heard football fans complain the game went too long? No, because when we love and honor something, we willingly commit our time to it.

Apply that heart attitude to our spiritual lives—church, personal Bible study, or prayer. Too many of us are satisfied with quick devotions and short prayers. The Ten Commandments reveal how to honor God, but do we do that?

### Honor God's Name // Exodus 20:7-11

Choose your favorite president—living or dead—and imagine he's coming to your house for dinner. You've gone all out by cooking a wonderful meal, setting the table, and even vacuuming the carpet. When the president arrives, what do you call him? Do you open the door and call him by his first name, or say, "Hey, what's up, \_\_\_\_\_?"

I doubt it. The position of president demands honor. When a role requires honor, we place a title in front of the name and speak the name with respect.

Too often, even believers refer to God—the Creator of the universe and the Sustainer of life—with dishonor. They refer to Him using clichés like "the big guy" or "the man upstairs" or throw out phrases such as "Oh, my God!" and "Jesus Christ!" In the Model Prayer, Christ taught us we're to honor (hallow) God's name (Matt. 6:9). The term "hallowed" comes from the same root word we get the word "holy."



## THE POINT: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS SEEN IN HOW WE HONOR HIM.

It means to be “set apart” or “sanctified.” His name is unique and holy because God is unique and holy.

After all, God is the One who spoke the world into existence in six days. On the seventh day, God rested, not because He was tired. He rested because He had finished what He set out to do. He wanted to enjoy and experience His creation. Likewise, He calls us to set aside one day a week to rest and honor Him.

When we honor God for who He is, God opens the floodgates of His provision. We honor God because He deserves it; yet, in His grace He returns favor to us.

“How great is your goodness that you have stored up for those who fear you and accomplished in the sight of everyone for those who take refuge in you” (Ps. 31:19).

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS PEOPLE DISHONOR OR MAKE LIGHT OF GOD’S NAME?

We’re not to “misuse” God’s name in any way. The misuse of God’s name is often interpreted as vulgarity, but we can also dishonor God through our actions and lifestyles. If we live in disobedience to Him, we dishonor His name.

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS PEOPLE CAN HONOR OR GIVE WEIGHT TO GOD’S NAME?

#### Honor God Through Worship // Psalm 145:1-3

“Every day.” Those two words stand out in verses 1-3. David praised God and declared he would bless God every day. Not just on the good days. Not just on the days when he felt like dancing and singing in the streets. Not just on the victory days. No, David wrote about his heart’s desire to worship God every day and praise His name forever and ever.

Do you desire to worship God every day? Or is your worship limited to Sunday morning? Or on those days when you get a good report at work, or receive a blessing, or have a nice vacation somewhere? If your heart doesn’t reflect David’s heart, then your worship is “sometimey,” basically inconsistent. It’s based on circumstances and convenience. That’s not worship; that’s emotion.

### WHAT ARE SOME OBSTACLES THAT GET IN THE WAY OF OUR WORSHIP OF GOD DAILY?

American families cook a lot of turkeys and hams at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Careful attention to getting



## DIGGING DEEPER GOD’S NAME

The commandment, “Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God,” is followed by a threat of punishment for those who disobey it. The misuse of God’s name appears to be invoking His name to vouch for something or someone. Examples would include “God may strike me down if I don’t keep my promise.” The most basic idea behind this commandment is to prevent lying about God. The name of God signifies His essence. To speak God’s name was to recognize His awesome power and holiness. Jesus reinforced this commandment with regard to making false promises, using God’s name (Matt. 5:13-37; 23:16-22).

### Why do you believe people, even Christians, carelessly use the name of God today?



the meat just right is important and includes using a thermometer to know when the meat is perfectly done.

Eating uncooked meat can be harmful. A ham or turkey can appear to be perfectly cooked on the outside and yet remain raw on the inside. A meat thermometer is important and necessary to determine the true state of what is inside.

Kingdom disciples are no different. We can look great on the outside but be a spiritual mess on the inside.

God holds the thermometer; He knows the state of each of our souls. He may keep you in an oven of trials and challenges, because He desires to shape and sharpen you during those tough times. Choose to honor Him with your worship in good times and bad. Learn to trust God

despite the reality of where we are on a given day. As David chose, we need to worship Him every day.

#### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BLESS THE LORD EACH DAY?

### Honor God Through Actions // Psalm 145:4-7

David's heart for God shines through in these verses. He wrote of honoring God's great works and great goodness, while singing joyfully of God's righteousness. We live in an age when honoring God takes second place to many people's desires to honor themselves. People often try to present a perfect image and identity on social media, but it's faulty and deceptive, and it replaces focusing on God's greatness and goodness. If David's words were in sync with today's cultural values,

the word "your" would be replaced with "my." We would be on the throne of praise instead of God.

- One generation will declare (my) works to the next and proclaim (my) mighty acts.
- I will declare (my) greatness.
- They will give a testimony of (my) great goodness.

Anytime we shift the focus from God and His rightful position and place it on ourselves, we have failed to honor God. This is like the church at Ephesus, "I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first" (Rev. 2:4).

To be sure, the Ephesian church had a lot going on. The Lord assured them that they were doing many things right. However, they had neglected

## THE POINT: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS SEEN IN HOW WE HONOR HIM.

one thing: Put God first and honor and love Him over everything else.

The issue at Ephesus wasn't that they no longer loved God at all. It was that He was no longer their priority—even though they were doing many good works for the kingdom of God. To honor God with our testimony and actions, we must not only love God, but we must love Him first.

So, how do we recognize when first love has turned to second love—or worse—in our lives? One way is when performance for God becomes an end in itself. In those moments, we have lost our first love like when:

- We spend time in daily devotions just to check it off our list.
- Our testimony and actions paint us as more prominent than God.

When we reflect on all God has done, we're drawn to true worship. We'll want to honor Him with lives that serve as "a testimony of your great goodness."

### WHAT HAVE PREVIOUS GENERATIONS TAUGHT YOU ABOUT HONORING GOD?

### DID YOU KNOW?

The names of God had great meaning in the lives of African-American enslaved. In African traditional religion, African religio-cultural roots were often combined with biblical belief. This gave expression to ways of worship and names of God. For example, "Olodumare" Meant "God, the Omnipotent." It is the same name El Shaddai in Genesis 49:25. These names helped slaves understand that God, not masters, was ultimately in charge of human history. So when African-Americans sing the gospel song, "God knows how much we can bear," they are singing about a God who will see and understand what they are going through (Gen. 16:13) and make the load lighter (2 Cor. 10:13). Because He is all-knowing, they believe in the end God will say well done to those who are misunderstood.<sup>3</sup>

### IN WHAT WAYS IS HONORING GOD UNIQUELY IMPORTANT IN THE LIVES OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS?

## LIVE IT

### How can you honor God daily?

To honor God means to give Him the respect, praise, glory, adoration, and obedience He so richly deserves. Forced honor and forced worship are neither honor nor worship. But as you begin to reflect daily on God's greatness and God's goodness, honor and worship of Him will flow naturally out of your heart.

+ + +

- Confess to God any times you misused His name and failed to honor Him with your life. Journaling helps. It is a great way of releasing thoughts on your heart and mind.
- If you're on social media, post and share God-honoring posts this week.
- Consider sharing with someone in your day how great God is and the great and wonderful blessings He has provided in your life.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. WHAT'S IN A NAME? // EXODUS 20:7

Has anyone ever called you by another name? If meant in a derogatory manner, it does not feel good. A person's name becomes attached to his or her character, and that is even more so with God. Because God is holy, His name is holy. When we fail to honor the name of God, we fail to identify Him properly, show others His value, or give to Him the credit He is rightly due. Honoring God begins with trusting that He alone is God.

**That trust will lead us to worship His name and strive to do everything to the glory of His name.**

## 2. REMEMBER REST // EXODUS 20:8-11

Two common expressed sentiments, "There aren't enough hours in the day," and "If I only had more time." Making these statements can wrongly imply that God, the Author of time, has His time calculations off. However, more realistically, we probably have more on our plates than we can handle, or we haven't prioritized our time sufficiently. God created the whole of creation in six days and then, on the seventh day, He rested. This was not because He needed to, but because He just stopped. His action gave people a time pattern to follow. Unlike God, we need to rest and should make it a priority among our many obligations of life. Don't worry about the work left behind when you rest.

**You can trust God will see your work through to completion. Just obey His command and take time to rest.**

## 3. BLESS THE LORD // PSALM 145:1-2

God has given His children many blessings, because He wants us to be happy and experience fulfillment. But what does it mean when we bless

the Lord? It means from the depths of our souls, we acknowledge the Lord and His goodness. In the Book of Psalms, David encouraged the people to bless the Lord by praising, exalting, and worshipping Him. God is glorified when we bless Him. Think in terms of what it means to you to be blessed. You receive favor, goodness, honor, and overall well-being. We have the privilege of providing that same blessing to God.

**What an awesome privilege to honor the One who loves us unconditionally in such a way.**

## 4. TELL SOMEBODY // PSALM 145:4-7

Do you remember when you first heard about God and His goodness? Someone probably shared a personal experience. Believers honor and glorify God when they tell others about the difference God has made in their lives. Our personal experiences are often the best headlines for God's good news. These stories spin a never-ending cycle of truth. From generation to generation, the story of God has been told and will continue to live on.

**What chapter does your life add to His story?**

## 5. HONOR ROLL // PSALM 112:1-2

The honor roll. Do you remember this list of students in school? Those listed received recognition for academic achievement. God has an honor roll as well. It's for those who trust, worship, and honor Him through their decision to live for Him. Not only are we given honor, but our descendants will be blessed because of the legacy we leave behind.

**As a believer on God's honor roll, make a daily effort to maintain a close walk with Him.**



## SESSION 3

# HONOR PARENTS

### THE POINT:

HONOR FOR PARENTS IS SEEN IN OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS.

## EXODUS /// 20:12; 2 SAMUEL /// 15:7-14

### MEMORY VERSE

Ex. 20:12 **Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.**

<sup>2 Sam. 15:7</sup> When four years had passed, Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go to Hebron to fulfill a vow I made to the LORD. <sup>8</sup> For your servant made a vow when I lived in Geshur of Aram, saying: If the LORD really brings me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD in Hebron." <sup>9</sup> "Go in peace," the king said to him. So he went to Hebron. <sup>10</sup> Then Absalom sent agents throughout the tribes of Israel with this message: "When you hear the sound of the ram's horn, you are to say, 'Absalom has become king in Hebron!'" <sup>11</sup> Two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom. They had been invited and were going innocently, for they did not know the whole situation. <sup>12</sup> While he was offering the sacrifices, Absalom sent for David's adviser Ahithophel the Gilonite, from his city of Giloh. So the conspiracy grew strong, and the people supporting Absalom continued to increase.

<sup>13</sup> Then an informer came to David and reported, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." <sup>14</sup> David said to all the servants with him in Jerusalem, "Get up. We have to flee, or we will not escape from Absalom! Leave quickly, or he will overtake us quickly, heap disaster on us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword."

+  
+  
+

### KEYWORDS

**a: Long life (Ex. 20:12)** – There is not a promise here for individually long life spans. Rather, the promise refers to God's protection of His people if they obeyed His command.



## HOW CAN WE SHOW OUR PARENTS WE CARE ABOUT THEM?

A testimony from Tony Evans:

My mom and dad made it abundantly clear when I was growing up that if I misbehaved at school, there would be consequences at home. My dad, especially, cut no slack when it came to breaking the rules at school or anywhere else. In fact, my father “ruined” many a Saturday night during my youth: as I went out the front door, he’d say, “When you are out there tonight, remember that your last name is Evans.”

Obviously, I knew my name; he didn’t need to remind me. But he was reminding me my name represented something bigger than just me. Our family’s name stood for honesty, integrity, morality, and dignity in the community. In short, it represented a commitment to Christian living, and my dad didn’t want me to do anything to jeopardize the testimony of that name.

That reminder stayed in my mind as I made youthful choices. I sought to honor my dad and the value he taught me to put in our name. I wanted to honor the name he had given me.

### Honor Through Respect //

**Exodus 20:12**

What is “honor”? The Greek word for honor means “to value highly, to hold in highest regard.” This, by the way, holds true at any age. There may be disagreement regarding the age when children are no longer required to obey their parents, but children never reach an age when they don’t owe their parents honor.

#### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE SHOW HONOR TO PARENTS?

God made it abundantly clear that honor and respect are critical elements in every home. God is serious about honoring parents because God understands the whole picture. He knows it is not simply about having a good day or a peaceful home; honor is tied to advancing His kingdom on earth.

Today it’s common to blame your problems and behaviors on parents. It’s reminiscent of two brothers who went through a counseling

## THE POINT: HONOR FOR PARENTS IS SEEN IN OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS.

session together. They had grown up in a home with an alcoholic father. One of the brothers had also become an alcoholic, but the other drank no alcohol at all. When asked to explain their behavior, they said in unison, “Well, what else could you expect with a father like mine?”

Both men told the truth: One followed in his father’s destructive footsteps, even though he probably had professed he never would do so, but the other stuck to his resolve not to end up like his dad. The story is a reminder that parents sometimes get blamed for far too much—and receive praise for far too little.

So how can we show honor? Here are three categories:

- 1. Emotional Honor.** By spending time with them and showing genuine concern and love. You’re not expected to honor the wrong your parents do, but you are expected to honor their position as parents.
- 2. Verbal Honor.** As adult children, we are to show respect to our parents. It should not be, “Hey, Vincent. How’s it going?” It should be, “Yes, sir” and “No, sir.” Whether a parent is right or wrong, we’re still to speak respectfully. As Paul told Timothy, “Don’t

rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father” (1 Tim. 5:1). We’re to speak to and about our parents, honorably.

### 3. Financial Honor. In

1 Timothy 5:8, Paul wrote, “If anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Honoring our parents includes a financial responsibility for them when they can’t take care of themselves.

### WHAT ARE WAYS OUR CULTURE SHOWS DISHONOR TO PARENTS?

### Honor Through Truth // 2 Samuel 15:7-12

To further understand honoring parents, the tragic story of Absalom provides an example of what not to do.

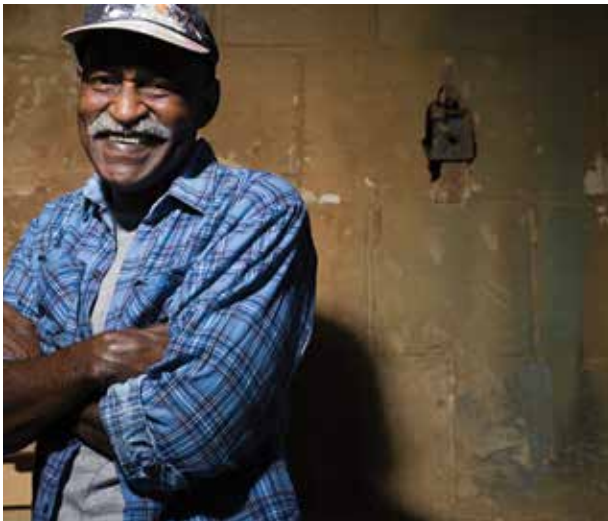
Absalom was David’s third son, born to him through his fourth wife, Maacah of Geshur, daughter of King Talmai, ruler of a small Aramean city-state (2 Sam. 3:3). This marriage was probably rooted in pursuit of political gain rather than attraction or love. In fact, almost all of David’s marriages were based on political power, causing jealousy among his family members.



## DIGGING DEEPER DAVID AND ABSALOM

According to the Bible, Absalom was the third son of King David. The name Absalom means father of peace; however, he did not live up to his name. Instead, Absalom murdered his brother Amnon because his brother had disgraced his sister Tamar. This created a rift between David and his son Absalom that lasted a couple of years. To reconnect his son, David gave Absalom permission to return home, but he would not face his son. Finally, after two years of trying, Absalom got an audience with his father. However, this one meeting would not heal a wound that had festered in David’s heart for five years. Absalom rebelled and decided to usurp his father’s throne. But Absalom was killed by one of David’s soldiers, Joab.

**Whom do you think should be responsible for reconciliation between parents and children? Why?**



David was far from a perfect husband and he wasn't an upstanding father either. For example, his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam. 11) contributed to rebellion in his sons, particularly Absalom. Indeed, David's sins unleashed a whole series of consequences on his family. When Nathan the prophet told David a story highlighting David's sins, David said the offender should pay back the debt fourfold (12:1-7). Sadly, David declared his own sentence as four of his own children would die.

1. The baby David created with Bathsheba died (v. 18).
2. David's son Absalom killed his brother Amnon after Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar (13:28-29).
3. Absalom rebelled against his father David and was killed by Joab (18:9-15).
4. Years later, David's son

Solomon had his older brother, Adonijah, killed because he tried to take over as king (1 Kings 2:22-25).

David's sin with Bathsheba left a legacy of destruction. His sinful behavior didn't excuse Absalom's behavior. Absalom was responsible for honoring David as both his father and king, but he honored himself at his father's expense.

**HOW DID YOUR DESIRE TO HONOR YOUR PARENTS IMPACT YOUR DECISIONS?**

We cannot honor our parents without truthfulness and integrity in how we talk to them or about them. Absalom's negative example showed the tragic consequences of failure to show honor with integrity, bringing great adversity home to the nation of Israel—and death to himself.

**Honor Through Honor //**

**2 Samuel 15:13-14**

Absalom's move to become king appeared to be working. He was popular, and one of David's men reported to him, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." Had this been an election, it would've meant David would have to step down and let Absalom take the office he won by the people's vote. But defeat in that culture meant death. David rightfully feared for his life and the lives of his people in Absalom's rebellion. Absalom had no concern for his father's welfare, only his own.

Another example in Scripture showing how God feels about dishonor is the story about a group of young men who cursed the prophet Elisha.

## THE POINT: HONOR FOR PARENTS IS SEEN IN OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS.

“As he was walking up the path, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, chanting, ‘Go up, baldy! Go up, baldy!’ He turned around, looked at them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the children” (2 Kings 2:23-24).

These weren't little kids being childish. These boys were cursing God's prophet, and their disrespect brought their death. Many children are dying spiritually, emotionally, and relationally today because they've never learned the importance of honor. It's costing their lives.

Absalom's dishonor of David cost him his life. His rebellious pursuit to dethrone his father left him dead at Joab's hand (2 Sam. 18:14-15).

Dishonor has a way of recycling itself throughout our relationships, which is why it's so critical for us to always show integrity and honesty. Yet, when we do sin, we must seek God and His mercy given to us by God's grace through the blood of Jesus Christ.

What if our own parents were hard to honor? If they left a legacy of destruction, bitterness,

or any number of things, we must seek to trust Scripture in which God calls us to forgive and honor them.

### WHOM DO YOU KNOW THAT MODELS THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP IN A WAY THAT HONORS GOD?

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Enslaved parents passed on lessons of loyalty; messages about how to treat people; and stories of family genealogy to their children. The following true story provides an example: One day, when his father and his mistress had happened to call young Willie at the same time, he hesitated, not sure which had the strongest claim on his obedience. He finally went to his mistress. When his father scolded him for it, he said, “You both called me, and I didn't know which to go to.” His father said, “You are my child, and when I call you, you should come immediately, if you have to pass through fire and water.”<sup>4</sup>

### WHAT MADE A DIFFERENCE IN THE PARENT AND CHILD RELATIONSHIPS OF SLAVES?

## LIVE IT

### How will you daily seek to honor parents?

No matter what family history you have been given, choose the path of love, respect, and honor from this day forward. God gave us parents because through them, He instills the godliness and integrity we need to live in community on earth. The love and patience of parents exemplifies the love and patience of our heavenly Father. For that alone they should be honored.

+ + +

- Apologize for any sins of dishonor or anything done that made it difficult for your children to honor you. When you do, you are modeling truthfulness and integrity for your children, your grandchildren, and the children of others.
- This week do something to help your parents or support them with a letter or card. Even if your parents are not alive, you can honor them by how you talk about them.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. BLESSINGS IN HONOR // EXODUS 20:12

The very first relational command God gave dealt with honoring our parents. This establishes the family as an essential building block of society. If unrest persists in our homes, the very fabric of our society is ripped apart. We can see proof of this every day. Honor in homes must persist because this command extends from generation to generation. What we do today establishes future blessings for our descendants. This command is not only for children but every living person should honor those who raised them.

**We are to respect, honor, and care for those who gave us life and sacrificially cared for us.**

## 2. HONORABLE RETURN // EPHESIANS 6:2-4

What comes to mind when you hear the word obey, as in “obey your parents”? Submit? In this passage, it means more than submission. It means to acknowledge the authority of someone. The seriousness of this command is communicated through the promise received when it is obeyed—“so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land.” An honorable return in the form of a promise that deals with the length of our lives should motivate us to obey without question.

**Even so, we should always remember that God’s commands are for our good, whether with or without a promise.**

## 3. RIGHT HONOR // 2 SAMUEL 15:5-6

Have you ever given someone honor without sincerity because you stood to gain something for yourself? That was Absalom’s plan. He wanted the people to think of him as king, rather than his father David. In these verses, Absalom stole the hearts of

the people by a simple kiss to their hand. But the honor he received was short lived. It’s not uncommon to pay someone a mindless compliment even when we don’t really believe they deserve it. God desires that His people extend love and compassion to each other.

**Therefore, be mindful to honor others with a sincere heart of love.**

## 4. LIVE HONOR // DEUTERONOMY 6:4-8

God expects honor to be a way of life for us. This was declared in the Shema, which He gave the Israelites. The Shema was the essence of God’s covenant with His people. It was to be deeply ingrained in the heart and mind, then put into action. This means honor isn’t like clothing we take off and put on. God intended for it to be part our being, character, and identity.

**How can we live lives of honor? It begins with loving the Lord our God, extending love to others, and living obediently according to His commands.**

## 5. HONOR OVER TRADITION // MARK 7:6B-13

The purpose of God’s laws is to guide us in right living. Sometimes people can take this to the extreme in their pursuit of holiness and “religion.” Jesus accused the Pharisees of “abandoning the command of God” while keeping “human tradition.” They made their oral traditions more important than God’s law. Though they may seem right and serve a purpose, God isn’t impressed with our traditions. He expects our obedience to Him and His Word.

**We should be sure our motives honor God rather than be motivated by man-made rituals or traditions.**



## AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

MARK CROSTON

I can remember the excitement I felt as a growing Christian in my teenage years. Memorizing key Scriptures; learning how to share my faith; being challenged to teach the Word of God and more. I wanted to grow to be a man after God's own heart. Unfortunately, times would come when I would be reminded of my humanity and I would find that sins I thought I had outgrown would still visit my life from time to time. They would cause me to wonder—Am I still saved? Does God still love me? Can God still use me?

So what does it mean to live a life after God's own heart? Does it mean we are perfect? Does

it mean that we just rigidly and routinely execute the commandments of the Bible? Does it mean we have never sinned? Is this a very high and special title that only a select few can achieve? Or is it something we can all strive for despite our imperfections?

I have always been encouraged in times like this by the life of David. Most people who have been around the church know that David was not a perfect person. We may not remember he was the youngest son of Jesse, a shepherd, a soldier, or even a sovereign king. But most people who know of David know he had an affair with a woman named

Bathsheba. What amazes and encourages me about David is that, though a failure in our eyes, God still called him a man after His own heart.

In 1 Samuel 13:13-14, Samuel said to Saul, "You have been foolish. You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. It was at this time that the LORD would have permanently established your reign over Israel, but now your reign will not endure. The LORD has found a man after his own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over his people, because you have not done what the LORD commanded."

Two things here. One is that David is declared a man after God's own heart while he was a boy and even before he was anointed king over Israel. In addition, maybe surprisingly, after his affair and fall with Bathsheba, the Bible says it again. Acts 13:22 tells us "After removing him, he raised up David as their king and testified about him: 'I have found David the son of Jesse to be a man after my own heart, who will carry out all my will.' "

The second interesting thing is that Saul was also a failure, but the judge/prophet/priest Samuel tells Saul that if he had kept God's command "the Lord would have permanently established your reign over Israel . . . but now your reign will not endure."

So what's the difference? Why is David a man after God's own heart and Saul discharged? The difference is not the nature of their sin. Sometimes we have a tendency to play the big sin, little sin game, and we declare your sin is the big sin and our sin the little sin. Be reminded that 1 John 5:17 says, "All unrighteousness is sin," so one sin does not condemn us before God any more or less than the other.

The difference is in the hearts of the sinners. Saul was arrogant; David was humble. Saul made excuses for his sin; David ultimately was repentant and asked forgiveness for his sin. In Psalm 51:4,7, David prays, "Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you pass sentence; you are blameless when you judge . . . Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."



It was David's heart submission to God that made the difference. It is not the style of the sin, it's the sincerity of the surrender. First John 1:9 reminds us, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It takes a heart of humility and love to be a person after God's heart. David confessed, and God forgave.

We, too, can be people after God's own heart if our love for Him is so strong that it will not allow the separation sin brings to last long. It takes a heart of humility and love; a willingness to admit and confess our sins; and a desire for God's favor and fellowship to be a person after God's heart. There is hope for all of us who have a passion for God and are willing to walk close to Him in loving submission.

Mark Croston serves as national director, Black Church and Western Partnerships for LifeWay and the general editor for YOU curriculum.



## SESSION 4

# HONOR LIFE

**THE POINT:**  
RESPECT HUMAN LIFE  
AS GOD DOES.

**EXODUS /// 20:13;  
1 SAMUEL /// 26:7-11, 22-25**

### MEMORY VERSE

Ex. 20:13 **Do not murder.**

<sup>1</sup> Sam. 26:7 That night, David and Abishai came to the troops, and Saul was lying there asleep in the inner circle of the camp with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. Abner and the troops were lying around him. <sup>8</sup> Then Abishai said to David, “Today God has delivered your enemy to you. Let me thrust the spear through him into the ground just once. I won’t have to strike him twice!” <sup>9</sup> But David said to Abishai, “Don’t destroy him, for who can lift a hand against the LORD’s anointed and be innocent?” <sup>10</sup> David added, “As the LORD lives, the LORD will certainly strike him down: either his day will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. <sup>11</sup> However, because of the LORD, I will never lift my hand against the LORD’s anointed. Instead, take the spear and the water jug by his head, and let’s go.”

<sup>1</sup> Sam. 26:22 David answered, “Here is the king’s spear; have one of the young men come over and get it. <sup>23</sup> The LORD will repay every man for his righteousness and his loyalty. I wasn’t willing to lift my hand against the LORD’s anointed, even though the LORD handed you over to me today. <sup>24</sup> Just as I considered your life valuable today, so may the LORD consider my life valuable and rescue me from all trouble.” <sup>25</sup> Saul said to him, “You are blessed, my son David. You will certainly do great things and will also prevail.” Then David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

### KEYWORDS

**a: Murder (Ex. 20:13)** – Putting to death improperly, for selfish reasons rather than with authorization (as killing in the administration of justice or in a holy war).

## WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU SHOW OTHERS THAT YOU VALUE THEM?

Ask anyone with little knowledge of what the Bible teaches, and he's likely to mention one of the Ten Commandments, especially the one about killing. You may have seen a TV courtroom drama where someone shouted at the accused murderer, "Thou shalt not kill!" Or perhaps the defense lawyer used it as a reason not to put the condemned person to death.

It's almost universally accepted that killing others is wrong, but cultures and governments legislate different ways to interpret that. Life—

and the value of life—has been a major topic in recent years. Whether discussing late-term abortions, rights issues of euthanasia, or human-trafficking, life is demanding to be noticed and defended.

The Bible is clear: life begins at the moment of conception and retains its value from the womb to the tomb. *All life*. Unfortunately, believers within the body of Christ have not always agreed on this, and we have failed to unify on this all-important area. But God wants us to realize that all life is valuable. We are to see life as He sees life.

### Value What God Values //

**Exodus 20:13**

Human life is precious to God—and should be precious to us. Yet we often give in to the lie that just because we don't take part in actual, physical murder ourselves, we're above this three-word command: "Do not murder."

#### WHAT ARE SOME BENEFITS FOR SOCIETY WHEN WE VALUE HUMAN LIFE?

Jesus made it clear in His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that murder can take other forms. We also aren't to destroy another's life through hate or insult.

"You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be subject to hellfire" (Matt. 5:21-22).



## THE POINT: RESPECT HUMAN LIFE AS GOD DOES.

Hatred and insult typically come rooted in bitterness and unforgiveness. Allowing these two things to grow and worsen in our lives produces the damaging stench of death. It not only affects others around us in many ways but can also lead to our own spiritual and emotional death.

Christ has called us to live a life of love. He said, "I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another" (John 13:34). Anytime you and I live absent of love for one another, we are living in disobedience to God's highest command.

Yet, love becomes difficult to give or experience in the stench of unforgiveness. The ability to forgive is about more than forgiving the person who hurt you, or even forgiving yourself for what you now regret. It's also about regaining the life God intended for you. All human life is precious—*including your own*. When you choose bitterness and unforgiveness, you're also hurting yourself.

To release any hatred and bitterness, look to the cross and what Jesus did for you. Jesus died to forgive you, but He also died for the ones you're tempted to murder with hate.

## Accept God Is in Control //

1 Samuel 26:7-11

Although Saul was king, it was clear that God's hand was on David and he would become king. Saul not only stood in the way of David's rightful rise to the throne, but he'd also made it his mission to keep David from becoming king. Several years before this time, while David was in the palace with the king, "Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear. As the spear struck the wall, David eluded Saul, ran away, and escaped that night" (1 Sam. 19:10). David escaped into the surrounding country, but Saul chased after him.

Now on this night, as Saul and his three thousand men slept, David was nearby. Circumstances were in David's favor; here was an opportunity to easily kill Saul. Based on Saul's actions against David, many people wouldn't have blamed David. It would be an act of war or self-defense: "Kill or be killed."

But David knew to lift a hand against the Lord's anointed would leave a stain of bloodshed and guilt on his own life. So, David chose instead to take the spear and the water jug by Saul's head



## DIGGING DEEPER ABISHAI

Abishai was David's nephew and one of the bravest of David's mighty men. He continually demonstrated loyalty and faithfulness to his royal uncle. He commanded one of the three divisions of David's army at the battle with Absalom (2 Sam. 18:2,5,12). He slew the Philistine giant Ishbi-benob, who threatened David's life (2 Sam. 21:15-17). On one occasion he withstood three hundred men, and slew them with his own spear (2 Sam. 23:18). Abishai believed God had delivered their enemy Saul into their hands and requested the honor of killing David's enemy for him, offering to pin Saul "to the ground with one thrust of my spear." But David denied him the opportunity to touch God's anointed.

**What do you believe would have been the impact on David's reign had he killed Saul this way?**

to let Saul know how easily he could have killed him.

**WHAT DO DAVID'S WORDS AND ACTIONS REVEAL ABOUT HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?**

Life is sacred. No one has the right to take a life other than the Creator of life Himself: God. It's also because we are made in the image of God.

God made an important statement to Noah, revealing life's sacredness and value: "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed, for God made humans in his image" (Gen. 9:6). The willful shedding of human blood is murder. The reason murder is wrong isn't just because it's an attack on another person; it's also an attack on God.

Humanity was made in God's image. To attack or destroy humanity is to declare war on

God. It assaults the epitome of His creation.

**HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN THE TRUTH THAT GOD IS THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY OVER ALL LIFE?**

As kingdom disciples, we shouldn't be at ease in a world where life continues to be degraded and destroyed. We're called to speak up for the lives of others—including the helpless and most vulnerable—in any and every way that we can.

**Treat Others with Value // 1 Samuel 26:22-25**

Every life bears the stamp of God. We've spoiled that image through sinfulness, but His image is stamped in every human being. This truth ought to direct how we view and treat ourselves and others. We're to respect life

by treating every life as equally valuable. David modeled this with Saul.

Cancer is one of the devastating diseases of our day. Cancer is the formation of abnormal cells that want to take from the body, but they don't want to contribute to it because they want to grow. They also want to spread and move into other parts of the body causing the whole body to suffer and be in trouble.

Cancer exists in the body of Christ as well. There are "cells" of people in the church who want the benefits for their own lives without contributing to the rest of the body. Believers around the world face major religious persecution. Thousands die annually for their beliefs in Christ. Moreover, according to the Guttmacher Institute, an estimated 56 million humans



## THE POINT: RESPECT HUMAN LIFE AS GOD DOES.

die every year through abortion. The devaluing of life and our ignoring this reality is a cancer spreading through the body of Christ.

David displayed an attitude that valued life. Throughout much of his life, David modeled words the prophet Micah spoke centuries later: “Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8). Consider how we can live this truth as David did:

1. To act justly toward the innocent and vulnerable and to seek to protect their lives.
2. To love faithfulness by pursuing life and freedom for those who are at risk of losing both.
3. To walk humbly means we “consider others as more important than” ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

When we do these three things, we will both honor and value life as God intended for us to do. We will also position ourselves for blessings and rewards.

### WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN LIFT UP THE VALUE OF LIFE BEFORE OTHERS?

### DID YOU KNOW?

The apostle Paul noted that governments are established by God and authorized by Him to use “the sword” (Rom. 13:4). However, the government can be motivated by the times to use their authority to do harm as was the case about one hundred years ago in Elaine, Arkansas. On October 2, 1919, hundreds of black citizens were killed during what has become known as America’s worst racial massacre. Black men, women, and children were murdered, some burned alive by U.S. troops and vigilantes. The violence was instigated when white planters had sought to prevent black planters from organizing a union to receive a fair price for their crops. Paul’s admonition, “Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice” (Eph. 4:31) should guide the hearts African-Americans to value the lives of others rather than retaliate.

### WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TODAY TO LIVE UNSCATHED BY THE DEVALUING OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIVES IN THE PAST?

## LIVE IT

### How will you actively show value to all life?

The Bible is clear: life begins at the moment of conception and retains its value from the womb to the tomb. Unfortunately, believers within the body of Christ have not always agreed on this, and we have failed to unify on this all-important area. But God wants us to realize that all life is valuable. We’re called to see all people as God does.

+ + +

- If you privately consider some people more important than others, confess to God and ask forgiveness.
- Take time to examine how you devalue life through words you speak to or about others. Words of anger, hatred, or bitterness don’t honor the lives of those God loves.
- Find real ways you can affirm the value of life within your circles of influence.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. DIVINE DON'TS // EXODUS 20:13

Though God's laws are thought of as a list of don'ts, they actually should be viewed as the opposite. They should be seen in the light of being protected from missing out on the fullness of God's presence and blessings. Anything to which God has said *no* or *don't* prevents separation from Him and His blessings. Because of God's majesty, purity, and holiness, He cannot tolerate sin. Therefore, a dilemma arises because we are not holy. God's law resolves that issue.

**Our obedience to the laws of God forms our relationship with Him and positions us to be recipients of His blessings.**

## 2. HEART MATTERS // MATTHEW 5:21-22

Most of us can say we haven't committed murder; however, many of us are still guilty of committing murder in our hearts because we have violated God's command to love. Jesus dealt with this command, saying, "everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment." Anger in this verse refers to a seething bitterness against someone. It is a dangerous emotion that can spiral and impact our spirit so that we are not pleasing to God. Seeds of bitterness create harvests of hatred.

**We must look to Jesus to hew out bitterness from our hearts.**

## 3. RISE ABOVE // 1 SAMUEL 26:11

At some point in life, each of us will experience a time when we feel we've been wronged. We can seek payback for the wrong, but if we do, consider two things. First, God knows what has happened and has allowed the insult or opposition. Second, He's got a better way of dealing with it than you ever could. Because of God, you can rise above

these things and move forward without hate or revenge.

**Just trust God and ask Him to strengthen you to release any desire for revenge to His will and His way.**

## 4. CONSIDERABLE HONOR // 1 SAMUEL 26:24

David didn't always do things right; however, this verse shows one of the reasons God said David was a man after His own heart. David had the opportunity to take matters into his own hands with Saul. Instead, he chose to honor God by not harming Saul. Because of this he had every right to request that God would honor him because he had honored Saul, but he did not. This was an exhibition of godly character, which is often rewarded with the blessings of God.

**In wisdom, consider honor for others more essential than honor for yourself.**

## 5. FEAST ON HUMBLE PIE // PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

Have you ever heard of "humble pie"? To eat humble pie describes the act of making a major mistake and having to own up to it. Some believe humility requires putting oneself down. However, the implication in these verses is that humility can build up. We have great worth because of who we are in Christ. But we should lay aside any thoughts of exalting ourselves and treat others with common courtesy and respect. We should feast on God's humble pie. When we consider the interests of others more important than our own, we imitate Christ who was the true example of humility.

**Let us follow Christ in humility so that He will be glorified through our lives.**

SESSION 5

# HONOR MARRIAGE

**THE POINT:**

PHYSICAL INTIMACY IS RESERVED FOR ONE MAN AND WOMAN WITHIN THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE.

**EXODUS /// 20:14; 2 SAMUEL /// 11:1-5**

**MEMORY VERSE**

Ex. 20:14 **Do not commit adultery.**

<sup>2</sup> Sam. 11:1 In the spring when kings march out to war, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah, but David remained in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> One evening David got up from his bed and strolled around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing—a very beautiful woman. <sup>3</sup> So David sent someone to inquire about her, and he said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hethite?” <sup>4</sup> David sent messengers to get her, and when she came to him, he slept with her. Now she had just been purifying herself from her uncleanness. Afterward, she returned home. <sup>5</sup> The woman conceived and sent word to inform David: “I am pregnant.”

+  
+  
+

**KEYWORDS**

**a: Adultery (Ex. 20:14)** – The breaking of wedlock. Whatever defiles the body is just as serious as whatever destroys it. Jesus applied this commandment to what pollutes our imagination (Matt. 5:27-28).

# HOW CAN COUPLES HONOR GOD THROUGH THEIR RELATIONSHIP?

Weddings these days come in all sizes and shapes. For many, a wedding is a quiet, simple ceremony, while others spare no expense to create an experience their friends and family will long remember. Regardless of the trappings, weddings share one thing in common: union. Two additional words can be used to describe a solid marriage.

- 1. Discontinuity.** When a man and woman get married, they break ties with their immediate family before the wedding.
- 2. Continuity.** The couple continues this institution called family with the same principle as the one from which they have disconnected.

God calls this union a covenant. The nature of a covenant is spiritually binding and is especially important in marriage. God made His standard clear in the Ten Commandments. Obedience to God's commandment carries God's blessing, but as we see in the life of David, failing to honor God's standard of marriage brings devastating consequences.

## Be Faithful // Exodus 20:14

The commandment against adultery in marriage is a critical one. We're to protect our marriages. Adultery breaks trust and destroys the oneness God desires and has designed for marriage.

### HOW WOULD YOU SUMMARIZE OUR CULTURE'S VIEW OF ADULTERY?

Within the physical intimacy of marriage, God has designed us so that chemical bonds serve a greater purpose than pleasure. They create and seal ties of commitment, attraction, and protection based on various hormones.

Adultery damages marital attachments. Then the married couple must rebuild what it lost to restore oneness. Affairs also create new chemical bonds outside of the marriage covenant leaving lasting scars, cravings, and even withdrawal symptoms for months or years.

Adultery—physical or emotional—does more damage than breaking trust through betrayal in a marriage. Scientific data has shown that





withdrawal effects from a temporary love interest are as severe, if not even more severe, as those from any drug.<sup>5</sup>

Science confirms this, but God says something similar. When Paul wrote, “Don’t you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her?” (1 Cor. 6:16). He used the Greek word *kollao*, which literally means “to glue together, cement.” Sexual intimacy releases chemicals designed to bond; these brain-imprinting hormones glue two individuals together.

When a person ends an affair, physiological reactions occur in the brain, like when stopping any addictive behavior.

Anytime a person stops an addictive behavior without addressing it emotionally and spiritually through repentance, forgiveness, healing, and the empowerment of Christ, they have a higher chance of relapse. That is why Scripture counsels us to “guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life” (Prov. 4:23).

We guard our hearts because it’s where sin first takes root. Jesus, focusing on the heart said, “You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already

committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:27-28). While the commandment focused on the act, Jesus zeroed in on the heart motivating the act.

#### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR A SOCIETY FOLLOWING GOD’S STANDARDS FOR PURITY AND FAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE?**

### **Guard Your Thoughts //**

#### **2 Samuel 11:1-3a**

David’s life is an example of what happens when faithfulness and purity don’t guard our thoughts. As soon as David chose to ask about the woman he saw bathing on the rooftop, he had already begun pursuit. In that situation, guarding his mind would’ve meant turning away when he first saw her. Instead, David chose to pursue her, which led to devastation of many lives.

If we don’t guard ourselves, we share intimate knowledge about ourselves which is only meant for our spouse. Sexual intimacy is first mentioned in Genesis 4:1: “The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain.” The original term translated *was intimate* is the Hebrew word *yada*, referring to knowing or revealing something. While *yada* doesn’t



## **DIGGING DEEPER TEMPTATION TO LUST**

People respond to temptation in a variety of ways. Centuries earlier Joseph, a trusted slave in Egypt, was tending to his affairs when he was aggressively tempted by his master’s wife. But rather than giving in to temptation, Joseph ran from it (Gen. 39:7-12). In contrast, David was walking and looking around on his roof when he was tempted by Bathsheba, who was unknown to him at the time, taking a bath. But instead of running from the temptation, David moved toward it. His action reflected more than just an innocent query; it signaled an impulsive desire. He disregarded the Torah’s prohibition (cf. Ex. 20:14; Lev 18:20; Deut. 5:18) and the fact that the penalty for adultery was death (cf. Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22).

**Why do you think David lacked the strength to resist the temptation to commit adultery?**



refer to sexual intimacy, its meaning points to an intimate knowledge. It's clear sexual intimacy is about more than physical activity and pleasure. The word *yada* infers diving into another person's reality in order to know deeply and be deeply known.

The word is also used about knowing God through personal interaction with Him:

- “The secret counsel of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he *reveals* his covenant to them” (Ps. 25:14).
- “You are my witnesses”—this is the LORD's declaration—“and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may *know* and believe me and understand that I am he” (Isa. 43:10).
- “I will give you the treasures of darkness

and riches from secret places, so that you may *know* that I am the LORD” (Isa. 45:3).

God desires intimacy in our relationship with Him. Because marriage reflects our union with Christ (Eph. 5:22-32), the same purity and faithfulness shown in that relationship is expected with a spouse.

#### WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN FOLLOW GOD'S COMMAND TO BE FAITHFUL AND PURE?

### Watch Out for Others //

#### 2 Samuel 11:3b-5

David set aside faithfulness in his own life and failed to honor Bathsheba's marriage. David's servant reminded him of Bathsheba's own marriage and tried to

warn him of the danger in his pursuit. He reminded David that Bathsheba was someone's daughter and wife. But David chose self-satisfaction regardless of the consequences.

We can argue David wasn't in love with Bathsheba; he only lusted after her.

1. If David truly loved Bathsheba, he would never have sought to violate her own marriage vows and union. Love isn't selfish or self-seeking (1 Cor. 13:5).
2. We learned sexual union in marriage is to have an intimate knowledge that seeks to know deeply and to be deeply known. But the Hebrew word for know, *yada*, isn't used in verse 4. Instead, it is another Hebrew word *shakab*, translated as: “he slept with her” that is used.

## THE POINT: PHYSICAL INTIMACY IS RESERVED FOR ONE MAN AND WOMAN WITHIN THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE.

While these two Hebrew terms are used to refer to sexuality, *shakab* doesn't include the sacredness of the union and removes the main purposes of sexuality: special bonding for knowing and being known. Anytime the word is used in the Old Testament for sexual relations, it refers to wrong behavior.

- Lot's daughters slept with their father (Gen. 19:32-35).
- Shechem defiled Dinah (Gen. 34:2-7).
- Reuben slept with his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22).
- Amnon raped Tamar (2 Sam. 13:11-14).

Unfortunately, this can happen within marriage if couples don't bond emotionally and spiritually through a loving, giving, and honoring relationship. The word *shakab* is used in the case of Jacob and Leah, because he didn't love his wife (Gen. 30:16). Their marriage may have produced seven children, but it also produced pain and conflict.

When sex is self-seeking, it brings many emotional, physical, and spiritual consequences. Guarding marriage from adultery starts by creating a true connection of love, honor, and

romance between both spouses and nurturing the love-relationship. Honoring marriage produces lives that are pleasing to God and brings us the greatest satisfaction and joy.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Last year D. W. Williams, 103, and his wife, Willie Williams, 100, celebrated 82 years of marriage. The couple met in Newberry, S.C., in 1935, and they were married two years later. They won the longest running marriage contest in their state in 2014. D. W. and Willie have accomplished quite a feat to remain married so long because black marriages struggle to last mainly due to socioeconomic factors. The couple attributes the secret to their lasting black love to trusting God, listening to country western music, working crossword puzzles, talking things out, and just being nice to one another. <sup>6</sup>

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS OUR GROUP CAN ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT COUPLES IN THEIR MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP?

## LIVE IT

### How will you honor marriage?

God made His standard about relationships between a man and a woman clear in the Ten Commandments. Obedience to God's commandment carries God's blessing, but as we see in the life of David, failing to honor God's standard of marriage brings devastating consequences. God calls marriage a covenant, and the nature of a covenant is spiritually binding.

+ + +

- Adultery begins in the heart. Reject any lust or inappropriate feelings toward others.
- If you're guilty of adultery (emotionally or physically) in the past or present, repent fully before God. Turn your heart toward obedience to Christ.
- Seek ways to honor your and others' marriage.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. ONENESS KEEPER // EXODUS 20:14

In the realm of marriage, a man and woman live in oneness. Spouses should commit to be oneness keepers, individually and as a couple working to maintain purity and faithfulness. Because marriage standards in today's culture have been infiltrated by sin, the work of oneness keeping needs the inclusion of God as one of the strings in the union. Without God, a marriage will more often than not succumb to the temptations that drive a husband and wife apart.

**Choose to live out the covenant of marriage as a oneness keeper who honors the marriage standards set by God.**

## 2. DESIRABLE DESIRES // MATTHEW 5:27-28

Desire is defined as a strong hunger for something for enjoyment or satisfaction. Our desires come from God and are part of our human nature, but they can lead us out of God's will when they are selfishly motivated. This selfishness originates in the heart. Jesus carefully explained the sin that takes place in the heart is just as real as the act of doing it, especially as it relates to the sin of adultery.

**Therefore, our primary concern as a man and woman in marriage should be to align our hearts with what God says is desirable.**

## 3. SET THE RECORD // HEBREWS 13:4

The seventh commandment makes clear that God requires sexual purity, which is in contrast to the unfaithfulness and promiscuity generally practiced and even sanctioned in today's culture. Because marriage is ordained by God, it has a beauty all its own. But there is a mix-up. People are embarrassed by a display of affection between a married couple, yet few blink when the sexual activities

of those who aren't married are on display. We, as God's people, need to set the record straight. Though the affections between a husband and his wife are deeply personal, we should not be ashamed to celebrate our love before a dying world.

**Pray for boldness to share the blessings of holy living and to be a true example of the love we share in marriage.**

## 4. HEART WELL // MATTHEW 15:19

Water wells were important during biblical times because they sustained life in communities. Similarly, the heart can be seen as a well because it also sustains life. Just as it was important to keep biblical community wells free from impurities and filled, it's even more important to keep our hearts clean and filled.

**Such impurities as "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander" have no place in the heart well of a believer.**

## 5. FIRST DEFENSE // PROVERBS 4:23

The heart is the center of a person's true character, and therefore of his purity or impurity (Matt. 15:18). Many times, we make ourselves impure because of what comes out of our mouths. Therefore, it's necessary to guard what goes into our hearts through our eyes and ears. This is our first defense for godly living. Protecting our hearts prevents us from losing our physical, emotional, and spiritual stability and keeps us connected to the Holy Spirit.

**We should entrust our hearts to God's care and protect it from the evils of the world.**

SESSION 6

# HONOR ALL RELATIONSHIPS

**THE POINT:**

INTEGRITY AND CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST FORM THE FOUNDATION FOR GOOD RELATIONSHIPS.

**EXODUS /// 20:15-17; PSALM /// 37:1-6**

Ex. 20:15 Do not steal. 16 Do not give false testimony against your neighbor. 17 Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

.....  
Ps. 37:1 Do not be agitated by evildoers; do not envy those who do wrong. 2 For they wither quickly like grass and wilt like tender green plants. 3 Trust in the LORD and do what is good; dwell in the land and live securely. 4 Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires. 5 **Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act,** 6 **making your righteousness shine like the dawn, your justice like the noonday.**

**MEMORY VERSE**

- +
- +
- +

**KEYWORDS**

**a: False testimony (Ex. 20:16)**  
– Has to do with speaking falsely, unjustly, or deceptively against one's neighbor. In the Old Testament, this was a serious offense and punishable by a court of law.

**Covet (Ex. 20:17)** – To desire or take pleasure in someone else's possessions. Coveting is not an external act but has to do with one's hidden mental state.

# WHY IS INTEGRITY AN IMPORTANT FOUNDATION IN RELATIONSHIPS?

The collapse of a structure can be an amazing thing to watch. One minute you're looking at a fully standing building, bridge, or tunnel, then within seconds, the entire structure collapses into a pile of ashes and rubble.

In controlled demolition, experts place a number of small explosives strategically throughout the structure. Strategic placement is pivotal to destroy the structural integrity of the building without destroying what's around it. The term used for this strategy is *implosion*. It may look chaotic, but it safely protects buildings close by.

The structural integrity of our lives and relationships matters just as much as it does for a building. It takes only a second for a relationship to implode. One lie can collapse a friendship. One slanderous accusation can destroy people's perception of us. One wrong choice carried out to its fullest can cause a decade of growth to crumble. The Ten Commandments provide a solid foundation—built on honor and contentment—to ensure the structural integrity of our relationships.

## Watch Your Speech and Actions // Exodus 20:15-16

A preacher boarded a bus, paid his fare, and the driver gave him change. As the preacher sat down, counting his coins, he discovered the driver gave him too much. Returning to the front of the bus, he handed the driver two quarters and said, "You gave me too much change."

The bus driver smiled saying, "Pastor, I really appreciate this, because I was in your church service yesterday, and I heard your sermon on honesty. I intentionally gave you too much change to see whether you live by what you preach."

## WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT FOR BELIEVERS TO BE PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY?

Integrity ought to be automatic for us. We never know who is watching our actions or listening to our words. The apostle Peter framed integrity to show it as a ready defense: "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so



that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits” (1 Pet. 2:12).

Being honorable is at the heart of two of the Ten Commandments: “Do not steal” and “Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.” We’re to treat others and their possessions with respect in word and action. Jesus said, “Let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no’” (Matt. 5:37). These virtues define a kingdom disciple. Jesus summed it up when He said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Loving one another always includes speaking truth in love (Eph. 4:15). People excuse a lie because it’s “a little white lie,” which is like being a “little pregnant.” Lies can create a boomerang effect and return, causing great damage.

We need to live with integrity, modeling our thoughts, words, and actions after God because our lives should bring glory to Him and advance His kingdom. We want our lives to represent God well. When we don’t, we aren’t reflecting the truth of who God is. When we lie or are deceptive, we’re showcasing the “father of

lies,” Satan’s nature, instead of God’s.

### **WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR SOCIETY WHEN PEOPLE DON’T LIVE WITH HONESTY AND INTEGRITY?**

## **Be Content**

// **Exodus 20:17**

Aesop’s Fables include the story of a dog crossing a bridge with a bone in his mouth. As he considered the water, he saw a reflection of what he thought was a larger dog with an even larger bone. Wanting the bigger bone, the dog opened his mouth to go after it, dropping his bone into the water where it sunk. Not only did the dog not get the “larger bone,” but he lost the one he’d been enjoying.

Dissatisfaction with what you’ve already got is the quickest path toward losing it.

Contentment shouldn’t depend on things or circumstances. Contentment is realizing that God has met your needs, and coupling that realization with gratitude.

### **WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL STEPS WE CAN TAKE TO AVOID DISCONTENTMENT IN OUR LIVES?**

Contentment is:

- Being just as happy



## **DIGGING DEEPER THE SIN OF ACHAN**

When the Israelites set out to conquer the promised land, a man named Achan sinned when he first “coveted” some beautiful things and then “took them” (Josh. 7:21), in violation of God’s command to destroy everything in Jericho. Achan’s sinful action began with a sinful thought, which had devastating consequences initially for the Israelites and ultimately for him and his family, since he and his sons and daughters were stoned to death as a result of his sin (vv. 24-25). In the New Testament, Jesus clarified how even a thought can be sinful (Matt. 5:28), and that sinful actions originate in the heart (15:19).

### **How does the sin of coveting challenge our integrity?**

driving an old hooptie as driving a new Mercedes®. Both are transportation.

- Being fine with living in an 800-square-foot apartment as in a four-thousand-square-foot house. Both are housing.
- Enjoying a hot dog as much as a T-bone steak. Both are food.
- Being just as satisfied wearing thrift store clothing as wearing a designer outfit. Both are clothes.

Living in contentment acknowledges God’s goodness, provision, and timing. Paul shared:

“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. I know both how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of

being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:11-13).

The secret to contentment is knowing all we have and can do comes through Christ, who loves us most. Contentment is the key to a life of integrity because it provides the security necessary to rest in God’s provision. Find contentment in God and find the secret to a satisfying life.

### Trust in the Lord

// Psalm 37:1-6

David captures the heart of the commandment not to covet. He reminds us not to envy those who disregard God yet seem to thrive. As another psalmist wrote, “My feet almost slipped; my steps nearly went astray. For I

envied the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Ps. 73:2-3).

The antidote for such envy and dissatisfaction comes from looking to God instead of gawking at the wicked. We are to “trust” and “take delight” in Him and Him alone. All we could ever desire rests in God.

### WHAT EVIDENCE HAVE YOU SEEN THAT GOD’S COMMANDS ARE FOR OUR OWN GOOD?

Early in ministry, struggling with contentment, I wanted the ministry to grow and expand. My attitude caused me to work long hours when I may not have needed to. My focus was on my own efforts.

I received vital advice from a former seminary classmate who had an impactful ministry. He said, “Tony, never forget this truth: you only have one





## THE POINT: INTEGRITY AND CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST FORM THE FOUNDATION FOR GOOD RELATIONSHIPS.

Source. God is your Source. Everything else is just a resource.”

That truth enabled me to rest. Since God was my Source, He would provide a way to achieve the outcomes if it was His will. This truth rests on a powerful verse: “And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8).

This means none of us needs to worry or fret about what other people are accomplishing or doing. It’s a normal human inclination to make comparisons. David appeared to struggle with this, and we do too—but that doesn’t mean it’s healthy. We can let go of competition and embrace our completion in Christ. “Trust in the Lord and do what is good,” living life by the virtues and values of God’s kingdom.

In Christ, you receive your heart’s desires, His endless provision, and rest. Align your thoughts, words, and actions under His authority and trust His provision. Give Christ your heart by giving Him your loyalty. Then watch Him bring you delight as He delights in you.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Though not stated, one implication of the command, do not covet, is the right to own personal property. Some people may injure or exploit others in their pursuit of possessions. Possessions can potentially draw a person’s heart away from God, but in contrast they can be used (even given away) for good and godly purposes. When the slaves were freed by the war and the proclamation of the president of the United States, on Jan. 16, 1865, General William T. Sherman sought to give away land for godly purposes. He issued an order to give the newly freed slaves 40 acres of tillable land. He also ordered the army to loan the freed families a mule; hence the familiar name for the order, “40 acres and a mule.” However, President Andrew Johnson overturned the order with one swipe of his pen.<sup>7</sup>

### HOW DO YOU THINK THIS OCCURRENCE MAY HAVE IMPACTED THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN’S TRUST IN GOD?

## LIVE IT

### How will you seek to live a life of integrity?

Integrity becomes crucial for our culture’s stability when it seems to be ruled by deceit and mistrust. People of integrity create the harmony necessary for relationships to thrive. The Ten Commandments provide a solid foundation to ensure the structural integrity of our relationships.

+ + +

- Watch your words and actions this week. Be a person of honesty and truthfulness.
- TV or social media can cause depression or feelings of dissatisfaction. Encourage those struggling with dissatisfaction.
- Keep the heartbeat of the Ten Commandments by allowing God to love others through you.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. TRUST OVER GREED // EXODUS 20:15-17

The heart of these commandments center on loving others and respecting their possessions. When we are thankful and content with what we have, there is no room for covetous behavior. Contentment does not mean we have settled for what we have; rather, it means we have a healthy trust in God. We trust that the love of God is true, and we trust that what He desires for us, He is able to provide.

**So, instead of wanting more possessions, we should want more of God. His goodness and grace is sufficient for all we need.**

## 2. WIN THEM WITH HONOR // 1 PETER 2:12

The phrase “kill ‘em with kindness” refers to being overly kind to others even when they’re not kind to you. Peter shared this biblical principle and God’s expectation of His people to act honorably always. So, how can you win those who are unkind to us? Represent God well as an honorable person in everything you say and do. This will cause them to see you in a new light and give glory to God. The kindness of your heart toward them may even win them for Christ.

**Let us establish our behavior in God’s goodness so that even those who may despise us will glorify God.**

## 3. SERVING UP TRUTH // EPHESIANS 4:15

Would you prefer to hear what people think you want to hear or would you want to hear the truth? Though we may not like or agree with the truth, we’re better off when we truly know what’s going on. The icing on the cake for us is that our truth spoken in love covers our words with sweetness and causes hearers to have the assurance that we have their best interests at heart. Because of this, we should never deviate from the truth.

**If we need help, we should ask the Spirit for wisdom to speak the truth in God’s love.**

## 4. CONTENT IN ALL THINGS // PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13

The source of some of life’s issues is in a lack of contentment. Either our expectations aren’t met, leading to disappointment, or we’re envious of what others have, causing dissatisfaction. Paul said he was content in whatever circumstance he was in. Even though Paul was in need and inside a Roman prison, he was content. The source of contentment isn’t a secret for believers. We know that if we base our contentment on things or people, we’re guaranteed disappointment. However, just like Paul, focusing on God’s plan for our lives and living that plan, ensures contentment in all things.

**Accept Christ’s will for your life and believe He will provide all you need to live it out, then you too will be content in all things.**

## 5. DELIGHTFUL DESIRES // PSALM 37:4

God doesn’t just want good for us; He wants us to be delighted in Him and His desires for us. To delight in someone means to find extreme satisfaction in that person. But this can happen only when we know him or her. So, if we’re to delight in the Lord, we must grow to know Him. The satisfaction we have in knowing God and His provision will reap the blessings of a happy and satisfied life. In knowing God, our desires will not be clouded by envy, jealousy, or even worry.

**Rather, in submission to His will, our desires should flow through God and His Word with delight.**



# Teaching the Ten Commandments to the Next Generation

NATASHA MENIFEE

**W**hen you hear The Ten Commandments, what comes to mind? Law—Love—Restriction—Rescue. Most often we say God’s law, and for many adults that translates to His love. This is not the case however with younger generations. Generation Z and even some millennials have a different opinion when it comes to the word “law” and the legal system in general. The social injustices and divisive government practices they have witnessed gives a different meaning to the word law. For them, law does not necessarily translate to love. For this generation, it equates to restriction and has a negative connotation. Whether their thinking is accurate or not, it is where we are in 2020.

Therefore, we have a responsibility to the generations coming behind us to share the truth of what God has given to His people through the Ten Commandments. God does not save us, turn us loose and say “do your best!” He loves us too much for that. Rather, believers have a clear and concise set of directions on how to navigate life. The first three laws are given to show us how to be in relationship with God. The remaining

seven, teach us how to have a relationship with one another. Unfortunately, many people see them as outdated and irrelevant. Nothing could be further from the truth. God's Word is timeless and will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8). But the question remains, how do we re-present this Old Testament truth to a new generation? Allow me to offer three suggestions on how to guide this generation to love God's law.

### Know Your Audience

In order to teach the upcoming generation, you must get to know the generation. Gone are the days when adults tell you what you should believe and you just believe it. Today young



people do not take everything at face value just because someone says it is so. They want to know the “why” behind it. Why is the Bible important to my life? Why should I read what I don't understand? Take some time to build a relationship with your youth or young adults. Once trust has been established, receiving instruction from you becomes easier for them. Paul stated, “I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). Are you willing to do whatever is necessary to reach across generations so that they will have a relationship with Christ?

### Trade Translations

Most young people (adults too) cannot understand all the thee's and thou's of the King James version of the Bible. Not that there is anything wrong with this translation; however, it is important to encourage younger generations to read a version they can understand. If their version of the Bible causes a lack of understanding, a lack of application will potentially follow. The majority of youth and young adults don't even use an actual print Bible; instead, they tap and scroll. Their world is one of technology and apps, why not use technology to guide their spiritual growth. This means we will see phones in Bible study, Sunday School, even worship. We have to allow ourselves to be stretched beyond our comfort zone in order for our generation to teach the next one.

### Connect the Dots

Whether it is in daily conversation or Bible study, we have an obligation to connect the dots of Scripture to this generation. They need to know why what happened yesterday is important to their lives today. Using this teaching model provides biblical context (then) and life application (now).

**Natasha Menifee** is a writer and teacher who serves as the Christian education director at First Baptist Church, Winchester, Ky. She holds two master's degrees from Georgetown College, one in learning/behavior disorders and the other in teacher leadership. She is the proud mother of two daughters.

## SESSION 2

# OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

**THE POINT:**  
COMMIT YOUR WHOLE  
LIFE IN TRUST AND  
OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST.

### MARK /// 10:13-22

#### MEMORY VERSE

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup> **Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.**” <sup>16</sup> After taking them in his arms, he laid his hands on them and blessed them.

<sup>17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “No one is good except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not defraud; honor your father and mother.” <sup>20</sup> He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth.”

<sup>21</sup> Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, “You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup> But he was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.

+  
+  
+

#### KEYWORDS

**a: Touch them** (v. 13) – Jesus blessed them. This phrase’s use in this verse is intensified, conveying Jesus’ sincerity.

**b: Inherit** (v. 17) – Receive as an heir upon the passing of a previous holder. The inheritance received through Christ is not earned or deserved, but through a relationship.

# HOW CAN WE SHOW TRUE COMMITMENT TO CHRIST?

The reality TV show *American Ninja Warrior*<sup>®</sup> has contestants tackling challenging and complex obstacle courses. These athletes have been in intense training for months. Their thinking has been totally focused on getting through those tough courses and finishing well. It's no small commitment.

We may not be vying for any kind of title, but our lives revolve around our commitments just the same. A quick look at a typical week will reveal our commitments and how committed we are to those commitments! Family, friends, a job, honing a new skill, practicing a hobby, and working out at the gym all call for a level of commitment. And all of them will face an "obstacle course" of challenges.

Our commitments reveal what we love. Our commitments also reveal *whom* we love.

In the Bible, we read about commitment, and specifically God's love for us. He is fully committed to us. The real question is how we respond to that commitment.

## Trust Christ with Childlike Faith

// Mark 10:13-16

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus gave us a clear picture of what commitment and obedience to Him looks like. While Jesus was teaching and healing, people brought their children to Him so He could touch and bless them. His disciples didn't like this and "rebuked them." The disciples probably thought Jesus was bothered by the children because He was busy teaching, healing, and building the kingdom of God. Jesus rebuked His disciples for thinking that way. Jesus made two statements.

### 1. "Let the little children come to me.

Don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." The kingdom of God belongs to people like those little children.

### 2. "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

This must have been confusing for the disciples. People assumed that the most educated and knowledgeable in the things



of God would make it into His kingdom. Yet, Jesus said you must be like “little children” to enter His kingdom.

**HOW DO YOU THINK THE PRESSURES OF LIFE HAVE STOLEN YOUR CHILDLIKE FAITH?**

Most believers no longer have the childlike faith we had when we first came to Christ. We came to Christ in faith and trusted everything Jesus said, beginning with what He said about His love and forgiveness for us. We loved nothing in the world more than being with and pleasing our heavenly Father. Then we grew up, got busy with life, got distracted by things, and now God is no longer our priority.

That’s what Jesus is saying. Unless we come to God like a child we can’t enter the kingdom of God. Children aren’t caught up with the worries of the world but simply want to be with and please their Father. Entering God’s kingdom has nothing to do with position, power, education, or social status. Entering God’s kingdom has everything to do with the posture of our heart. We need to have the delighted, adoring posture of a child.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK CHILD-LIKE FAITH LOOKS LIKE?**

**Strive to Obey Christ // Mark 10:17-20**

Immediately following the account of the little children, Mark related another event that helps us see what actual obedience to Christ looks like. These verses tell us about a man who wanted to know what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. This young man was trying to secure his way into heaven by doing good deeds. He wanted to know what was on the “get into heaven checklist.” You may have had the same question yourself: “What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?”

The problem comes when we think we can be good enough to gain a right standing with God. Donating to charity, giving money to the homeless, and volunteering our time, resources, and energy to good organizations are good things but shouldn’t be a part of our own “get into heaven checklist.”

**WHY ARE OUR GOOD DEEDS NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO GET US INTO HEAVEN?**

Jesus gave the man the list that he was seeking, making the point that he already knew what the law said:

- Do not murder.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not steal.



**DIGGING DEEPER  
GOD IS GOOD**

Jesus was addressed by the rich, young man as, “Good teacher” (v. 17). In the Old Testament, the people of Israel didn’t normally use “good” to refer to other individuals. They generally used it when referring to God (1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 5:13; Ezra 3:11). Thus, Jesus’ question (v. 18) shouldn’t have surprised anyone who heard it. They believed that only God deserved the distinction of being called good. Being good meant much more than just doing some good things. The Greek word in this verse painted a picture of built-in, deeply-rooted goodness that would always come across as altogether genuine and pure.

**If Jesus and God are one, why do you think Jesus said, “No one is good except God alone”?**



- Do not lie.
- Honor your parents.

Jesus chose these commandments because He knew this Jewish man would know them. These commandments involve other people. The man was excited because in his outward behavior he was obedient. However, his actions showed partial commitment. We demonstrate our commitment as we strive for obedience. There should not be limits to our obedience. But Jesus was about to drop a bomb on this man's way of thinking.

### WHY WASN'T THIS MAN'S OBEDIENCE GOOD ENOUGH?

## Follow Christ Wholeheartedly

// Mark 10:21-22

Jesus laid a big demand on the man by telling him there's

one thing he lacked. He still loved money. Jesus told him to give all his money to the poor and follow Him.

Giving up our possessions is not the point of this passage of Scripture. There's no other place in the Gospels that Jesus told anyone to give up their possessions. In following Jesus, Zaccheus gave away half of all he owned to the poor and paid others four times what he owed them (Luke 19:1-10). In His parable of the minas, Jesus called us to use what we have wisely for His kingdom. So why did Jesus make this demand on this man? Jesus knew the man loved his possessions more than he loved Him. Money sat on the throne of this man's heart, not God. So Jesus looked past his surface obedience and went straight to the one thing the man loved more than anything.

We can't miss what Jesus did before His demand of the man. "Looking at him, Jesus loved him." The man wanted a rich, full life as well as eternal life and Jesus wanted both of those for him too. Jesus loved him and wanted the best for him. Jesus knew the way to get both of those desires was an "all in" commitment to follow Him.

The young man heard an answer to his question, but it was not what he wanted or expected. "He was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions." This man had said with his mouth he wanted eternal life, but he was not willing to do the one thing Jesus said he needed to do. He loved his money more than he loved Jesus. He didn't want a genuine relationship with Jesus.



## THE POINT: COMMIT YOUR WHOLE LIFE IN TRUST AND OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST.

After the man walked away, Jesus remarked “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25). Jesus, not people or things, must hold first place in our hearts in order to enter the kingdom of God. God wants us to be “all in.”

### WHAT OBSTACLES KEEP SOME PEOPLE FROM TOTAL COMMITMENT TO CHRIST?

How can we be saved? Can we only be saved by first being perfectly committed to Jesus with all our hearts? No. We’re saved by grace through faith. We enter God’s kingdom like children who come to our Father, desperate for His love and presence. The evidence of our salvation are hearts fully committed to our heavenly Father we love. Committed hearts don’t give us entrance into the kingdom of God, but they prove we have already been given access to God’s kingdom. When we trust Christ and have received the love of God it proves we’re totally committed to God in return.

### WHAT DOES A LIFE TOTALLY COMMITTED TO CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

### DID YOU KNOW?

A life committed to Christ resembles the life of Sojourner Truth. Born into slavery in 1797 as Isabella Baumfree, Sojourner had several owners who were cruel to her. But she became a runaway at the age of 17 and received help from a family of Quakers who freed her. While living in the Quaker home, Sojourner said she received a vision from God. She said, “God revealed Himself to her, showing her that He was all over.” She later said, “Jesus loved me! I knowed it, I felt it.” Sojourner said God changed her name “because I was to travel up an’ down the land, showin’ the people their sins, an’ bein’ a sign unto them.” She said He gave her the last name “Truth” because she was to speak the truth to the people. Sojourner’s work as a writer, preacher, woman’s advocate, and abolitionist was sometimes met with harassment. But she did not allow that to keep her from doing what God called her to do. She died in 1883.<sup>10</sup>

### IN WHAT WAYS DOES SOJOURNER’S LIFE HELP TO DEFINE A LIFE COMMITTED TO CHRIST?

## LIVE IT

Remember when you were first saved? You wanted to be in His presence and do His will. You were excited about your relationship with Him. Sometimes as life happens, people and things become more important than God. This lesson has reminded us that God should be our first love. We must say “yes” to Him even when it is hard.

+ + +

- This week rekindle the childlike faith that drew you to love God. If you find that you have strayed from Him, recommit your heart to Him.
- If you’ve been trying to be good in order to gain a good standing with God, acknowledge the futility of it. Trust Christ and be obedient to His Word as a response to His grace in your life.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. THE GREATEST LOVE // 1 JOHN 3:1

Whitney Houston sang the “Greatest Love of All.” In the song, her greatest love of all was loving yourself. While loving yourself is important, God’s love, by far, is the greatest love in all creation. John reminded us that the greatest love story ever written is found in the pages of Scripture. In page after page, the heart of God is revealed toward His children. God loves us more than we can love ourselves.

**His love should encourage us to commit ourselves to Christ and live as He did.**

## 2. UNITED FOREVER // ROMANS 5:10

Why did Paul say we were God’s enemies? We were enemies of God because of the sin in our hearts. In that condition, we could not live in God’s presence (Ps. 5:4). Paul was reminding the Roman church and, ultimately us, that the love He had for us when we were His enemies caused Him to sacrifice His Son. Imagine the depth of that kind of love. Now we are eternally tied to God through the power of His Holy Spirit.

**It is that power and love that unites us to God and on which we can draw for help every day of our lives.**

## 3. AMAZING GRACE // ROMANS 5:20-21

Sometimes people on death row seek pardons from their state governor or the president of the U.S., because they proclaim their innocence. Usually, new evidence has been discovered that proves their clear innocence. We are reminded in Paul’s letter to the Romans, that though we are guilty, God’s grace pardons us from our sins. More amazingly, He invites us to live with Him forever in His kingdom. The Christian life isn’t a mistake-free

life, but it can be a guilt-free life. God understands when we mess up—and He loves us anyway.

**God’s grace is amazing! Thank God for His saving and restoring grace!**

## 4. REFRESHING WORD // PSALM 19:7-8

This Scripture describes God’s Word as perfect. His Word renews and restores our lives. Many books have been written to educate us. However, education is not wisdom and education without wisdom makes us dangerous. Wisdom brings experience, knowledge, and good judgment to life’s table. The best kind of wisdom is godly wisdom that comes from the Word of God and brings joy. How refreshing to receive joy and wisdom from God’s Word. Thank God for His refreshing Word!

**Let us use it daily to guide our steps in wisdom and give us joy.**

## 5. TRAINING RIGHT // 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

I’ve taught my daughters how to sew by hand so they can mend their own clothes. One of my daughters repeatedly tries something different and her way results in misaligned seams. Her mistakes reveal my inadequacies. Although I’m a good seamstress, my instructions aren’t always perfect. However, God’s Word is perfect! Paul discloses that God’s Word is perfect for “teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness.” His Word prepares you for every good work to which He has called you. Therefore, you should not try to live life a different way. He has a perfect plan for you for which you will be trained through His Word. So, when you read the Word, apply it to your life.

**Make the Bible your standard for everything that claims to be true.**



# leaves are falling, Christ is calling

TANYA R. WEST

**“So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ” (Rom. 10:17).**

**Fall . . . a season made perfect by everything pumpkin spice, hayrides, and football! There is something wonderful about the crisp, cool autumn air, sweater weather, and gathering around a warm bonfire to make s'mores that brings out the fellowship in everyone. It is during those times when we can gather with friends to reminisce over days gone by and make plans for the future to come. It is also during this time when we can take a few minutes of our conversation to invite our friends to experience the same God who causes the leaves to change into magnificent hues of orange, gold, and red.**

**There are many fall activities that present opportunities to not only fellowship with others but to share our faith. For instance, many of us will take time to research, prepare, and purchase new grass seeds and flower bulbs this season to prepare for spring. We will weedeat and aerate our lawns to make sure that what we have purchased will take root. In the spring, we will enjoy the fruit and blooms of our labor when we see a beautiful harvest of lush green grass and multi-colored flowers. How amazing would it be if we took the opportunity to pull double duty and plant seeds for the kingdom as well this fall? Planting spiritual seeds can be as simple as inviting someone to a small group study, or just being willing to share a short and sweet testimony of what God has done recently in your life.**

## Christ is always opening doors along the way, showing and giving us opportunities to be His hands and feet in this world.

Other ways we can plant these seeds is to use the familiar traditions of fall. For some, it is the time of pumpkin carving and cooking, which can also become an open door to a praise discussion. For others, it can be a faith-filled conversation on a scenic drive or hiking trail while taking in the autumn colors. In our home, and the homes of many others, football season is a very big deal! From Friday night lights for high school and Saturday afternoon college games to Sunday/Monday nights filled with NFL® highs and lows, our family breathes, sleeps, and eats football.

During this season, most of us are in constant contact with people as we serve in the capacity of host, team parents, or just simply cheering on the sidelines. There is something wonderful and warm about gathering with other families to cheer on our favorite players while trying new dips and fingerfoods. But what if we took it up a notch and invited our confused coworkers, or the doubting delivery person who isn't quite sure what they believe in? What if we reached out to the searching soldier next door during this season, to not only offer chips and salsa, but to offer Christ?

Tailgating at homecoming games or sharing our cooking secrets on how to make an award-winning batch of chili, while coming together to cheer for our favorite teams can lead to great conversations. We can weave in the telling of a special and personal encounter we have experienced of how God was able to season our lives with grace, love, and mercy.

Here is the thing, while we are busy moving from one season to the next, Christ is always opening doors along the way, showing and giving us opportunities to be His hands and feet in this world. The problem is not being able to see the windows of opportunity because they aren't the most conventional nor traditional ways we are used to. We serve a God who was never meant to be contained in a box, so it only makes sense that we should think outside of the box to reach those in need! Think about it: If the only place to hear about Jesus was in Sunday School, how many people would be left behind? The Scripture tells us that "faith comes from what is heard" (Rom. 10:17), which should challenge us to share our faith even in the least traditional settings. We have zero reservation about sharing our famous recipes for physical nourishment to those who are hungry and excited about our latest dish. Imagine what could happen if we took a few minutes to tell someone the recipe of how Christ nourishes our souls?

So as you pull out that cozy sweater and your favorite mug this year, consider bringing an acquaintance or two along to the next Bible study. Because knowing Him is much sweeter than the best pumpkin spice caramel latte fall can bring!

Tanya R. West is a writer, speaker, and Bible teacher who serves as the minister of families and young adults alongside her husband, Rev. Clarence West Jr., at East End Baptist Church in Suffolk, Va. They have served in ministry for more than fifteen years and have three young adult children.



SESSION 3

# COMMITTED TO HIS WORD

**THE POINT:**  
GOD'S WORD GIVES  
TRUSTWORTHY  
GUIDANCE FOR ALL  
OF LIFE.

## PSALM /// 119:1-11

MEMORY VERSE

**<sup>1</sup> How happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk according to the Lord's instruction!** <sup>2</sup> Happy are those who keep his decrees and seek him with all their heart. <sup>3</sup> They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. <sup>4</sup> You have commanded that your precepts be diligently kept.

<sup>5</sup> If only my ways were committed to keeping your statutes! <sup>6</sup> Then I would not be ashamed when I think about all your commands. <sup>7</sup> I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous judgments. <sup>8</sup> I will keep your statutes; never abandon me.

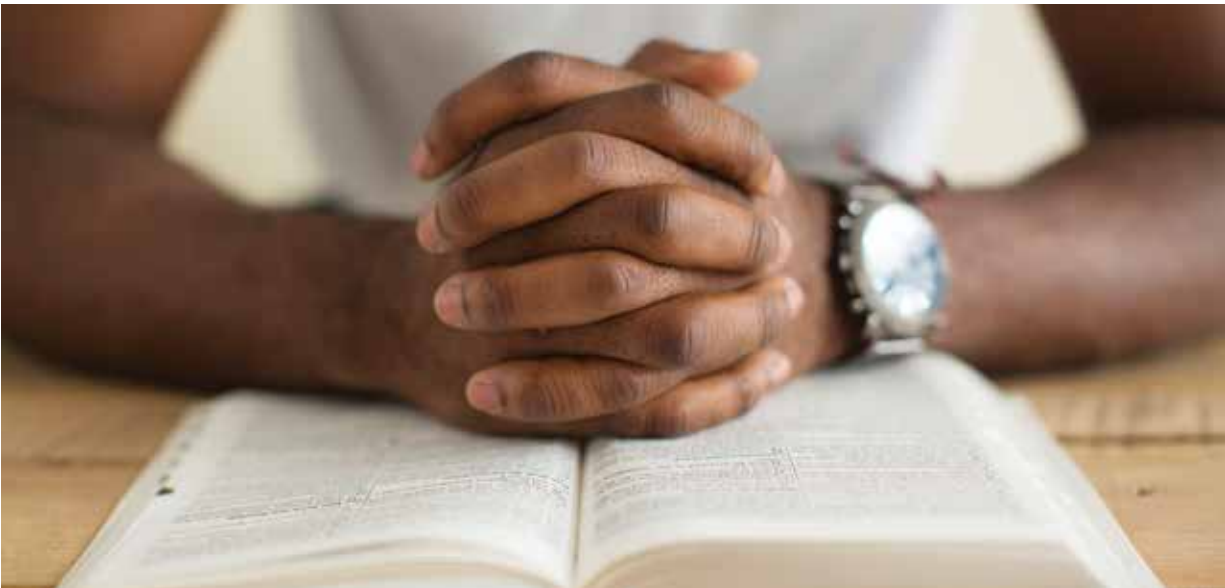
<sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping your word. <sup>10</sup> I have sought you with all my heart; don't let me wander from your commands. <sup>11</sup> I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.

+  
+  
+

KEYWORDS

**a: Blameless** (v. 1) – To be blameless derives from the Hebrew word for “perfect.” The psalmist prayed for total commitment to obedience.

**b: Diligently** (v. 4) – From the Hebrew word meaning “muchness, force, abundance.” God's laws should be given continual observance.



## IN WHAT WAYS DOES GOD'S WORD BLESS MY LIFE?

It's frustrating to sit in class and discover you know more than the instructor. You wonder *"Aren't you supposed to be the authority on this subject?"*

For years, some states short on certified teachers have offered emergency teaching certificates, allowing non-certified, unqualified teachers to teach in public schools. In 2018, one state issued over 2,000 such certificates.<sup>11</sup> Though it may be better than having no teacher at all, teachers should actually know what they're talking about.

When it comes to instruction, we want reliable information. When it comes to how to live life, we encounter a lot of self-proclaimed authorities on the matter. Such so-called experts might be OK if we're changing a carburetor or baking a pie, but we need to consider carefully what authority we look to for gaining eternal life.

We have that authority in the Bible. God revealed Himself through His Word. He's the Authority worth listening to.

### The Word Guides My Walk

// Psalm 119:1-4

Psalm 119 points to God's Word as the guide and authority for us. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the psalmist pointed to God's Word as the ultimate source of life, joy, and peace.

Twice, the writer used the word: *happy*. The original Hebrew word meant "fully satisfied" referring to the "highest form of human experience." Jesus used a similar word in the Beatitudes when He said, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit" ... "blessed are those who mourn" ... "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:3-11).

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS GOD'S WORD HAS BEEN A BLESSING IN YOUR LIFE?

When the psalmist wrote, "How happy are those whose way is blameless," he was saying a person who walks blamelessly will find the highest form of human satisfaction and the ultimate experience of human life. The blameless

way is only found in following God's Word. It is the way to be truly "happy."

We can only find the highest, most blessed human experience by walking "according to the Lord's instruction!" The psalmist said, "Happy are those who keep His decrees and seek Him with all their heart." A blameless life is 100% committed to God. We receive the highest form of blessing in our lives when we're fully committed to God and His Word with our whole heart.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8). When our hearts are purely devoted to God, we receive and experience the highest form of blessing. Throughout Scripture, we learn that complete obedience to God's Word brings blessing.

#### WHAT HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED WHEN YOU STRAYED FROM GOD'S WORD?

### The Word Makes Me Unashamed

// Psalm 119:5-8

Satan uses shame to keep us down, to make us feel unworthy to worship God, follow God, or even know God. Satan uses shame to make us believe we're unworthy of God's love.

Conviction is not the same as feeling shame. Shame is something Satan throws at us to keep us down; conviction comes from God's Holy Spirit with the purpose of leading us to repent and turn back to Him.

#### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE BEING SHAMED OR CONVICTED?

When we give our lives to Christ, He comes to live in us through His Holy Spirit. As His children, we can't sin anymore without being convicted by the Holy Spirit. God hates sin, so when we sin, His Spirit lets us know through the act of conviction. His purpose is always to restore us. When we sin, the Holy Spirit whispers to us, "That's not how you were created to live; come back and obey God."

Satan has another goal when we sin: shame. The tempter becomes the accuser, and he whispers things like: *You sinned again? I thought you were a Christian . . . How many times are you going to keep on doing the same old awful things? . . . How do you think you'll ever be worthy of worshiping God, knowing all you've done?*

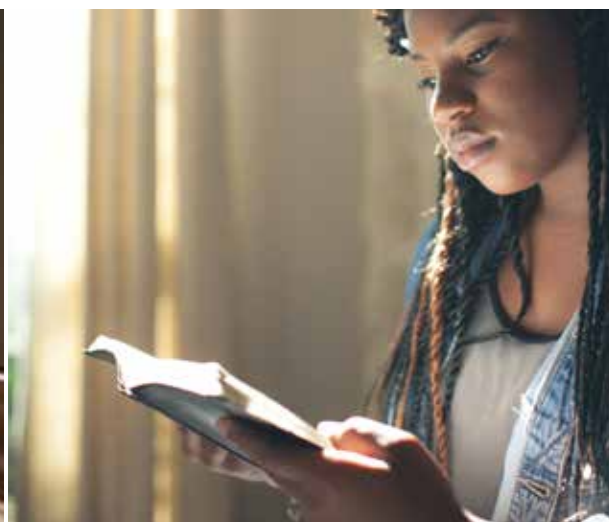
Don't ever forget this one truth: shame comes from the enemy *to keep us away from*



### DIGGING DEEPER BLAMELESS LIVING

To be blameless (v. 1) means to be unblemished, whole, and complete. Such a person lives with integrity. Nobody can accuse him or her of doing something that's unjust, unfair, dishonest, or wrong. A person who makes being upright a priority will be happy. In fact, being blameless stands out as the surest way of being happier than we could ever imagine. Of course, blameless living starts with devoting ourselves to "the LORD's instruction" and allowing His Word to guide our lives. His instruction—*torah* in Hebrew—can be trusted to put us on a path that will lead to happiness.

#### Why do some believers struggle with the idea of blameless living?



God, but conviction comes from the Holy Spirit to *bring us back to Him*.

#### WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PERSON DEVOTED TO KNOWING GOD AND KEEPING HIS WORD?

We can avoid the accusations, shame, and humiliation by being devoted and obedient to God in all our ways. The psalmist expresses a desire to be fully committed to God's Word. The cry of his heart is to follow the Word of the Lord with every second of his life! Why? "Then I would not be ashamed."

The greatest weapon against Satan's plan to get us to sin and bury us in shame is obedience to God's Word. We should desire obedience. Remaining obedient can be hard. We are prone to sin, but we can stand against

temptation when we lean on Christ. The psalmist recognized the beauty and power of God's commands and his need for God's help. As we seek to obey, we must pray like the psalmist, "Never abandon me." We need the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to obey, and when we lean on Him, we won't be put to shame.

#### WHAT WAS THE PSALMIST'S DESIRE IN THESE VERSES?

### The Word Keeps Me from Sin

// Psalm 119:9-11

Let's be honest: sin offers pleasure. If not, we wouldn't sin. However, sin's pleasure is short lived and leaves only emptiness. Why? Sin never satisfies.

Christ's followers all sin, but when we do, we're not left

alone with emptiness. The Holy Spirit lives in us. We react different to sin than when we were unbelievers. We may enjoy sin for a short time, but the Holy Spirit immediately convicts us and produces in us a holy unhappiness. As believers, if we choose to sin, it's just a matter time before we come to our senses and repent. Why? We are God's children, and the Holy Spirit that lives in us will never let us be OK with sin.

The goal of every believer should be to set our heart on obedience to God and away from the path of sin. This is the only way we find peace and rest. The psalmist gave us the key to rest and peace: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping your word."

In Psalm 119, the psalmist connects living right and



## THE POINT: GOD'S WORD GIVES TRUSTWORTHY GUIDANCE FOR ALL OF LIFE.

obeying God's Word. He knew he could avoid shame by keeping God's Word. In Verse 9, he connected purity and obedience. When we live our lives according to God's Word, our way of life will remain pure.

### WHAT SPECIFIC STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO INCREASE THE INFLUENCE OF GOD'S WORD IN YOUR LIFE?

The psalmist noted, to keep from sinning and keep his ways pure he had "treasured your word in my heart." In Hebrew, treasured means hiding something of great value. We hide God's Word in our hearts so when we need it, it's available. When we're not nourished with God's Word we're easily tempted to sin. The culture's worldview can easily influence our thinking when we haven't nourished our souls with God's view found in His Word.

When we treasure God's Word in our hearts, we feast on His goodness and provision. There's no room for sin when our hearts are full of God's Word.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The controversial history of African-American education impacted learning the Bible. Illiteracy was an overarching nemesis in their lives because slave owners feared losing control of slaves, if they were educated. Also, the Bible was misused by white masters and ministers to maintain supremacy and ownership of slaves. Despite these efforts and following slavery, literacy increased within the populace of African-Americans. Because of this they became exposed to the fully liberating, unadulterated Word of God. In most cases, the Bible was taught in Sunday School, which functioned not only to help African-Americans reach their highest potential within the world, but to humanize them in a system that sought to steal their freedom and joy.<sup>12</sup>

### HOW DOES FORCED ILLITERACY AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICANS INSPIRE YOU TO MAKE A COMMITMENT TO KNOW THE WORD OF GOD?

## LIVE IT

Everyone with a smartphone has access to GPS (Global Positioning System). It can help you get to most but not all places. Even if you follow it exactly as it instructs you can get lost. Believers have the ultimate guide to wholeness in life in God's Word. When you're obedient to God's Word and follow as it instructs, you are equipped to reach the destination God has ordained for you.

+ + +

- If God's Word has not been a part of your life, begin now. Take time every day to read Scripture and meditate on what you read.
- Reach out to those not currently in a Sunday School class and let God use you to help them discover the rich guidance from His Word.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. FAITHFUL FOLLOWER // DEUTERONOMY 13:4

In the kid's game, "Follow the Leader," the players are to do everything the leader does. Slip up and you are out. The last one standing wins the game. This Scripture implores us to follow God and "fear Him." To "fear" God is to love and honor Him. The proof of doing both is obedience. Unlike the game, we follow God and obey His commands because we love and honor Him, not so we can win at any game in life.

**When we worship God and remain faithful to Him, He receives the honor He deserves.**

## 2. BECAUSE OF LOVE // JOHN 14:15

The word *love* is used so much in our culture that the meaning has become lost. People seemingly fall in and out of love like it's a virus that comes and goes. The apostle John recounted what Jesus told His disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commands." The Greek word used for love here is *agape*. This type of love is a strong permanent love that requires actively doing what the Lord prefers. It's a love that doesn't go away and never wavers. This type of love should be exhibited to God and to all people.

**Love should be our response to God and His Son, Jesus Christ, for the unconditional love given to us.**

## 3. COMMITTED WORKER // PROVERBS 16:3

There is nothing more pleasing to an employer than a committed employee. You know the ones: they are always on time for work; they volunteer to stay late; they complete every assignment; and they never complain. Committed employees are usually rewarded for their commitment. But think about it; God desires that we do His will and His work the

same way. In this verse, Solomon provides wisdom on the reward of being committed to the work of God. God promised to make our plans succeed.

**Let us trust our work to God, and let us work as if what we do depends completely on Him.**

## 4. BETTER TOGETHER // EPHESIANS 4:3-4

I like trail mix. There's something about the blend of salted nuts and dark chocolate that makes it the perfect snack. Although the nuts or the dark chocolate can be eaten alone, somehow the taste just isn't the same. The salted nuts and dark chocolate taste better together. Similarly, one believer can accomplish great things for God. However, when believers are unified, patient, kind, and showing unselfish love to one another, the church will thrive in doing the will of God. Unification is a strong foundation on which a church should be built.

**We should not separate ourselves from the whole, but unite under the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

## 5. LOVE CALLING // ROMANS 13:8

No one wants to be in debt, but it is a huge problem in our culture. Credit counseling companies make a fortune on our bad financial decisions and poor management of our God-given resources. While financial debt is not to be desired, love debt is our calling. Paul reminded the Roman church of the second commandment. The debt he is referring to is a debt of love. It is a debt we can never repay; therefore, we must love so fully that we never owe love to anyone.

**Let us fulfill God's law and love each other as God loves us.**

SESSION 4

# COMMITTED TO HIS CHURCH

**THE POINT:**  
COMMITMENT TO  
CHRIST INCLUDES A  
COMMITMENT TO HIS  
BODY, THE CHURCH.

## ROMANS /// 12:3-16

MEMORY VERSE

**<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.** <sup>4</sup> Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

<sup>6</sup> According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

<sup>9</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good.

<sup>10</sup> Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

+  
+  
+

KEYWORDS

**a: Sensibly** (v. 3) – To be of sound mind. As part of a renewed mind, the Christian is to think wisely about one's self and what one's function is to be in the church.

**b: Hypocrisy** (v. 9) – Love should be free from hidden agendas. God calls us to real and sincere love.

# WHAT ARE REASONS WE SHOULD LOVE THE CHURCH?

“Any friend of yours is a friend of mine.” Many of us have used that timeworn phrase, but as we get to know a friend’s friend, we may change our tune. Just because we have something in common with a friend doesn’t mean we have anything in common with his other friends.

Friendships are one thing, but it’s a different matter with those we love. If someone said to you, “I love you, but I can’t stand your spouse,” it would probably be devastating. Someone can’t truly love another person without also loving that person’s spouse. Such a negative attitude would be a barrier in a relationship.

We hear a similar statement in our culture: “I love Jesus, but I don’t love the church.” Maybe they’ve been hurt by people in the church or they found commitment to the church is too demanding or difficult. Whatever the reason, this sentiment is far from the heart of God. After all, the church is the bride of Christ.

We are to love that which Christ loves, and that includes His bride, the church.

## We Are One Body in Christ

// Romans 12:3-5

Regardless of our view of the church, as Christ’s followers we are connected to the church. “We . . . are one body in Christ.” We don’t lose our individuality, but we are inseparably connected to other Christians. We may differ in our race, ethnic background, gender, and socioeconomic status, but we are all one in Christ.

Our bodies illustrate how we are one in the church. Different parts of our bodies look different and do different things, but every part makes up who we are. We’re one body made of different, unique, and amazing parts. Our body parts can’t be changed; they remain part of our bodies. The same is true for the church.

Paul explained it like this: we are not only individually connected to Christ, but we’re “individually members of one another.” We need each other and belong to each other. Christ formed His church; we need each other in order



## THE POINT: COMMITMENT TO CHRIST INCLUDES A COMMITMENT TO HIS BODY, THE CHURCH.

for the church to function as a healthy body.

### HOW DOES BEING A PART OF THE CHURCH BENEFIT US?

The world looks at diversity and creates division; we should not. We shouldn't separate ourselves based on race, politics, socioeconomic status, or anything else. Within the church, divisions shouldn't exist. Christ reaches into our divisions and brings people to faith in Him. He loves us all equally and brings us together through shared faith.

This means, no believer is "to think of himself more highly than he should think." Rather, we're to "think sensibly," acknowledging that we're not better than anyone. We're not only unique, we're uniquely gifted by God. We "are one body in Christ."

### WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR A CHURCH TO SEE ITSELF AS ONE BODY IN CHRIST?

## We Have Gifts to Support Each Other

// Romans 12:6-8

We need each other to grow, flourish, and become everything God has called us to be. God gives believers different gifts so we can help and support each other. We often refer to these gifts as

"spiritual gifts." When we are saved, each one of us—each member of the body of Christ—is given a unique gifting that we are to use for the purpose of helping the body of Christ—the church—be everything she has been created and called to be.

Paul only listed a few of these gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and showing mercy. This isn't the complete list of gifts. Paul also referred to gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11, and each list is different. He stated, "We are to do that which is obvious to us and which we feel compelled and capable of doing."

### HOW HAVE YOU SEEN OTHERS USING THEIR GIFTS WITHIN THE CHURCH?

Our human tendency is to think some gifts are more important than others. Conversely, far too many Christians believe they don't play an important role in the kingdom of God. They think to themselves, "I'm not a pastor, worship leader, or missionary, so I'm not that important." That idea cannot be derived from this passage! In Ephesians 4, Paul stated:

"From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by



## DIGGING DEEPER GOD'S GRACE

In Romans 12:3, Paul wrote about God's grace to him. In 12:6, he turned attention to ways God graces all Christians with gifts for use in the ministries of the church. When Paul brought up the idea of gifts, the word he used derives from the Greek word for "grace," underscoring the remarkable connection between God's grace and believers' gifts. The Holy Spirit graces the church with spiritual gifts He distributes to Christians for them to use in carrying out the Lord's work together. Paul noted the gifts were different even though all of them came from the same gracious God.

### In what ways do we extend God's grace to others when we use our spiritual gifts?



every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part” (Eph. 4:16).

It bears repeating: “The whole body . . . promotes the growth of the body.” We are each part of the whole body. Regardless of our spiritual gifts, we’re each critical to the life and ministry of the body of Christ.

The church does not function and grow only because preachers preach and teachers teach. The body grows as each one of us uses the gifts God graciously gave us. The church can’t reach its full potential until all individual parts use the gifts God has given them for the good and growth of the body.

Unfortunately, there are no perfect churches. We create

a bigger problem when we point the blame at different parts of the body. “Evaluating and placing blame” is not a spiritual gift. Instead, we must exercise our gifts “according to the grace given to us,” and we are to do our part to build up and work for the health of our church.

**WHAT ARE SOME OBSTACLES THAT WOULD PREVENT US FROM USING OUR GIFTS AS GOD INTENDED?**

## We Are to Love and Serve Together

// Romans 12:9-16

In verse 12, Paul gave us the “secret ingredient” that enables the body of Christ to grow, thrive, and become the healthiest version of itself: “love.” This is the Greek word *agape*, a word that expresses the essential nature of God

(1 John 4:8). This is not a term that describes emotions; it is a word about how we act. We are not called to have just warm and fuzzy feelings about the church; rather, we are to love the church by serving her with our hearts and lives. We act with a love-infused, “all-in” commitment to Christ’s church

Paul built on this *agape* love by referring to *philadelphia*: brotherly love. We are to “love one another deeply as brothers and sisters.”

**HOW DOES GENUINE CHRISTIAN LOVE DIFFER FROM THE WORLD’S IDEA OF LOVE?**

In these verses, Paul gave us a picture of what sacrificial love looks like. These verses point out the action steps of love. Consider how we are to carry out these actions with Christlike love. Don’t be lazy. Be fervent (passion).

## THE POINT: COMMITMENT TO CHRIST INCLUDES A COMMITMENT TO HIS BODY, THE CHURCH.

Serve. Rejoice. Be patient. Pray persistently (continually). Contribute (give). Show hospitality (friendly). Bless. Weep with those that weep. Live in harmony (in agreement). Don't be haughty (feel superior). Don't think of yourself too highly. This is what love looks like.

What a beautiful picture it is! Surely anyone among us would want to be a part of a church full of members like that, but this beautiful picture of what the church is to be begins with you and me. Why should we love and serve the church in this sacrificial way? Because that is exactly how Christ loved us. Jesus didn't sit back in heaven, fold His arms, and tell us to get our act together before He would love us. Despite all our failures and shortcomings, He left the glory of heaven, put on our broken flesh, and came to this planet for one reason: to love us. "God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). If Jesus loves us—His bride—in this sacrificial way, how then can we not love her in the same way?

### WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROMOTE HARMONY IN THE CHURCH?

### DID YOU KNOW?

Minister Richard Allen is credited with opening the first national African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in Philadelphia in 1794. Allen converted to Methodism at the age of 17, after hearing a white itinerant Methodist preacher preach against slavery. Later, he became a preacher at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church where blacks and whites worshiped together. But Allen became frustrated with the limitations placed on him and black congregants, which included segregating pews. Also, the church leadership designated Allen's service to a different place. He believed the move to be bigoted and started what would become Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church today. It's the oldest property to be owned continuously by African-Americans.<sup>13</sup>

### WHAT TYPE OF BOND DO THE STRUGGLES BLACKS EXPERIENCED IN THE EARLY YEARS OF CHURCH CREATE IN TODAY'S CHURCHES?

## LIVE IT

The ingredients of a healthy church include loving one another, serving, and using our gifts for His glory. Every believer has something to offer the church. We can't sit in a sanctuary and watch those serving and not use our God-given gift(s). The growth of a healthy church depends on our willingness to work together and use our gifts for His glory.

+ + +

- Identify the spiritual gift(s) God has given you. Ask your pastor or others in your group how you might utilize your gift to minister, strengthen, and support your church.
- If you know a fellow believer who is not using his or her spiritual gift, lovingly confront and encourage the person to carry out his role in the body of Christ.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. DEVOTED HEART // PSALM 119:9-10

Have you heard the phrase: “it’s a heart issue”? It means, what your heart is devoted to directs your emotions, desires, words, and actions. The psalmist provided a formula for developing a godly heart issue. When we seek God’s wisdom through His Word, it causes us to check ourselves and make a change, according to God’s guidance. Further, the psalmist challenged us to seek God’s Word and not stray from it, intentionally or unintentionally. A heart devoted to God is a heart seeking and following His Word.

**Allow God’s Word to change your heart as well as your life.**

## 2. LISTEN // DEUTERONOMY 27:9

Some people don’t listen when you’re talking to them, especially when it’s a subject on which you don’t agree. They hear the words you are saying, but they are “not listening.” Their focus is on saying what is on their minds so they can push their point. Listening is active, but hearing is passive. In this verse, the Israelites (and us) are advised to actively listen to God. This is listening without considering our own opinions or perspectives. It is active listening that naturally leads to actively obeying God’s Word.

**We should listen with open hearts and minds to what God says to us in His Word.**

## 3. PLANNED RESCUE // GALATIANS 1:3-4

The U.S. Coast Guard rescues people from dangerous situations on the water. They ensure the safety and security of the nation’s waterways. Their power to rescue does not extend beyond the water. God planned our rescue from sin before we knew we were in trouble. His reach is not limited like the

Coast Guard. But no matter where we are in this evil world, or what we are going through, God can reach us. Through Jesus, we have been freed from the clutches of the enemy.

**Praise God, we were rescued from our sin.  
Now let us live our lives for Him.**

## 4. KEEP PRAYING // COLOSSIANS 4:2-4

Paul advised the church at Colosse to be devoted to prayer. He explained that prayer should be specific and filled with gratitude. We should not just pray for ourselves but also for other believers. Paul even asked for prayer for himself. He was not concerned about his safety, but he was concerned about his ability to boldly and clearly proclaim the Word of God. Like Paul, we all need prayer.

**Therefore, we should keep praying so God’s will is fulfilled through you and through the lives of other believers.**

## 5. DON’T WORRY—PRAY // PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Stress from life’s circumstances can cause worry. Paul tells us that the secret to obtaining God’s peace in our lives is found in prayer. He made it clear that there are no circumstances that cannot be impacted by the power of prayer. He said “in everything” we should pray. And when we pray, the Spirit of God calms our hearts, giving us peace we can’t understand. God’s peace is different from the peace of the world. We can’t get it on our own. It comes when we give God control of our circumstances through prayer. The choice is yours; you can worry or pray.

**But if you want to worry less and have peace, you should pray!**



SESSION 5

# COMMITTED TO PRAY

**THE POINT:**  
COMMIT TO PRAY FOR THE SALVATION AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF OTHERS.

## COLOSSIANS /// 1:3-12

<sup>3</sup> We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup> for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints <sup>5</sup> because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel <sup>6a</sup> that has come to you.

<sup>6b</sup> It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate God's grace. <sup>7</sup> You learned this from Epaphras, our dearly loved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, <sup>8</sup> and he has told us about your love in the Spirit.

MEMORY VERSE

**<sup>9</sup> For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, <sup>10</sup> so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:** bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light.

+  
+  
+

KEYWORDS

**a: Knowledge of His will** (v. 9)  
– Knowledge gained through a first-hand relationship. One of a Christian's first responsibilities is to know God and know what He requires.

# HOW SHOULD WE PRAY FOR FELLOW BELIEVERS?

If you need to call the president of the United States, the White House switchboard number is 202-456-1414—just don't expect to actually talk to the president.

That hasn't always been the case. The White House originally had just one phone—and it was down the hall from the executive office. If you called the White House in 1893, President Grover Cleveland answered the call personally. It's a quaint picture in light of today's smart phones. In 1893, the United States was on the cusp of being a formidable player in world politics, but anyone with a phone could call and talk to the president himself.

Long gone are the days when the president might pick up the phone, but that's not the case with One far more powerful. We have a direct line to the sovereign, all powerful God and Creator of the universe, a connection we often take for granted. God calls us to talk to Him—He invites us to talk to Him. It's called prayer, a wonderful privilege God has given us to talk directly to Him.

## Pray for Other Believers

// Colossians 1:3-6a

In Colossians, Paul gives us one of the most important passages in Scripture about prayer and what it should look like in our lives. He showed us the importance of prayer to the life of the church. This passage gives us three ways we can pray for the glory of God and the health of the church.

### 1. Pray with thanksgiving for other believers.

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” Far too many believers take God's unfathomable gift of prayer and only use it when they get into trouble or maybe before a meal. For Paul, though, prayer was a regular, consistent part of his daily walk with Christ.

Paul gave thanks for the church because of their “faith in Christ Jesus.” He had heard of their love for one another and the hope that they had—a hope rooted and founded in the truth



of the gospel that had come to them.

Paul was giving us an example of how we are to live our lives. We should pray about our needs, the needs of those we love, and those close to us. We should also pray for and remember what God is doing in the lives of other believers. And with those prayers should come thankfulness for how God is at work.

**WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN ENCOURAGED BY THE PRAYERS OF OTHERS?**

## Pray for Workers of the Gospel

// Colossians 1:6b-8

The gospel was “bearing fruit and growing all over the world.” Paul acknowledged that the gospel had grown “among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate God’s grace.” The church’s faith was growing, increasing, and bearing fruit.

God loves to answer prayers that align with His heart and will for our lives. “This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14). One thing that aligns with His heart and will is for Christians to bear fruit and increase in the gospel

of His Son, Jesus Christ. After all, God “wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). God’s desire is for us to come to Him and grow in the truth of the gospel. When we pray in line with His will, He responds!

## 2. Pray for those who minister and spread the gospel.

The second way we can pray for the glory of God and the health of the church is connected to those whom God uses to help us grow in Christ. Paul did not *explicitly* mention praying this way, but his reference to Ephaphras reminds us of the important role others play in ministry. We should pray for those God is using to accomplish His work in our lives.

Ephaphras ministered to those in Colossae while in their presence but also continued to minister to them through his prayers. “Ephaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills” (Col. 4:12).

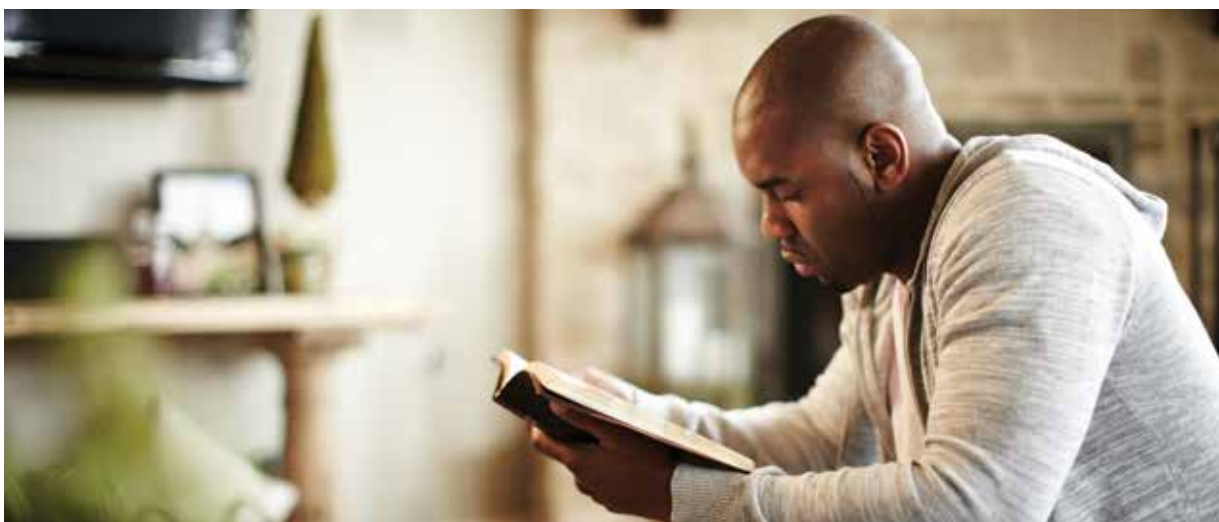
**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US TO PRAY FOR CHURCH LEADERS HERE AND ABROAD?**



## DIGGING DEEPER EPAPHRAS, SERVANT OF GOD

Epaphras (1:7) apparently served as the leader of the Colossian church. Paul brought him up once more later on in this epistle (Col. 4:12-13). He also mentioned Epaphras in his letter to Philemon (Philem. 1:23). Paul’s remarks about Epaphras painted a picture of a leader who had committed himself wholeheartedly to the Lord. He expressed his commitment with his abiding concern for people to be saved and for believers to grow in Christ. Notice, Paul described him as a fellow servant. Like Paul, he had entrusted his life to Christ and had given himself to serving Him with complete obedience.

**What impresses you the most about Epaphras? (See vv. 3-8.)**



Think of those who shared the gospel with us. They did so from a life dependent on God through prayer. The people who shared the gospel with us were themselves also recipients of other people's prayers and ministry. People asked God to protect them, grow them, and give them wisdom. You've been blessed through a historical chain of prayers!

This ought to change us and move us to pray for others who minister and serve. Pray for leaders and teachers in ministry to be bold, for their protection, and that they never lose their love for Jesus. Pray God empowers you and makes you bold, so you bring the good news of Jesus Christ to others.

**WHAT ROLE DOES PRAYER PLAY IN FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION?**

## Pray for Spiritual Growth of Believers

// Colossians 1:9-12

### 3. Pray for the spiritual growth of other believers.

The third way we can pray for the glory of God and the health of the church is *how* and *what* we pray for those in the church family. This passage breaks down the prayer requests this way:

- **Pray they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will.** To "be filled" means controlled by. If we're filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), we should pray that believers will let God's plans fully control them by understanding God's truth and applying His truth.

### WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRAYER AND GOD'S WORK IN US AND THROUGH US?

- **Pray they would live lives worthy of and pleasing to Christ.** God is pleased when we bear "fruit in every good work." Our good works don't save us but result from our saved relationship with Christ. Paul advised, it pleases the Lord when we're "growing in the knowledge of God." As we grow in understanding God's character, we live out our understanding through the fruit we bear.
- **Pray they would be fully strengthened by God.** We must ask God to work in others' lives so they find strength in Him. Believers need

## THE POINT: COMMIT TO PRAY FOR THE SALVATION AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF OTHERS.

the strength for “great endurance and patience,” that only comes through Christ’s strengthening, “according to his glorious might.”

- **Pray they would give joyful thanks to God.** We should pray that other believers never lose sight of God’s work and role in their lives. This awareness leads us to live with gratitude toward Him.

Imagine what your church would look like if each follower of Christ lived in that way. These images should drive our prayers for one another. The church grows, and God is honored as the church commits to pray for one another with that kind of specificity and power.

God blesses the church powerfully when prayer is central and as important as what the church does. We know that the church in America is facing challenges. But one thing is clear: The church is strengthened and Christ is honored when His people pray unceasingly for one another and when we make such prayer a priority. Let’s become people committed to coming before the Lord in prayer.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The African-American community has a variety of traditions that exemplify the importance of prayer and spirituality. Most of these traditions arose out of slavery and the segregation that followed. Church services usually involved a devotional prayer. The prayer would request for God to ease the burdens of the people, and the congregation would respond in agreement with the words like, “Yes, Lord,” “Have mercy, Lord,” and “Amen.” Here is a portion of a prayer for God’s mercy:

*We have gathered in this place this morning, allow your spirit to fill our very being. Most gracious and loving God, we remember the struggles of our people, black people, people of African descent, your people and thank you for your grace, your love, and your mercy.<sup>14</sup>*

### WHY DO YOU BELIEVE PRAYER WAS SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN TRADITION?

## LIVE IT

This lesson is an important reminder of the necessity of prayer. God wants to hear our gratitude, petitions, concerns, and intercession for others. While private prayer is important, public prayer encourages other believers to pray. Consistent and specific prayers for other believers helps them live out God’s call for their lives.

+ + +

- This week, find out when your church comes together in prayer and invite your family and friends to join you to pray for all believers to become powerful prayer warriors.
- Carve out an extended time of prayer where you can sit quietly and talk to God without the demands of your next appointment.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. PROVEN LOVE // 1 JOHN 4:20

The world's kind of love elicits us to love those who love us first. However, God loves us unconditionally despite our sins against Him. The apostle John reminded us that God doesn't want us to love like the world. He wants us to love those who are right in front of us the same way that He loves us. When we do, we demonstrate clearly our love for God, who loves everyone in the world (John 3:16).

**Prove that you love God by loving His children. If you can't, ask God for His kind of love to fill your heart.**

## 2. WISE PARTNERSHIPS // PROVERBS 18:1

When someone dislikes committing to anything or anyone, that person usually wants things to go his or her way. Stubbornly, more often than not, he will decide to go it alone when he does not get his way. This action stems from an unwillingness to make even the smallest sacrifices to get along with others. Solomon's godly counsel informs us that separating yourself from God and other believers isn't wise. It makes no sense to go against Solomon's wise advice, because the need for God and each other is evident at every turn in everyday life.

**Even though it may be difficult to deal with other believers, for the sake of God and His love, we should make a concerted effort to work together.**

## 3. THE SOLID ROCK // MATTHEW 16:18

You would not want to be married to a spouse who didn't defend you. For example, you would want your spouse to respond defensively to a negative comment about you because of the love he has for you. The church is the bride of Jesus, and He loves His church. Matthew recounted a conversation Je-

sus had with Peter. He said not even death or hell could defeat the church, because of the solid foundation on which Jesus built His church. This act was Jesus' way of loving and defending His church. **If Jesus loved the church, then we should love the church. We should do our part to serve it and not tear it down.**

## 4. NO BULLYING ALLOWED // JEREMIAH 20:13

My older sister would not allow anyone to mess with me. She used to fight those who bullied me. Between the two of us, I was the weakest, so I was grateful to have a big sister who protected me. God is the One who protects the weak from evildoers. He will not allow anyone to hurt any of His children, especially those who are weak. Our response to His protection should be to give Him the praise that He is due.

**Praise God that even though we are weak, we have the victory. God is our Protector; He is our strength. Praise Him!**

## 5. TELL EVERYBODY // PSALM 75:1

When people do something nice for you, thank them. If it is something unexpected and undeserved, you will most likely tell others about it. God has done a lot of wonderful things for us, and we owe Him praise. These wonderful and undeserved blessings are so good that we should not keep what God has done to ourselves. We should tell everybody about our God who does all things well.

**Then we should worship and thank God for who He is and what He has done. Praise God; He is worthy of all our praises.**

SESSION 6

# COMMITTED TO HIS WORSHIP

**THE POINT:**  
GOD DESERVES  
OUR WORSHIP AND  
PRAISE.

## PSALM /// 99:1-9

MEMORY VERSE

<sup>1</sup> The LORD reigns! Let the peoples tremble. He is enthroned between the cherubim. Let the earth quake. <sup>2</sup> **The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted above all the peoples.** <sup>3</sup> **Let them praise your great and awe-inspiring name. He is holy.**

<sup>4</sup> The mighty King loves justice. You have established fairness; you have administered justice and righteousness in Jacob. <sup>5</sup> Exalt the LORD our God; bow in worship at his footstool. He is holy.

<sup>6</sup> Moses and Aaron were among his priests; Samuel also was among those calling on his name. They called to the LORD and he answered them. <sup>7</sup> He spoke to them in a pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees and the statutes he gave them. <sup>8</sup> LORD our God, you answered them. You were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their sinful actions. <sup>9</sup> Exalt the LORD our God; bow in worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.

+  
+  
+

KEYWORDS

**a: Awe-inspiring** (v. 3) – Literally “to be feared”; denotes both respect and worship. God rightfully should receive praise because He is great.

**b: Footstool** (v. 5) – “At his footstool” associates the Lord’s presence with the ark of the covenant. For believers, it is a central place of worship (Ps. 132:7).

# WHY IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR COMMITMENT TO WORSHIP HIM?



We have many reasons to love the fall season: the leaves change colors, the weather gets cooler, and football season arrives. Boys in small towns and big cities put on pads and helmets so they can play a game that borders on sanctioned violence. Fans pack into

stadiums to cheer for what has become the ultimate American pastime.

The people watching these games are called fans—a word that's short for fanatics—and for good reason. Their behavior often borders on the fanatic. When their team scores, fans simultaneously shout at the top of their lungs—thousands of people joining their voices in a mighty roar of approval. As the fans scream and cheer for joy, they also jump to their feet, raising their hands in the air. Thousands of hands instantly reach for the sky as a symbol of both victory and sheer adulation.

We all have an innate desire to give adulation and praise to things and people we love. Nothing and no one deserves our worship and praise more than God!

## God Is Holy and Great

// Psalm 99:1-3

The innate desire to worship is in all of us for a very good reason: God put it there. In fact, God created us to worship Him. Pointing us to Himself is not narcissistic, but is the most loving thing God could ever do. God is the greatest, most holy, most loving Being in the universe. There's no one greater, more life giving, or satisfying than God. Worshiping anything or anyone else would leave us empty, so worshiping God is His gift to us. God loves us and desires the absolute best for us—and that best is found only in the One who created us.

Where do we even begin in worshiping God? God's beauty is infinite; His majesty has no end. Once we are with Him in heaven, we will have eternity to discover and worship God for all His



## THE POINT: GOD DESERVES OUR WORSHIP AND PRAISE.

amazing attributes. But even now we can worship Him for what we know of Him.

**We praise God for His holiness.** Verse 3 ends with this: “He is holy.” He is set apart from His creation and no one is like Him. Verses 1-3 lead us to this declaration:

- God alone reigns.
- God alone sits on His throne surrounded by His cherubim.
- God alone is exalted and lifted high.

God deserves our praise because no one else is above Him or His equal. He stands apart in His holiness.

### WHY IS WORSHIP SO IMPORTANT FOR US?

**We praise God for His great power.** The psalmist praised God for His power. His power has no limits. “He is exalted above all the peoples.”

We see God's power in His creation. God is powerful and we aren't. “God is *for us*” (Rom. 8:31), not against us. Our response should be reverent awe and respect that draws us to love and praise Him! When we encounter God in all His holiness and glory, we worship Him. He is worthy of our worship.

In difficult times, we can feel powerless to change our circumstances. Even in those times we should praise God who has the power to change anything. We praise Him as the psalmist did: “I lift my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:1-2). With God, we're never without hope. He is more powerful than any circumstance. That ought to produce praise in us.

### WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN AWED BY WHO GOD IS OR WHAT HE HAS DONE?

## God Is Just and Righteous

// Psalm 99:4-5

The psalmist mentioned other attributes of God that should motivate us to praise Him: His justice, fairness, and righteousness. We value justice because we've experienced injustice. Unfortunately, this happens in a sinful world. People are selfish, spiteful, and sometimes mean. Sinful people use their power to hurt others and sometimes wrongly blame others.

God is never unjust. He loves justice. In God's righteousness, He ensures



## DIGGING DEEPER MOUNT OF ZION

Jerusalem had the prestige of being the political, economic, and spiritual center of the nation of Israel. Being the spiritual center made the city unique for God's people. For that reason, they often referred to the city as Zion (v. 2). The name describes Jerusalem in other Old Testament passages (2 Sam. 5:7; 1 Kings 8:1; 1 Chron. 11:5). David delighted in the beauty and strength of Zion and viewed it as a type of church of the Messiah (Ps. 48:1-2). New Testament writers used it in descriptions of heaven (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1). Originally, Zion was a fortified hill in Jerusalem. But for God's people, it came to represent His intention for Israel to flourish as a nation under His sovereign reign.

### What difference does the place where we worship make in our worship of God?

justice is served, but His justice isn't on our timetable. When Christ returns and consummates His kingdom, He will deal with all injustice. As Peter wrote, "The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Jesus experienced the greatest injustice ever committed. He never committed sin, yet through an unjust arrest, trial, and crucifixion, He became our sin "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). He unjustly bore our sin and shame so we could inherit eternal life.

**HOW CAN KNOWING GOD IS ALWAYS FAIR AND JUST HELP YOU FACE INJUSTICE AND UNFAIR SITUATIONS?**

We praise God because His justice and righteousness are ours through Christ. We praise Him when we face injustice trusting Him to work His justice. "Therefore the LORD is waiting to show you mercy, and is rising up to show you compassion, for the LORD is a just God. All who wait patiently for him are happy" (Isa. 30:18).

What should be our response to our justice-loving, justice-executing God? "Exalt the LORD our God; bow in worship at his footstool. He is holy" (Ps. 99:5). Even in the midst of injustice, we can praise and worship God. He is trustworthy. He will always and inevitably make things right.

## God Answers Our Call // Psalm 99:6-9

The psalmist gave another reason to be committed to worshipping God—He hears

us and answers us! God, the wisest and most powerful Being in the universe answers the cries of His people. Job exclaimed, "What is a mere human, that you think so highly of him and pay so much attention to him?" (Job 7:17). God is the Creator, and we are His creation. God is all powerful; we're weak. God is holy; we're sinful. Despite all this, when we cry out to God, He chooses to answer us.

The psalmist used the examples of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, priests who called on the name of the Lord in their distress. When in distress, they called to their Father—"the Lord."

- When the Israelites complained about lacking water, Moses prayed to the Lord, and God miraculously provided (Ex. 17:1-7).
- When God wanted to



## THE POINT: GOD DESERVES OUR WORSHIP AND PRAISE.

wipe out the Israelites, Moses interceded, and God pardoned them (Num. 14:11-20).

- Samuel prayed for the people a lot. He said, “As for me, I vow that I will not sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:23a).

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU’VE SEEN GOD ANSWER PRAYER?

God answered each time they called out to Him in faith. The people prayed and interceded during in a time when they were being rebellious and failing to trust God. Yet, God answered. He is “a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their sinful actions” (v. 8). This amazing verse tells us that God avenged their wrongdoings and not the wrongdoings they did against themselves. To avenge means to “respond to a harm or wrongdoing.” Unlike fallen human beings, God doesn’t avenge our wrongs with harm and anger. He avenges our wrongs with love and forgiveness.

The awareness of God’s response draws us to worship. “Exalt the LORD our God; bow in worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.” There is no other way to respond!

### DID YOU KNOW?

The First African Baptist Church, located in Savannah, Georgia, was the first African-American place of worship in the U.S.\* Organized by Rev. George Leile in 1773, which predated the 1776 formation of this country. Rev. Leile was a former slave and the first African-American licensed by Baptists to preach in Georgia. Initially, he traveled from plantation to plantation along the Savannah River in Georgia and South Carolina preaching to slaves and, with another pastor, attempted to establish a church in South Carolina. However, the church disbanded, since it was illegal for slaves to gather in worship. Rev. Leile pastored the First African Church from 1778-1787, converting and baptizing many slaves and freed blacks.<sup>15</sup>

### WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS TO HAVE A PLACE OF WORSHIP?

\*This is contested by the Silver Bluff Baptist Church, Aiken County, South Carolina (1773), and the First Baptist Church of Petersburg, Virginia (1774).

## LIVE IT

God who created the world and all within it loves us so much that He hears and answers our prayers. We can call on Him. There’s no injustice He can’t handle or problem He can’t fix. We can worship God in spite of the issues we face. This reveals to others to whom we belong and whom we honor. Because of who He is and what He has done, God is worthy of our praise and worship.

+ + +

- Do an honest evaluation and determine if any things in your life are objects of worship. Ask God to reveal your heart and lead you to make Him first in your worship.
- This week reflect on the many reasons God deserves praise. Commit to worshipping Him despite of what’s going on in your life. All the time is a good time to worship Him.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. FAITHFUL PRAYERS // DANIEL 2:20

Daniel faithfully prayed to God. The Babylonian king had a dream, but he nor his wise men could interpret it. Therefore, he decreed to kill them all. Daniel asked if he could interpret the dream. He believed God would rescue him and the other wise men from death. Daniel sought others to intercede with him, and he prayed to God with faith. God answered. Daniel's response was gratitude and blessing to God. We should seek God in prayer, and when He answers we should not dash off to business as usual.

**Rather, like Daniel, we should worship God in gratitude for His response.**

## 2. RIGHTEOUS POWER // JAMES 5:16

James taught powerful lessons about the power of prayer. He gave us the ingredients necessary to pray effectively. First, we must confess to one another. This is important because God doesn't hear our prayers when we harbor sin in our hearts (Ps. 66:18). Next, pray for healing and restoration of each other. Finally, we should pray persistently. The prayers of believers are effective through God's power and our obedience.

**It makes sense to trust that power because it is infinitely more powerful than anything on earth.**

## 3. WILLING PRAYERS // 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

Paul instructed believers on God's will in prayer. He said we should always rejoice. In other words, worship God continually. Then he said, don't stop praying. We should talk to God about everything all the time. Then Paul gave us information that many often miss. We should give God thanks in every situation. That means to give Him praise in good and

bad times. God's will for us is to remain connected to Him all the time through prayer and praise.

**When we do God's will in prayer, we will see everything, including people, in a whole new perspective.**

## 4. LABORERS NEEDED // LUKE 10:1-2

Companies that need workers may place signs in windows that read, "Help Wanted." This requires that the potential worker come into the business and inquire about the job. Jesus needed workers. He needed believers to spread the good news. Luke recounted what Jesus said, "The harvest is abundant but the workers are few," meaning there are a lot of unsaved people and few people proclaiming the message of salvation. We are Christ's workers to go out and proclaim the good news of salvation. There is no joblessness in Christian service.

**If we can't go physically, we can pray for workers who are sharing the gospel of Christ.**

## 5. BEAUTIFUL FEET // ROMANS 10:14-15

In these verses, Paul stressed the call to disciple others. He reminded us about unbelievers who can't call on Christ, because they have not received Him as Lord and Savior. They will not hear about Jesus without being told about Him by a messenger. However, the messenger must be sent for the purpose of spreading the good news of salvation. All believers are called to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. We should share Christ not only through the life we live, but through the words we speak. Both should be used to connect unbelieving hearts and minds to Christ.

**We should begin today to share the love of God with a lost soul.**

SESSION 7

# COMMITTED TO HIS MISSION

**THE POINT:**

GOD DESIRES FOR ALL PEOPLE TO HEAR AND RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL.

## ROMANS /// 10:9-17

MEMORY VERSE

**<sup>9</sup> If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.**

<sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame, <sup>12</sup> since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

<sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. <sup>16</sup> But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message? <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.

+  
+  
+

KEYWORDS

**a: Confess** (v. 9) – The Greek word for confess, “homologeō,” means to speak the same thing. An essential act to begin one’s faith walk is the agreement of what God has declared about Christ.

# WHAT DOES OUR MISSION AS CHRIST FOLLOWERS INVOLVE?

Every year, thousands of people get lost in national parks. In 2017 alone, 4,194 search-and-rescue incidents were reported.<sup>16</sup> The National Park Service has trained personnel leading searches but loved ones still naturally want to help. The reason: someone they love is lost!

Families will spend whatever it takes to get their loved ones back safely. Well over three million dollars are spent each year funding these searches, but it is money well spent. Otherwise lives would be lost.

As much as we would desire to help rescue a loved one who was *physically* lost, God has a greater desire for those who are *spiritually* lost. It is estimated that over two-thirds of the world's population are without Christ and in need of a "spiritual search-and-rescue."<sup>17</sup> One way we reflect our commitment to Christ is by sharing His commitment and desire to reach those who do not yet have a relationship with Him. Being committed to the mission of God means that each of us looks at this monumental task as our own personal responsibility and calling.

## Confess and Believe

// Romans 10:9-10

Romans 10:9-10 provides a powerfully concise explanation of the gospel message. We don't have to follow a list of dos and don'ts in order to have a relationship with God. God knew we couldn't be perfectly obedient to Him and follow all the rules, so He sent His Son, Jesus. Jesus came to this planet and did what we could never do. He lived the perfect life of obedience to God we could not. His obedience was so complete that He even gave His life as a perfect sacrifice to pay the price for our disobedience.

The Christian life is about belief. Paul used two verbs to describe this:

- **Confess.** "Jesus is Lord" is the Christian confession that Jesus of Nazareth is fully God.

How do we know that Jesus is God? We look at His life. He taught like no other and the miracles He performed gave authority to what He said. Jesus said He was the only way to God (John 14:6) and, "I and the Father are one"



(John 10:30). Christianity is centered on Jesus' resurrection! By this God the Father authenticated Jesus as the Son of God.

### **WHY IS CONFESSION AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR SALVATION?**

- **Believe.** Our confession is an outward expression of our belief in who Jesus is: the resurrected Savior and Lord, the Son of God.

Confessing and believing are not steps one and two for salvation. They go hand-in-hand. What we believe in our heart we will openly confess. Our "role" in salvation is as simple as that.

This message is called the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ. There's no greater news than the truth that Jesus Christ made our salvation possible when we were hopeless in our sin. All that remains is for us to acknowledge that truth and put our faith in Him.

"One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation" (v. 10).

### **WHAT DID BELIEVING IN YOUR HEART AND CONFESSING JESUS WITH YOUR MOUTH LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?**

## **A Message for All**

// **Romans 10:11-13**

Critics have ridiculed Christianity because of its exclusiveness: Jesus is the only way to God. However, the gospel is inclusive. A relationship with God is only available to those who trust in Christ, but this relationship is open to any and all who trust!

All people need God. Since all have sinned, God's salvation is available for all. By quoting Joel 2:32, Paul couldn't make it more clear; "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

As God's chosen people, God called the Jews to be "a light to the nations" (Isa. 42:6). God promised Abram "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). That blessing ultimately came through Jesus Christ, who brought salvation to all peoples.

The kingdom of God is the polar opposite of a sorority or a fraternity. God doesn't have one plan of salvation for one group and a different plan for another group. Instead, any and all who look to Christ and call on Him receive eternal life.

- The gospel is for people we like and people we don't like.



### **DIGGING DEEPER CALL ON THE LORD**

In Romans 10:13, Paul quoted the prophet Joel that "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Joel 2:32). Calling on His name means turning to Him out of the awareness of His character and the need for His help. At the same time, calling out to Him suggests the willingness to turn to Him with a sincere heart eager to confess Him as Lord. Calling on the name of the Lord forms an invitation to give Him complete control. Paul cited Joel's statement in order to make the same affirmation about calling on Christ.

### **How would you describe the power inherent in calling on the name of the Lord?**

- The gospel is for our friends and our enemies.
- The gospel is for people whom we would love to become believers and for those we don't think deserve to be saved.

*The good news of Christ really is for everyone!*

Therefore, we should pray as fervently for the boss who treats us poorly as we do for a close friend. We should desire the salvation of the person of another belief system as we do for a family member. We can only be committed to the mission of God when we have the same heart for people that God has. After all, God “wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

**WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS THAT THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS FOR ALL PEOPLE?**

## Share Your Faith

// Romans 10:14-17

Being committed to the mission of God means we must be committed to share the mission of God. A popular phrase says, “Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.” We should live our lives in such a way that the gospel is evident through the way we live. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Speaking the gospel is not optional. Words are necessary.

“How can they believe without hearing about him?” To clarify, Paul asked, “And how can they hear without a preacher?” Trusting in Christ calls for someone to preach the gospel. The privilege of proclaiming the gospel is not

limited to those who stand on a platform or behind a pulpit. We're all called to proclaim the gospel to those we engage in conversation.

“And how can they preach unless they are sent?” Recall the commission Jesus gave at the end of His ministry: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Jesus Himself sent us; therefore, we must proclaim the gospel of Christ to those we encounter as we go.

For many, being sent means packing up and moving to another country to share the gospel. For others, being sent means talking to the person sitting right next to them. Either way we must go, desiring to share the gospel.

**WHAT OBSTACLES MIGHT KEEP YOU FROM SHARING THE GOSPEL?**





## THE POINT: GOD DESIRES FOR ALL PEOPLE TO HEAR AND RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL.

We are not responsible for how others respond to the gospel. We simply need to be faithful to the call to go and speak. If we don't intentionally share the gospel, they will never have the opportunity to respond to the gospel. People can't miss the opportunity to call on the name of the Lord and become our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In light of all we have learned about God's heart for those who never have heard the gospel and His desire for them to come to the knowledge of the truth, how can we not change the way we live? Each of us has a short amount of time to make an impact for the kingdom of God. Let's seize the opportunity before us to join in the fight for our future brothers and sisters with whom we will one day stand before the throne of God.

### WHERE DO YOU SEE OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SHARE THE GOSPEL?

### DID YOU KNOW?

Few African-Americans choose ministries abroad. The International Mission Board (IMB) is making a strong push to enlist black missionaries to evangelize, teach, or minister around the world. Of the approximately 3,700 missionaries serving with IMB at the end of 2019, just 13 (0.3%) were African-American. George Smith and his wife, Geraldine, are African-American missionaries who have served in Africa for 20 years. George believes that because they are black, they have certain advantages that white missionaries don't have. White missionaries stand out as spectacles. But George and his wife blend in, living with the nationals as peers, providing ministry, and when necessary, correction. IMB black strategist Jason Thomas says, "All Christians are called to fulfill the Great Commission. To do that, we must send missionaries from all *ethne*," all races and nations.<sup>18</sup>

### WHY DO YOU THINK SUCH A LOW PERCENTAGE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHRISTIANS CHOOSE TO BE MISSIONARIES?

## LIVE IT

One way we reflect our commitment to Christ is by sharing His commitment and desire to reach those who do not yet have a relationship with Him. Jesus, Himself, commanded us to go; therefore, we must commit ourselves to reach our neighbors, loved ones, and friends, who don't know Him. This is a monumental responsibility that will fulfill our personal commitment to Christ.

+ + +

- Being committed to share the gospel begins with an understanding of your own story. Write it down so that when you're given the opportunity you can share it with clarity.
- This week share the gospel with someone. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you an opportunity and then look for that door to open.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. MIRACLE RECALL // DEUTERONOMY 10:20-21

While all of our days are not always good, we have had times when God has come through in a big way. Just recall your life before salvation. You were a sinner headed to hell. But your life has been miraculously transformed, making you a child of God. We must always remember what God has done for us, beginning with our salvation and continuing with God's daily intervention in our lives. He has done great things for us, and for those things, He deserves respect, honor, and worship.

**Take a moment and thank Him for being God and for all the wonderful things He has allowed you to experience in your life.**

## 2. UNSHAKEABLE GOD // HEBREWS 12:28-29

People and their circumstances are shakeable. Our world will go well one day, but the next day life will crumble. Our friends will stick around if it benefits them and leave when it doesn't. Unlike our lives and friends, the kingdom of God can't be shaken. Our God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13: 8). We, as believers, are part of God's unshakeable kingdom. Therefore, we can be confident that no matter what happens around us, our future with God is secure.

**Therefore, we should not build our lives on that which can be shaken. We should build lives on God and stand firm on His Word.**

## 3. CREATOR GLORIFIED // PSALM 86:9-10

The psalmist reminds us of the reason we worship God. First, God created us to worship Him. We should worship Him because He is great and has done wonderful things. He is mighty. He created the heavens and the earth. He created us and then saved us, when humanity messed up. He sacrificed

His only Son so we can have a relationship with Him. Because of His love for us and His grace, we have been given eternal life. Only our God can do that. He alone is God.

**There is no one like our loving Creator. We should praise Him!**

## 4. CHOSEN // JOHN 15:16

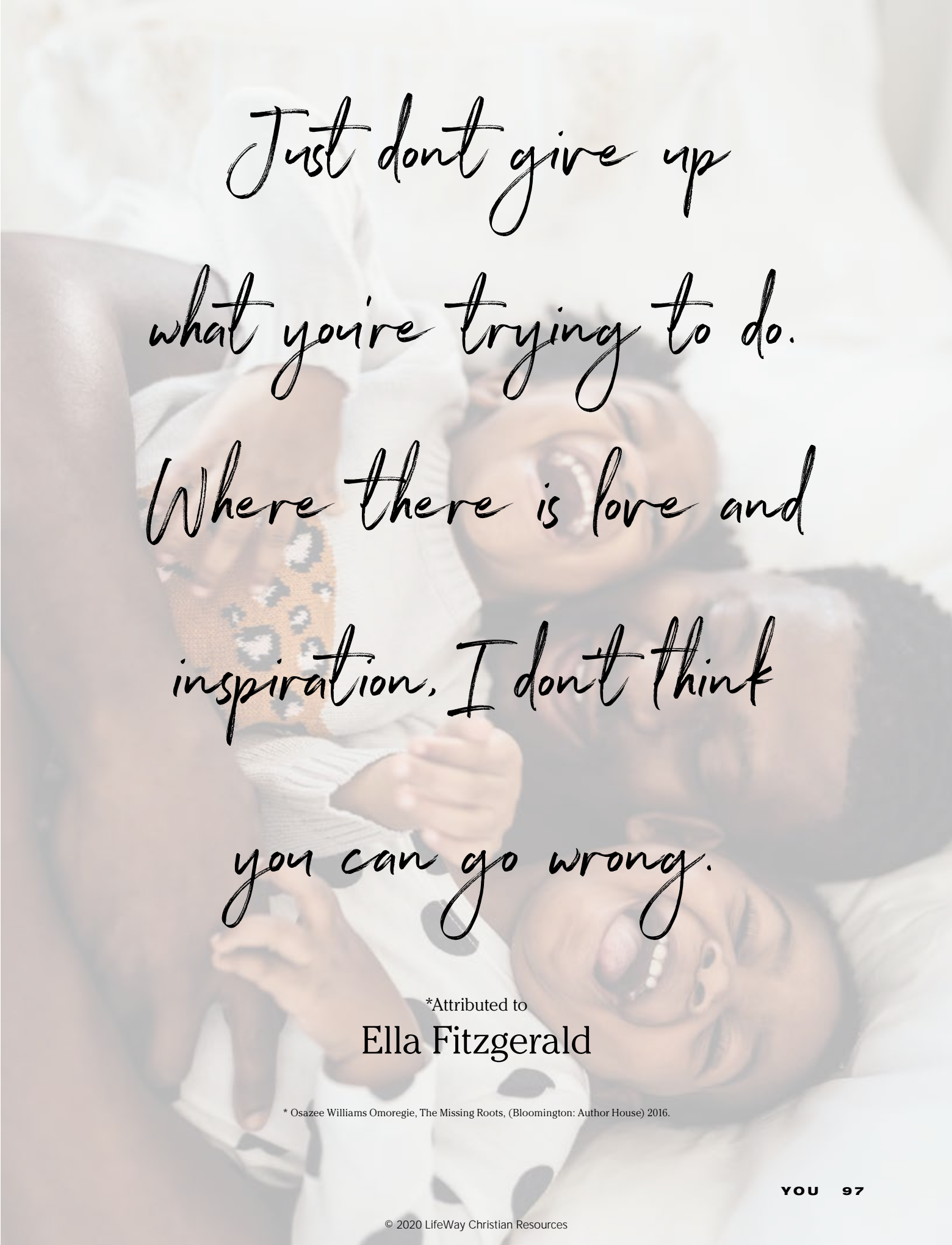
When shopping for fruit, there are various ways to figure out what's fresh. We may smell the fruit, tap it, inspect it, or sometimes taste it. Whichever way is chosen works. The apostle John recalled something Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you." That's a profound statement. Jesus chose to love us by dying on the cross for us. We made the next choice: to accept His love. That's the message of the gospel that He wants us to share, and it is the fruit He wants us to bear. But we must choose to open up our mouths and talk about the goodness of God and what Christ has done for us.

**Decide today to reach out to someone who doesn't know Christ.**

## 5. THANKFUL PRAISERS // PSALM 100:1-5

If you've ever been in love, your heart may skip a beat when in the presence of that special someone. Being in the presence of our holy God is better than that. Being in the presence of God is better than being in the presence of anyone on earth. There's no one like God. He is the center of our lives. We belong to Him. He is our Creator. He is faithful, loving, and merciful.

**Because of this and so much more, we should enter His presence with thanksgiving and praise. It's the praise He so richly deserves.**



Just don't give up  
what you're trying to do.  
Where there is love and  
inspiration, I don't think  
you can go wrong.

\*Attributed to  
Ella Fitzgerald

\* Osazee Williams Omoregie, *The Missing Roots*, (Bloomington: Author House) 2016.

# Psalm 119

A Hymn to God's Law

BY TODD BORGER



**P**salm 119 is unique in the Book of Psalms and even in the whole Bible. Its monumental length demonstrates the gravity of the psalm. At 176 verses, it is more than twice as long as any other chapter of the Bible. The length of the psalm, however, is really a result of its form. Psalm 119 is an acrostic, using each letter of the Hebrew alphabet at the beginning of each line. The Hebrew alphabet contains 22 letters, so a normal acrostic might have 22 lines in it—one for each letter of the alphabet. Psalm 119, however, is not a normal acrostic, as we will see below.

Also, Psalm 119 is nearly unique in the Book of Psalms because of its subject matter. This psalm is an extended song of praise concerning the Law. It is like Psalm 19 in this regard. The size and depth of Psalm 119, however, so far outstrip the brief yet poignant message of Psalm 19 that we could say that its uniqueness in this regard still stands.

Psalm 119 is the largest example of an acrostic in the Old Testament. It stands as a monument to its subject—the beauty of God’s law. Psalms 25 and 34 and the song of the noble woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 are also examples of acrostics. These examples are all simple 22-verse acrostics. The Book of Lamentations is devoted to the acrostic form throughout. The pinnacle comes in the third chapter, which has 66 verses, with each letter of the alphabet used at the beginning of three consecutive verses.

This backdrop can help us better appreciate the grandeur of the acrostic that is Psalm 119. This psalm devotes eight consecutive verses to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Eight verses for each letter results in 176 verses for the entire psalm. Once the reader sees the overwhelming character and dominance of this acrostic form, one might be tempted to proclaim the same judgment as one commentator, who said, “It is largely due to this artificial construction that the composition abounds in repetitions which makes the reading of it somewhat monotonous.”<sup>1</sup>

### Why an Acrostic?

Given that the size of the poem could lead to a judgment such as this, why might the Spirit-led psalmist have used such a daunting form? We can consider several possibilities. First, the acrostic may be a mnemonic device—an aid to help the reader in memorizing such an imposing set of verses. This explanation is unlikely for two reasons. As we have already seen above, several examples of acrostics are simple 22-verse creations, much shorter than other non-acrostic psalms. The acrostics in those shorter psalms appear to be for a purpose other than aiding memorization, so the use as a mnemonic device does not seem to be inherent in the form. Psalm 119 is so

massive, however, that perhaps the psalmist felt the need to insert the acrostic for that purpose here. While that is possible, the far stronger likelihood is that the massiveness of the psalm does not precede the acrostic form—but is rather a result of the form. In other words, the only reason that the psalm runs to 176 verses is because of the 8-fold acrostic used throughout. Surely the psalmist did not write a 176-verse psalm and then decide afterward to convert it to an acrostic for the purpose of easy memorization.

Second, if the psalmist was not using the acrostic as a mnemonic device, then perhaps he was attempting to show the gravity of the subject—the beauty of God’s Law—by forcing the poem into such a massive form. A third option, and one related to the second, is that the psalmist may have used the acrostic to show the completeness of the subject. He was covering the subject, as it were, from A to Z. The combination of these two reasons likely led to the enormous structure that we find in this psalm. It is complete, and its subject matter is serious.

### A Hymn to God’s Law

The attentive reader quickly sees that the topic of this great psalm is the Law of God. The psalmist uses several synonyms to refer to the Law. The Hebrew terms with translations from the HCSB are *torah* (instruction, 119:1), *edut* (decrees, v. 2), *imrah* (word, v. 11), *piqqudim* (precepts, v. 4), *huqqim* (statutes, v. 5), *mitsvotim* (commands, v. 6), *mishpatim* (judgments, v. 7), and *dabar* (word, v. 9).<sup>2</sup> The psalmist used these 8 terms repeatedly through the 176 verses of this psalm, meaning he used each of the 8 terms roughly 22 times over the 22 stanzas.

The psalmist chose a variety of words that bring out various aspects of the Old Testament legal material. As examples to show the variety in legal terminology, *torah* is a general term that we often translate simply as law. The translation above, instruction, takes in a more general sense of the term. *Mishpatim* are laws that are made in response to some issue. The root of this word conveys the act of judging. The result of judging is that one makes a *mishpat*—a judgment. *Mitzvotim* are commands proper. A *mitzvah* (singular, command) can be a simple imperative. “Do this.” “Don’t do that.”

Given the repetitiveness of the topic, the limitations on vocabulary, and the strictures inherent in using the acrostic form, the psalm might appear random, or, as one writer said, “kaleidoscopic.”<sup>3</sup> The psalmist, however, does a masterful job of creating movement within the 176 verses. Within many of the 22 stanzas, the reader can detect a theme that unifies all 8 verses of the stanza. For example, in the second stanza (vv. 9-16), the psalmist praised the Lord for the Torah, seeing it as a treasure from God. In the



Dated to about 728 BC, part of a relief from the Central Palace of Assyria's King Tiglath-pileser III at Nimrud. The scene shows two Assyrian archers taking aim as another soldier protects them with a body-sized shield. The psalmist declared, "You are my shelter and my shield; I put my hope in Your word." ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO / BRITISH MUSEUM / LONDON (31/1/3)

fourth stanza (vv. 25-32), the psalmist expressed his sorrow in life but also the assurance that he had, due to God's law and instructions to him. Stanza five (vv. 33-40) presents the psalmist as calling on the Lord specifically asking Him to teach him and mold him. Stanza eleven (vv. 81-88) again brings up the topic of trouble and suffering; the following stanza (vv. 89-96) tells of the faithfulness and eternity of God's help.

## The Beauty of God's Word

What is the overall message of the psalmist in regard to the Law? The psalm begins, as does Psalm 1 which also emphasizes the Law, with two beatitude statements: "How happy are those whose way is blameless . . . Happy are those who keep His decrees" (119:1a, 2a; CSB). One is not to fear or push against the Law. On the contrary, the Law is to be loved (v. 97) and used for guidance (v. 105). It is a safeguard against sin (v. 11) and to be revered (v. 120).



From Jericho, a pot and hoard of silver coins dating from the 1st century AD. The psalmist said, "Instruction from Your lips is better for me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (Ps. 119:72, HCSB). ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (9/40/2)

Psalm 119 stands as a testimony to the goodness of God's Law. The psalmist made clear the importance of the Law by creating a massive yet intricate 8-fold acrostic. Yet within that heavy form, he managed to create a beautiful work of art, extolling the virtues of following the Law and leaning on it for guidance in difficult times. Thank God that this testimony is still true for us today.

1. W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: SPCK, 1955), 486.2. For Hebrew terms and translations, see Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1907), on the pages cited: "hr"m.ai" (imrah; utterance, speech, word), 57; "rb" D"" (dabar; speech, word), 182-84; "qho" (choq, something prescribed, a statute or due), 349; "hr"AT" (torah, direction, instruction, law), 435-36; "tWdle" (eduth, testimony), 730; "dWQP'i" (piqqud, precept), 824; "hw" c.mi" (mitsvah, commandment), 846; "jP'v.mi" (mishpat, judgment), 1048.3. Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, vol. 21 in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1983), 139.



Scene on the sixth pylon of Thutmose III at the Karnak temple complex at Amun-Re, near Luxor, Egypt. Each figure represents someone the Egyptians conquered in the Battle of Megiddo; the oval plate records the captured person's name. The captives have their arms bound behind their backs. Psalm 119:61 says, "Though the ropes of the wicked were wrapped around me, I did not forget Your instruction" (HCSB). ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (16/10/17)

Todd Berger is the Associate Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.