

## STUDY 2 ALL IN: A LIFE OF COMMITMENT

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### HOW THIS STUDY FITS YOUR'S DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

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#### **Seek God.**

Seeking God is not something we do casually or only when we feel like it. A full commitment to Christ means we intentionally and continually seek after God and the things of God. As we deepen our walk and commitment to Christ, it only deepens our desire to seek Him, know Him, and please Him.

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#### **Writer Bio**

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##### **Matt Carter**

is pastor of preaching and vision at the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas. He's been married to Jennifer for twenty-three years, and they have three children. Matt's passion is to see people fall in love with God's Word and walk in a deeper commitment to Jesus Christ.

##### **Monique Brown**

is a physician and owner of a medical practice focusing on spiritual, physical, and emotional health. She is also an author and a leader for the women's ministry and the adult church at Study at Word Tabernacle Church in Rocky Mount, N.C.



## A BIBLE STUDY ON COMMITMENT

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You're going to see one word come up over and over in this study: *commitment*. Jesus spent three years of His life fulfilling His earthly ministry. During those three years He talked a lot about commitment. In fact, Jesus made it clear that commitment was a key part of being a follower of Christ. In the Gospels, we see many examples of people who followed Jesus because of what they hoped He could offer them. They were not truly committed to Him no matter what. When Jesus encountered those people He consistently challenged them to “count the cost” of following Him. Jesus wanted them to have an “all in” commitment to Him. He wanted them to recognize there may be

sacrifice or pain but being committed to Him is worth it.

We are going to look at the call on the Christian life to be committed to Christ, His Word, the church, prayer, worship, and His mission. One of the most beautiful things about what we'll learn is that God is committed to us first even before He calls us to an “all in” commitment to Him. As you jump into this study, go ahead and “count the cost” of following Him. What you'll discover is that you can never make any greater or more fulfilling commitment than that of being fully committed to God and doing His work.

SESSION 1

# CHRIST'S COMMITMENT TO US

**THE POINT:**

EVEN AT OUR WORST,  
CHRIST WAS FULLY  
COMMITTED TO LOVE US  
AND BRING US TO GOD.

**ROMANS /// 5:6-12, 18-21**

MEMORY VERSE

<sup>6</sup> For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. <sup>8</sup> **But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

<sup>9</sup> How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath. <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.

<sup>18</sup> So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone. <sup>19</sup> For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup> The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more <sup>21</sup> so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

KEYWORDS

**a: Just . . . good** (5:7) – A just person is upright in a relationship with God and others; a good person is honorable.

**b: Declared righteous** (5:9) – Those declared righteous by God are considered to be made right with Him.

**c: Reconciliation** (5:11) – Reconciliation takes place when enemies stop fighting each other and become friends who go in the same direction together.

# IN WHAT WAYS DOES CHRIST SHOW HIS COMMITMENT TO US?

Does the word *commitment* make you nervous? Our culture is becoming increasingly averse to the idea of commitment. The bottom line is that we don't like commitment. To illustrate, we're ready to jump at the special pricing promoted by the phone company or cable provider, but then we cringe when we discover the rate comes with a year commitment.

More seriously, marriages have been steadily declining. An estimated 25 percent of young adults won't marry.<sup>8</sup> One reason is commitment. People would rather not make a life-long commitment that deep down they're not sure they can actually fulfill.

Commitment is more palatable when we know the other person is absolutely committed to us and has our best in mind. That's what makes our relationship with God so special; He was committed to us before we were even committed to Him! And on top of that, even when our commitment to Him wavers, He never stops being committed to us. The greatest display of this is in our salvation.

## Christ Died for Us // Romans 5:6-8

The word *gospel* means good news. In the Book of Romans Paul provided a clear explanation for the good news of the gospel. It's good news that, when we were helpless and hopeless in our sin, God didn't sit back with His arms folded, expecting us to get our act together before we could enter into a relationship with Him. He made the first move.

### WHAT DOES COMMITMENT MEAN TO YOU?

God sent His only Son Jesus to die to pay for our sins. That's good news!!!! Our relationship with God isn't made right by good works or following the Ten Commandments. Actually, Scripture says that's impossible. We can't keep all of God's commandments but Jesus did. Jesus lived a perfect life and then died in our place on the cross of Calvary, paying the penalty of our sin for us.

Why would God leave the glory of heaven to come to earth to die for us? Scripture is clear, He loves us. John 3:16 says, "For God loved



the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” That’s love.

The word “love” in Romans 5:8 is *agape*, which means commitment or sacrifice. *Agape* is an action. God’s love for us is His commitment to us that He put into action by willingly dying for us. He gave His love to us when we didn’t deserve it. God came to us while we were still helpless in our sin. He demonstrated His love when we couldn’t demonstrate our love to Him.

### **WHY MIGHT SOME PEOPLE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT THE GOSPEL AS PRESENTED IN THESE VERSES?**

Christianity is different than other religions. In other religions, we have to be good to get God’s love. In Christianity, even though we were not good, God loves us and died for us. In other religions, if you get your life together, God will accept you. In Christianity, we were helpless in sin, but God accepted us anyway.

The core of the gospel is commitment. Yes, we are called to make a commitment to God but the beautiful reality is God was committed to us first. God’s commitment is an

“all in, forever, no matter what” kind of commitment.

## **Christ Reconciled Us to God //**

### **Romans 5:9-11**

The good news of the gospel is that, while we were still helpless in our sins, Christ came to this planet and died for us. Paul highlighted three things that happen to us because of the death of Christ on our behalf.

**1. Declared righteous by the blood of Jesus.** The word *Righteous* means without sin. God is perfectly holy and can’t be in the presence of sin. Romans 3:23 states “all have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” No one is righteous. To stand in the presence of our perfectly holy God we must be completely righteous. There are only two ways to do this.

- We can live perfect lives and never sin (this isn’t possible).
- We can have someone else’s righteousness imputed to us. *Imputed* means substituted. God has given us the opportunity to have the righteousness of Christ substituted for ours. When we stand before



## **DIGGING DEEPER ADAM’S SIN**

The account of Adam’s sin takes us back to Genesis 3. There we encounter the serpent’s tempting pitch to Adam and Eve. He assured them that eating the fruit from the middle of the garden of Eden would not have any ill effect on them. God had warned them they would die, but the serpent assured them they would continue to live. They ate the fruit, and immediately they began to experience the consequence of their sinful action. In Paul’s account, he focused our attention on Adam. His sin plagued the entire human population. Because of Adam’s act of disobedience, sin became a reality in our lives. However, Christ brought a new spiritual reality to humanity. Through Him. We can be freed from the curse of Adam.

### **How does the sin of Adam continue to impact the lives of believers today?**



God, He sees Christ's righteousness. Because Jesus died and shed His blood for us, His sacrifice covers us and gives us His righteousness. To receive the righteousness He offers, we must confess that Jesus is the Son of God and believe that He died for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day (Rom. 10:9-10).

### 2. Saved from God's wrath.

Christ's blood makes us righteous so we're saved from God's wrath. God is a righteous and just God who hates sin so He must punish sin. God poured out His wrath for our sin on Jesus at the cross of Calvary. Christ's blood ensured that we never face the wrath of God but only His love and acceptance.

### 3. Reconciled to God

#### through Jesus' death.

We're reconciled to God through Christ's death. At the heart of the gospel, God reconciled us to Himself. The greatest joy and contentment we can experience is in a personal relationship with the One who created us. Sin keeps us from experiencing that relationship with God. Jesus' death reconciles us back into a relationship with Him, restoring what was broken so we can live in fellowship with God.

#### HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN RECONCILIATION TO AN UNBELIEVER?

### Christ Gave Us Eternal Life //

Romans 5:12,18-21

Christ's commitment to us did not end when He made us

righteous in the sight of God; Christ's death also means we will be with God when we die. Because of Jesus' commitment, when we breathe our last breath, our souls will be instantly transported into the presence of our Lord and Savior, where we will live with Him forever in perfect peace and sinless bliss.

Why is that the best news of all? We all inherited Adam's sin nature (v. 12). That means we are headed for hell if we don't receive this amazing gift of God's grace. But if we receive through faith the amazing gift Jesus provides through His death on the cross, God gives us eternal life. God wants to be with us forever. That's a pretty amazing commitment!

#### HOW HAVE YOU SEEN ADAM'S SIN CONTINUE TO AFFECT ALL HUMANITY?

## THE POINT: EVEN AT OUR WORST, CHRIST WAS FULLY COMMITTED TO LOVE US AND BRING US TO GOD.

This seems too good to be true. *“Considering all the ways I’ve sinned, God would never want to make me righteous and be with Him in heaven forever.”* These verses show God’s grace. “Where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more.” Christ’s love is great and His commitment is so immeasurable that even the greatest sinners can be saved through the unmerited grace of God. God’s limitless grace not only pardons us but brings us into His kingdom to live forever in His presence.

The question is: have you received this righteousness-imputing, wrath-saving, reconciling, eternal-life-giving love of God? Ephesians 2:8 says, “You are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift.” To receive God’s amazing grace you have to believe God. Pray to God confessing that you are a sinner who needs His forgiveness through the sacrifice Jesus paid on the cross. God loves you and is committed to bringing His love to you.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU THAT WHERE SIN MULTIPLIED THAT GRACE MULTIPLIED EVEN MORE?**

### DID YOU KNOW?

Three myths have hovered around the hymn “Amazing Grace” through the years. First, it had been long rumored that the hymn was associated with American slavery. However, John Newton, a former slave trader, wrote the song decades after his slave trading days and after becoming a minister. Another rumor was that “Amazing Grace” originated from Newton’s survival of a violent storm at sea. This is only partially true. He was indeed inspired by his surviving a storm, but Newton wrote the hymn many years following his ordeal at sea. It was also rumored that “Amazing Grace” could only be played on a piano’s black keys, which were known as the “slave scale.” This too was proven to be a myth. The melody of the hymn was taken from a song called “New Britain” and has become a popular gospel song in black churches, because it reflects the struggles of African-Americans.<sup>9</sup>

**WHAT ROLE CAN SONGS LIKE “AMAZING GRACE” PLAY IN OUR COMMITMENT TO GOD?**

## LIVE IT

There’s no better example of what commitment is than God’s commitment to us. No one has been more committed to us than God. Even before we thought about Him, He made arrangements so Jesus would guarantee that we would have relationship with Him. Jesus paid the penalty for our sin and reconciled our relationship with our holy God. His grace and love saved us.

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- This week make a conscious effort to share the love story of God with someone who needs to know that His grace and love is available for them.
- Pray and reflect on Christ’s commitment to you. Ask yourself: “How am I living in light of Jesus’ great commitment to me?”

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. PROVE IT // ROMANS 5:8

You've been there. Someone tells you something but his or her actions contradict what has been told. This causes you not to know on whom or what you can depend. But you can be sure that what God says He will do, He will do. He loved us even before we knew Him, and He proved that love by sending His Son to die in our place. God showed His commitment to us even when we were rebels. We are obligated to show our commitment to Him.

**Ask God to lead you to act in ways that demonstrate your commitment to Him.**

## 2. LOVING LIBERATION // GALATIANS 1:3-4

There's probably no greater anguish for pet owners than having to make the decision to put a pet to sleep. It's a tremendous sacrifice that must be made to free the animal from suffering. We've heard this before. God made a tremendous sacrifice on our behalf. He gave His life to liberate us from the "present evil age," a world ruled by Satan and filled with deception, cruelty, and hate. Lovingly, God sent His Son to rescue us. This does not mean we have been taken out of the world, but we are no longer enslaved to live according to the world.

**Our lives should reflect gratitude to God for being liberated!**

## 3. RESCUED FROM DARKNESS // 1 PETER 2:9

Hostages are individuals who are held against their will. Once rescued, victims don't typically return to the place of captivity. That would be ludicrous. Why would you subject yourself to a place of darkness again? Peter said God called us out of darkness, but many times believers return to the dark world from which they have been freed.

Because of this, they experience fear and other distressful emotions. The darkness is no longer where we belong. Not only have we been rescued from darkness, but we are a special people to God and can live in His glorious light.

**Decide today to live victoriously in the light where God is.**

## 4. FAITHFUL FINISH // 2 TIMOTHY 4:7

We've all considered quitting something—a job, a club, a person. When things got hard and the pain unbearable, we just quit. When Paul neared the end of his life, he recognized he had been faithful to God's call on his life. Though the going was sometimes rough, Paul never gave up. The difference lies in knowing the One to whom he was committed. Knowing God is for us and He loves us gives us the strength to not only endure but to faithfully finish. So no matter how difficult things may seem, don't quit.

**Faithful commitment to God always leads to a victorious finish.**

## 5. AUTHORIZED FUTURE // PROVERBS 16:3

This verse is popular among those who want to be successful in their activities. But have you ever wondered what it really means? It's true that God gives us a guarantee that He will care for our activities, but only if we commit them to Him. This means none of the half stepping and half trust, which leads us to take control back from God. Our commitment to God authorizes the future He has planned for us, but only if we allow Him to work.

**So, commit your work to the Lord, then trust God as if everything depends on Him. He has authorized your successful future.**



## 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.

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#### 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 CHILDLIKE 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.

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- 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.

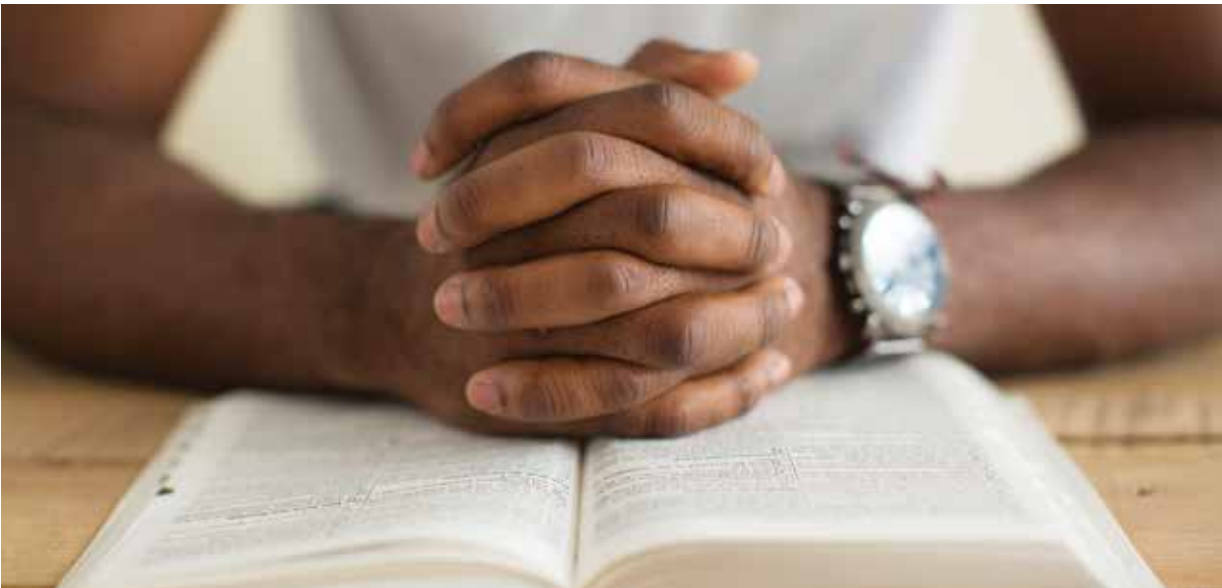
<sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping your word. <sup>10</sup> I have sought you with all my heart; don't let me wander from your commands. <sup>11</sup> I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.

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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?*

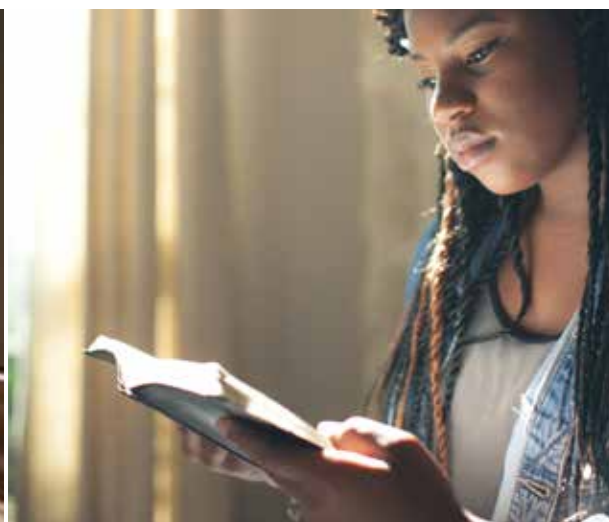
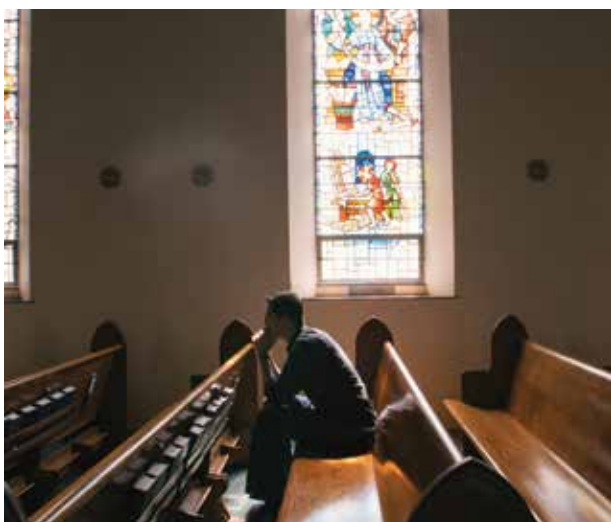
Don't ever forget this one truth: shame comes from the enemy *to keep us away from*



### 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.

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- 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.

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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.

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- 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.**

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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).

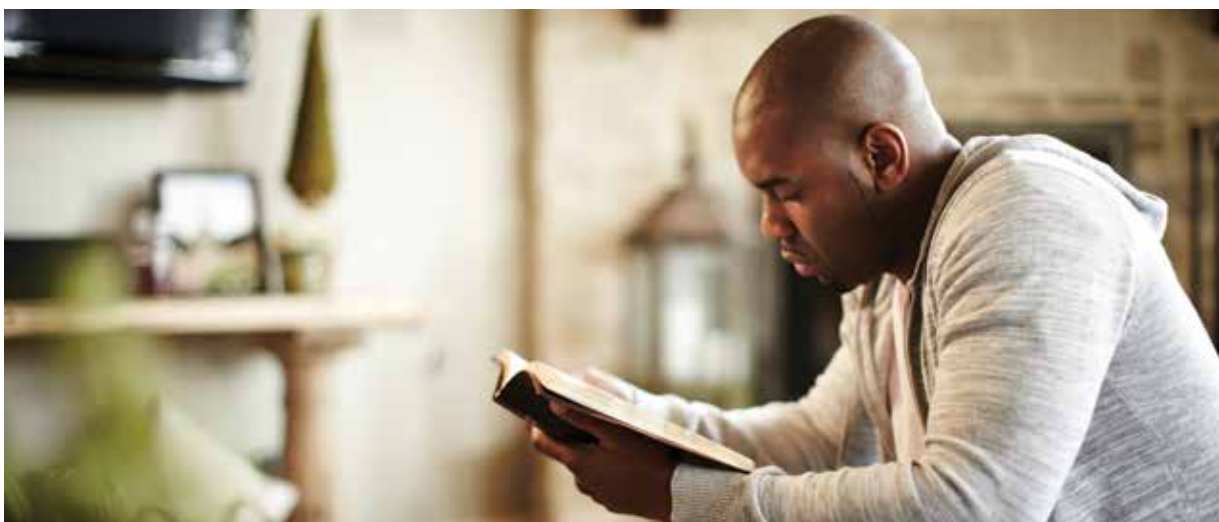
**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US TO PRAY FOR CHURCH LEADERS HERE AND ABROAD?**



## 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.

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- 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.

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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.

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- 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.

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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

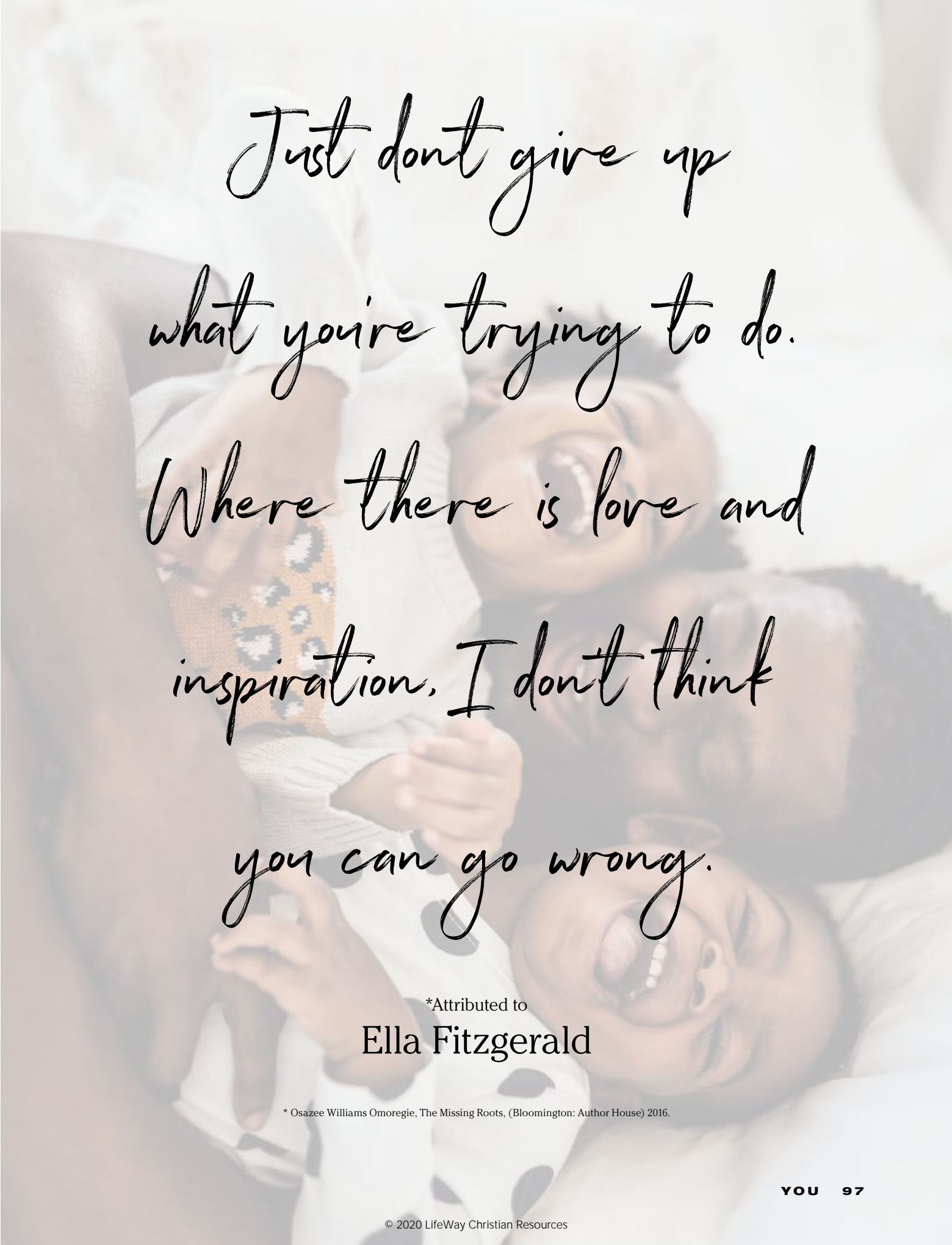
When shopping for fruit, there are various ways to figure out what's fresh. We may smell the fruit, tap it, inspect it, or sometimes taste it. Whichever way is chosen works. The apostle John recalled something Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you." That's a profound statement. Jesus chose 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.